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Photo credit: Jeremy Dwyer-Lindgren/Woodland Park Zoo

Zoo's last gray wolf, Shila, passes away Shila believed to be the first wolf with a pacemaker

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo is deeply saddened by the loss of its sole gray wolf, Shila (SHY-lah), who has passed away. Animal keepers found the 14-year-old, female wolf deceased this morning in her habitat.

At 14, Shila was a geriatric wolf; in human care, the median life expectancy for gray wolves is 11 to 12 years old. As a standard procedure, the zoo's animal health team will perform a postmortem exam to further diagnose factors that may have contributed to Shila's death.

Shila was born in April 2010 at New York State Zoo at Thompson Park and moved to Woodland Park Zoo in the fall that year with her three sisters who have all since passed away.

Woodland Park Zoo made groundbreaking medical headway for wolves when in June this year its veterinary team partnered with an external veterinary cardiologist to implant a pacemaker in Shila to treat a life-threatening cardiac arrhythmia. While pacemakers are common treatments for humans and domestic dogs, it is believed Shila's pacemaker was among the first for her species.

According to Dr. Tim Storms, director of animal health at Woodland Park Zoo, Shila's heart condition carried the risk of sudden death. "The only corrective option for Shila's diagnosis was an artificial pacemaker. She had an immediate return to normal behavior, and it was gratifying to see her acting like a much younger wolf during the last four months," said Dr. Storms.

Gray wolves have been a mainstay at Woodland Park Zoo for seven decades. "Our hearts are very heavy losing Shila, especially as she's our last gray wolf at Woodland Park Zoo. She lived a long, very good life thanks to the passion and dedication by our animal care staff," said Erin Sullivan, an animal curator at Woodland Park Zoo. "We're grateful to our veterinary team and the specialized team at Olympic Veterinary Cardiology who not only helped us extend her life but added quality back to it. Watching Shila strut around her habitat with the bounce back in her steps was absolutely incredible. Shila and her sisters were wonderful ambassadors for their kin in the wild. They helped to inspire awe of these oft-misunderstood carnivores and helped us shed an important light on the critical need for coexisting with these social canines and other wildlife in urban and remote areas."

Woodland Park Zoo will now begin the process of finding other gray wolves to live at the zoo. Shila lived in the Living Northwest Trail, which is also home to Canada lynx, brown bears, snowy owls, river otters, western pond turtles and more wildlife native to the Pacific Northwest.



Although the global population of gray wolves is stable, the species was nearly eradicated in the United States through systematic hunting, poisoning and trapping. However, wolves have shown how resilient they can be given legal protections and the space they need to roam. In Washington, wolf populations are naturally repopulating.

Woodland Park Zoo supports the recovery of wolves across Washington and elsewhere in the U.S. because of their ecological, cultural and intrinsic value.

For more information about Woodland Park Zoo, visit www.zoo.org or call 206.548.2500. Follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [TikTok](#).

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