

Happy birthday to Colo: Oldest gorilla in US turns 60 (Update)

December 22 2016, by Andrew Welsh-Huggins



Colo, the nation's oldest living gorilla, sits inside of her enclosure during her 60th birthday party at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Thursday, Dec. 22, 2016 in Columbus, Ohio. Colo was the first gorilla in the world born in a zoo and has surpassed the usual life expectancy of captive gorillas by two decades. Her longevity is putting a spotlight on the medical care, nutrition and up-to-date therapeutic techniques that are helping lengthen zoo animals' lives. (AP Photo/Ty Wright)

She is a mother of three, grandmother of 16, great-grandmother of 12

and great-great-grandmother of three. She recently had surgery to remove a malignant tumor, but doctors say she's doing well.

She's Colo, the nation's oldest living gorilla, and she turned 60 on Thursday at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium.

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"Colo just epitomizes the advances that zoos have made, going all the way back to her birth at Columbus," said Dr. Tom Meehan, vice president for veterinary services at Chicago's Brookfield Zoo and veterinary adviser to a national gorilla species survival plan.

The changes also mean more animals living with the normal aches and pains of growing older. Today, zoo veterinarians regularly treat animals for heart and kidney disease, arthritis, dental problems and cancer.

Hundreds of people gathered at the zoo Thursday to see Colo, singing "Happy Birthday" moments before the gorilla ambled into an enclosure decorated with multicolored construction paper chains and filled with cakes such as squash and beet and cornbread with mashed potato parsley frosting.



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Among the first in line was Pam Schlereth of Columbus, who at 63 was just a little girl when her father brought her to see the newborn Colo in a gorilla incubator in 1956.

"It's a tribute to the zoo that she's alive at 60 years old," Schlereth said.

Colo represents so much to the zoo, Tom Stalf, president of the zoo, told the crowd. "It's all about connecting people and wildlife," he said.

Colo is one of several elderly gorillas around the country. The oldest known living male gorilla, Ozzie, is 55 years old and lives at the Atlanta Zoo, which has a geriatric gorilla specialty.

At Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo, staff members use acupuncture, massage, laser therapy, and heat and joint supplements to help Emma, a 13-year-old rabbit.



Colo, the nation's oldest living gorilla, eats cake inside her enclosure during her 60th birthday party at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Thursday, Dec. 22, 2016 in Columbus, Ohio. Colo was the first gorilla in the world born in a zoo and has surpassed the usual life expectancy of captive gorillas by two decades. Her longevity is putting a spotlight on the medical care, nutrition and up-to-date therapeutic techniques that are helping lengthen zoo animals' lives. (AP Photo/Ty Wright)

At the National Zoo in Washington, Shanthi, a 42-year-old Asian elephant with arthritis, receives osteoarthritis therapy and was recently fitted with specially crafted front foot boots to help her feet heal as medications are applied.

In Oakland, California, Tiki, a 27-year-old giraffe and one of the oldest in the nation, gets foot care, massage therapy, acupuncture and chiropractic care, along with traditional veterinary medicine. Gao Gao, a 26-year-old male panda at the San Diego Zoo with a heart condition, periodically undergoes cardiac ultrasounds.

"Geriatrics is probably one of our most common medical challenges that we face in a zoo situation," said Dr. Keith Hinshaw, director of animal health at the Philadelphia Zoo. "So pretty much anything that you could imagine would happen with an older person is going to happen eventually with any animal."

That's up to and including medication: JJ, a 45-year-old orangutan at the Toledo Zoo, is on the human heart medicines carvedilol and Lisinopril, along with pain and orthopedic medications. He also takes Metamucil.

Colo, a western lowland gorilla, holds several other records. On her 56th birthday in 2012, she exceeded the record for longest-lived gorilla. On Thursday, she surpasses the median life expectancy for female gorillas in human care (37.5 years) by more than two decades.



Decorations, cakes and presents await Colo, the nation's oldest living gorilla, before she is released into her enclosure for her 60th birthday party at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Thursday, Dec. 22, 2016 in Columbus, Ohio. Colo was the first gorilla in the world born in a zoo and has surpassed the usual life expectancy of captive gorillas by two decades. Her longevity is putting a spotlight on the medical care, nutrition and up-to-date therapeutic techniques that are helping lengthen zoo animals' lives. (AP Photo/Ty Wright)

Other age-defying zoo animals:

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POLAR BEAR

Coldilocks, a 36-year-old polar bear at the Philadelphia Zoo and considered the oldest polar bear in the U.S. The bears' typical lifespan in captivity is 23 years. The zoo says treating her early for kidney disease

appears to have helped prolong her life.



Colo, the nation's oldest living gorilla, opens a present in her enclosure during her 60th birthday party at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Thursday, Dec. 22, 2016 in Columbus, Ohio. Colo was the first gorilla in the world born in a zoo and has surpassed the usual life expectancy of captive gorillas by two decades. Her longevity is putting a spotlight on the medical care, nutrition and up-to-date therapeutic techniques that are helping lengthen zoo animals' lives. (AP Photo/Ty Wright)

RHINO

Elly, an eastern black rhino at the San Francisco Zoo estimated to be 46 years old, is the oldest of her species in North America. She has had 14

calves, and her offspring have produced 15 grandchildren, 6 great-grandchildren and 1 great-great-grandchild.

ELEPHANT

Packy, an Asian elephant at the Oregon Zoo, and at 54, the oldest male of his species in North America. The zoo says Packy, born in 1962, became the first elephant to be born in the Western Hemisphere in 44 years.



A variety of cakes sit on the floor inside the enclosure of Colo, the nation's oldest living gorilla, during her 60th birthday party at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Thursday, Dec. 22, 2016 in Columbus, Ohio. Colo was the first gorilla in the world born in a zoo and has surpassed the usual life expectancy of captive gorillas by two decades. Her longevity is putting a spotlight on the

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MONKEY

Nikko, a 33-year-old snow monkey at the Minnesota Zoo, the oldest male snow monkey in North America.

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CHIMPANZEE



Stella Luken, 5 of Dublin, Ohio, wears a birthday hat and a pair of birthday sun

glasses as she waits in line to see Colo, the nation's oldest living gorilla, during Colo's 60th birthday party at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Thursday, Dec. 22, 2016 in Columbus, Ohio. Colo was the first gorilla in the world born in a zoo and has surpassed the usual life expectancy of captive gorillas by two decades. Her longevity is putting a spotlight on the medical care, nutrition and up-to-date therapeutic techniques that are helping lengthen zoo animals' lives. (AP Photo/Ty Wright)

Little Mama, a chimpanzee living at Lion Country Safari in Loxahatchee, Florida, with an estimated age in her late 70s. She takes allergy medicine, iron supplements and omega 3 multivitamins, and has been trained to accept a nebulizer treatment for coughing.

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TORTOISE

Emerson, a Galapagos tortoise at the Toledo Zoo in Ohio, whose age is estimated at about 100.



A young boy wearing a birthday hat looks through the glass at Colo, the nation's oldest living gorilla, during her 60th birthday party at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Thursday, Dec. 22, 2016 in Columbus, Ohio. Colo was the first gorilla in the world born in a zoo and has surpassed the usual life expectancy of captive gorillas by two decades. Her longevity is putting a spotlight on the medical care, nutrition and up-to-date therapeutic techniques that are helping lengthen zoo animals' lives. (AP Photo/Ty Wright)



Michele Frymen, from left, Christy Anderson and Jacob Anderson, all from Columbus, hold up a birthday cake and wave as they get their picture taken during some festivities in the food court as part of the 60th birthday celebration for Colo, the nation's oldest living gorilla, at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Thursday, Dec. 22, 2016 in Columbus, Ohio. Colo was the first gorilla in the world born in a zoo and has surpassed the usual life expectancy of captive gorillas by two decades. Her longevity is putting a spotlight on the medical care, nutrition and up-to-date therapeutic techniques that are helping lengthen zoo animals' lives. (AP Photo/Ty Wright)



In this Dec. 16, 2016 file photo, Coldilocks the polar bear looks up from a nap at the Philadelphia Zoo in Philadelphia. Coldilocks, who celebrated her 36th birthday last week, is considered the oldest polar bear in the U.S. The bears' typical lifespan in captivity is 23 years. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke, File)



In this March 27, 2012 file photo, Packy, an Asian elephant, is sprayed with water at the Oregon Zoo, in Portland. Packy at 54 is the oldest male of his species in North America. The zoo says Packy, born in 1962, became the first elephant to be born in the Western Hemisphere in 44 years. (Randy L. Rasmussen/The Oregonian via AP, File)

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