

Teaching captive gorillas the ropes

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The Columbus Zoo in Ohio uses humans as surrogate mothers to baby gorillas so the babies can learn nurturing and become caring parents themselves.

The program seeks to break a 50-year cycle of gorillas born in captivity that never learned how to be good mothers, zoo officials say.

Primate nursery keeper Barb Jones, 68, is at the program's forefront. Her latest charge is Umande, who arrived from the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo in Colorado Springs, Colo., after being rejected by his mother, The Columbus Dispatch reported Monday.

Since early October, Jones and six other zoo workers have been eating, sleeping and playing with 8-month-old Umande.

The program reduces to months from years the time it takes a gorilla to become part of a pack, the Dispatch said.

As dedicated as she is to the program, Jones draws the line at trimming a baby gorilla's toenails and fingernails with her teeth, as a real gorilla mom does.

"We use clippers," she told the newspaper.

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