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Press release

The world's oldest gorilla turns 66!

Zoo Berlin's grande dame Fatou celebrates another birthday

Today marks a special day for a living legend: female gorilla Fatou is now 66 years old. This record-breaking achievement was celebrated with a special feast that had been lovingly prepared by Zoo Berlin staff before the birthday girl awoke. Fatou tucked in gleefully to her birthday treats, which featured bright red, yellow and green fruits and vegetables – including a watermelon with two sixes carved into it. The colourful banquet was also a feast for the eyes of the numerous well-wishers who stopped by to visit Fatou. As well as the birthday meal, the keepers presented the elderly lady with a delicious bouquet of leaves and juicy twigs, decorated with berries and edible flowers.

Gorillas should only enjoy fruit on rare, special occasions as, just like humans, they need to limit their sugar intake. Since fruit contains a lot of sugar in the form of fructose, usually the gorillas dine only on vegetables. The Zoo Berlin team were therefore very careful when it came to choosing the birthday delicacies. "We always make sure Fatou gets healthy meals that are appropriate for her needs," says deputy division head Ruben Gralki. "Given her advanced age and lack of teeth, Fatou requires very soft foods that she can easily chew." At 66, Fatou is the oldest gorilla on record. She lives apart from the Zoo's other gorillas, as the antics of the group – which includes one very active toddler (Tilla) and one full-grown silverback (Sango) – would be too much for the frail old lady. "Fatou is free to contact her neighbours at any time if she would like to, but instead she purposefully seeks solitude and stays away from the other gorillas," says Gralki. Fatou's carers keep a watchful eye on her wellbeing and ensure that she has plenty of activities to keep her occupied in her daily life, such as seeking out food around her habitat and climbing on ropes.

"Anyone who has ever looked into Fatou's eyes knows what a remarkable encounter that is," says Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem. "She really has an impact on people and makes them think, which is why I firmly believe Fatou is a great ambassador for her critically endangered species." Excessive consumerism by humans is the main reason for the loss of the gorillas' rainforest habitat. Deforestation and mining, coupled with illegal hunting, are having a devastating impact on the numbers of western lowland gorillas, which are classified as "Critically Endangered" by the IUCN.



As well as Fatou, Zoo Berlin is home to silverback Sango (18), adult females Djambala (21), Bibi (26) and Mpenzi (37), and little Tilla (2).

Background:

Gorillas are the largest and heaviest of the great apes. Adult males can weigh up to 200 kilos and reach two metres in height. Western lowland gorillas live in family groups of several females and a dominant male, the silverback. The apes are diurnal and spend most of their time eating. Their diet is almost exclusively vegetarian, consisting of leaves, herbaceous plants, roots and fruits. Gorillas play an important role as “gardeners” in their African rainforest home as they spread the seeds of numerous plants and thus help to maintain a diverse ecosystem.