

Zoologist who raised Koko dies

October 26 2007

Ronald Reuther, a zoologist who helped raise the first gorilla to use human sign language, has died in California at the age of 77.

The Oakland (Calif.) Tribune said Reuther died Oct. 4 of colon cancer in Belvedere, Calif.

Reuther was director of the San Francisco Zoo in 1971 when he adopted a sickly baby gorilla named Hanabi-Ko into his home. The newspaper said Reuther went along with Stanford University graduate student Penny Patterson's proposal to teach human sign language to "Koko."

"He believed the success of such an endeavor could be very positive, not only for Koko, but for all gorillas," Lorraine Slater, development director of the Gorilla Foundation in Woodside, Calif., told the newspaper. "He was instrumental in all of that happening. We have said had it not been for him, there might be no Project Koko today."

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