

**Media download link for photos:**

<https://zoo.resourcespace.com/?c=4074&k=573995ba5c>

## **Gorilla giggles: new baby gorilla continues to thrive and be hand-reared**

### ***Zoo focusing on surrogate gorilla mom***



SEATTLE— Woodland Park Zoo’s newest baby, a gorilla born on June 28, is healthy, growing and thriving thanks to round-the-clock care by his human caregivers.

Gorilla Akenji (uh-KEN-jee), the newborn’s 22-year-old, first-time mother, has not shown any signs of interest in the baby who remains under 24/7 hands-on care by the gorilla staff. The baby, a boy, has not yet been named.

For months leading up to his birth, the gorilla staff provided maternal behavioral training to prepare Akenji for motherhood. However, within an hour after Akenji gave birth, the animal care team had to intervene for the baby’s safety and well-being.

“Despite our attempts over the past couple weeks to unite Akenji and her baby and encourage bonding, she has repeatedly turned away from him. Because of the trust and bonding we have with each of the gorillas, we can read her cues and she has clearly let us know she is not interested in the baby,” said Rachel Vass, Interim Animal Care Manager at Woodland Park Zoo.

The positive news is that the 2-week-old gorilla is doing very well. “He’s steadily gaining weight and drinking more human infant formula. He now can easily pull himself up with his arms and push off with his feet and he’s starting to focus on lights and objects and track sounds, all of which are important developmental milestones,” said Vass. “He’s also reaching a milestone where he is reacting with joy when something seems to make him happy. For instance, if we give him a light tickle on his tummy, he makes a tiny gorilla giggle noise that melts my heart.”

Efforts to unite Akenji with her baby have shifted to focusing on training three adult female gorillas who live at the zoo: Nadiri (naw-DEER-ee), Olympia and Jamani (juh-MAW-nee); each has successfully raised their own young. Olympia and Jamani live in a separate family group at the zoo.

“The next best outcome for the newborn gorilla is for a surrogate gorilla to take over the day-to-day care and raise Akenji’s baby. While Nadiri, Olympia, and Jamani are experienced moms, there are solid maternal behaviors they’ll need to demonstrate before we transfer care, such as holding the baby close to keep him sufficiently warm and, on our cue, bringing the baby to the gorilla team for his bottle-feeding sessions,” said Martin Ramirez, Senior Director of Animal Care at Woodland Park Zoo. “These behaviors are imperative before we place the baby in the care of one of these gorillas, and the process can potentially take weeks to months before this can happen. Meanwhile, our team will continue to hand-rear the baby and ensure he continues to thrive.”

For the long-term benefits and well-being of the baby gorilla, it's important he knows he's a gorilla, not a human. The baby gorilla is immersed in the day-to-day surroundings where he can see, smell and hear the other gorillas without ever leaving the gorilla bedrooms, explained Ramirez. "We want the baby to be a gorilla. Our gorilla team has a remarkable track record with hand- and assist-rearing babies before successfully introducing them to live in a normal social environment with other gorillas. The little guy is in excellent hands."

The new gorilla represents the 16th gorilla born at Woodland Park Zoo and the third offspring for the father, Kwame (KWA-may). His other children are son Kitoko born March 2020 and daughter Zuna born January 2021.

Woodland Park Zoo is home to two families of western lowland gorillas. Group one: silverback (adult male gorilla) Kwame; adult females Akenji, Nadiri and Uzumma; juveniles Yola and Zuna, daughters of Nadiri; and juvenile Kitoko, son of Kwame and Uzumma. Group two: silverback Nadaya; and adult females Jumoke, Olympia and Jamani.

For updates on the baby gorilla, stay tuned to [www.zoo.org/zoobabies](http://www.zoo.org/zoobabies).

###