



Berlin, 13 April 2022

Press release

For she's a jolly good fellow: Fatou turns 65

The world's oldest gorilla celebrates a milestone birthday

Fatou is a living legend in the zoo community, with a large fan base in Berlin, Europe and beyond that regularly gets in touch to ask how she's doing. Fatou arrived at Zoo Berlin when she was only about two years old and is now celebrating her 65th birthday – making her the oldest known gorilla in the world. This year, as usual, her birthday is being celebrated in style. Fatou will enjoy a sophisticated “afternoon coffee” in the gorilla family's front garden – the perfect birthday treat for an elderly lady. And, of course, no birthday party is complete without cake, which is always a particularly special one for Fatou. “The base of the cake is made of rice, which we've decorated with quark, vegetables and fruit,” says division head Christian Aust. “Fatou is very sprightly for her age and has a healthy appetite. We are thankful for every day she is with us and hope to be able to celebrate even more birthdays with her.” But Fatou only gets this special feast once a year. Like humans, gorillas shouldn't eat too many sweet treats. Fruit contains a lot of natural sugar (fructose), so Fatou's normal diet is made up almost exclusively of vegetables.

But there is a more sombre side to the joyous occasion: Fatou's species, the western lowland gorilla, is threatened with extinction in its natural habitat. Poaching and the destruction of the gorillas' natural habitat has decimated their numbers, and fewer and fewer of these remarkable animals can be found living in the tropical rainforests of Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Gabon and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

At up to 200 kg in weight, gorillas are the largest of the great apes. Despite their formidable appearance, they live together peacefully in close-knit families and are very sociable creatures. Disputes are settled through roaring, gestures and displays of strength. The gentle giants are also strictly vegetarian. An adult gorilla consumes 15 to 20 kg of leaves, grasses, tubers, bark and fruits per day.

As well as Fatou, Zoo Berlin is home to silverback Sango (17), adult females Djambala (20), Mpenzi (36) and Bibi (25), and Bibi's little daughter Tilla (1), the youngest member of the Zoo's gorilla family.



Background:

At the grand old age of 65, Fatou is the oldest gorilla in the world. Her exact age is actually unknown, as Fatou arrived in Berlin in 1959 under unusual circumstances: after a hard-drinking sailor used her to pay his tab at a tavern in Marseille, the young gorilla eventually ended up at Zoo Berlin. At the time of her arrival, Fatou was estimated to be two years old. She has lived at Zoo Berlin for more than 60 years and is now one of its best-known residents – about as famous as war-survivor hippos Knautschke and Bulette were in their day. However, Fatou is not the oldest animal at the Zoo: Ingo the flamingo came here as a youngster way back in 1948, making him now at least 71 years old.

As one of Zoo Berlin's oldest inhabitants, Fatou is also one of the few animals here that originally came from the wild. Nowadays, almost all Zoo and Tierpark inhabitants were born in a zoological facility. While in the 1950s and 1960s it was still common for animals to be caught in their natural habitat and brought to a zoo, modern-day zoos often have the opposite role: in some cases, animals that were once extinct in nature – like the European bison and Przewalski's horse – have been returned to their natural habitats with the help of zoos. Further information on this topic can be found at: www.zoo-berlin.de/en/species-conservation/at-the-zoo.