

PRESS RELEASE

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Zoo announces plans to move baby gorilla to another zoo *New home will ensure baby grows as a gorilla*



SEATTLE—In a move to ensure a baby gorilla is raised by gorillas and grows as a gorilla, Woodland Park Zoo has made a critical decision to move its 1½-month-old gorilla boy to another zoo so he can be raised by a surrogate gorilla mom and socialized with a multigenerational family of gorillas.

The baby, who has not yet been named, was born June 28 at Woodland Park Zoo to first-time mom Akenji and dad Kwame. Because Akenji hadn't shown any interest in caring for her baby, human intervention was necessary; gorilla staff have been providing 24/7 care for the baby since shortly after he was born. Further attempts to unite mom and baby were unsuccessful.

For the last several weeks, the focus has been on training three experienced gorilla moms living at the zoo as potential surrogates. Although Woodland Park Zoo 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, progress has not advanced fast enough.

The zoo is currently working with the Gorilla Species Survival Plan which maintains a list of potential surrogates across the country for situations just like this. "We include this option in our birth management plan in case it becomes necessary. We're confident the infant will be placed in a great home, and we'll share final details upon his safe arrival," said Martin Ramirez, Interim Senior Director of Animal Care at Woodland Park Zoo.

[Species Survival Plans](#) are cooperative breeding programs across accredited zoos and aquariums to help ensure healthy, self-sustaining populations of threatened and endangered species. The program convenes experts in animal care, welfare, and conservation who work toward maintaining genetically diverse, self-sustaining populations of more than 300 species of animals.

Gorillas are intelligent animals that live in complex, social groups. Constantly being with a mom is natural for an infant gorilla. This gives the infant confidence and a sense of security. These are critical characteristics for a gorilla to live a healthy, social life with multigenerational gorillas, which is a natural grouping for this great ape. This is why raising a baby gorilla needs to be gorilla-centric from the start.

"We have been following proven, advanced practices to make sure the baby gorilla has been exposed round the clock to visual, auditory, and olfactory stimuli of other gorillas, however, protracting this current hand-rearing situation is not feasible," said Ramirez. "The longer he's cared for solely by humans, the more he is hindered from

learning the complex social cues of gorillas and the higher the risk of becoming imprinted on humans.”

It is imperative to socialize the infant with a surrogate mom and family of gorillas without further delay, even if that means relocating him across the country. “While we hoped for a different outcome, this is the best decision for his long-term benefits and well-being,” added Ramirez. “As he continues to grow and reach important developmental milestones, this is a critical time in his life to be raised directly in the care of gorillas.”

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