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Press release

A flower for Fatou

World's oldest gorilla celebrates her 61st birthday

Fatou carefully picks the blueberries, strawberries, physalis and grapes from the quark topping on her birthday cake and eats them with evident delight. The fruits are in the shape of a 6 and a 1, because that's how old Fatou is today! The elderly gorilla is clearly very excited about the rice-based cake that her keepers have made – in the form of a flower to celebrate the arrival of spring. This birthday meal is a rare treat for Fatou. She only gets this variety of fruit, served with rice and quark, once a year. Like humans, gorillas shouldn't eat too much sugar. Fruit contains so much fructose that it isn't healthy for apes to have it too often. Fatou's normal diet consists primarily of vegetables.

At 61, Fatou is one of the two oldest gorillas in the world. She shares the record with another female gorilla, Trudy from Little Rock Zoo in Arkansas. As is the case with Trudy, however, Fatou's exact age is not known. She arrived in Berlin in 1959 under unusual circumstances. A hard-drinking sailor had used her to pay his tab at a tavern in Marseille, after which the young gorilla was taken across Europe and ended up in Zoo Berlin. At that time, she was estimated to be just two years old. She has lived at Zoo Berlin for the last 59 years and is now one of its best-known residents – about as famous as war-survivor hippos Knautschke and Bulette were in their day. "We are delighted to be celebrating Fatou's 61st birthday today," said Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem. "She is a living legend and a part of Zoo Berlin history." And yet Fatou is not the oldest animal in the zoo. Ingo the flamingo came to Zoo Berlin as a youngster in 1948, so he is at least 70 years old.

Fatou is one of the few animals at Zoo and Tierpark Berlin who was born in the wild; the vast majority of animals were born in captivity. The capture of wild animals for zoos is now a thing of the past.

Western lowland gorillas are currently threatened with extinction in their natural habitat. Poaching and the destruction of their environment have decimated gorilla populations. Only just under 100,000 gorillas currently roam the tropical rainforests of Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Gabon, and the Republic of the Congo.

The other gorillas at Zoo Berlin alongside our elderly lady Fatou are silverback Ivo (30) and females Djambala (16), Bibi (21), and Mpenzi (32).