Endangered gorilla in New Orleans expecting 1st baby

July 7 2020, by Janet McConnaughey

Tumani, a 13-year old critically endangered western lowland gorilla that is expecting to give birth later this summer, eats in her enclosure at the Audubon Nature Institute in New Orleans, Monday, July 6, 2020. If the pregnancy is successful, it will be the first gorilla born at the zoo since 1996. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

One of the critically endangered gorillas in the New Orleans' zoo is expecting her first baby, and already is being trained with a "doll" to hold her future offspring.

Thirteen-year-old Tumani's training "doll" doesn't look anything like a gorilla because a stuffed toy could easily be torn apart, the Tumani, father Okpara, and females Alafia and Praline are western lowland gorillas. Although there were an estimated 362,000 in the wild in 2016, their numbers were falling about 2.7% a year, making them in 2017 from the Franklin Park Zoo in Boston. Veterinarians don't know the baby's sex.

The 160-pound (72-kilogram) expectant mother is receiving twice monthly ultrasounds and has undergone training on how to pick up the doll, including how to hold it to her chest where a baby gorilla could nurse.

"We don't want the baby by itself. We want it with the mother at all times," McLean explained. "If the baby's on the ground, we want to be able to say, 'Hey, pick it up."

She also has been taught not to play with a baby bottle and its foot-long (30-centimeter) flexible hose leading to the nipple, which could be used if Tumani has a problem lactating or nursing.
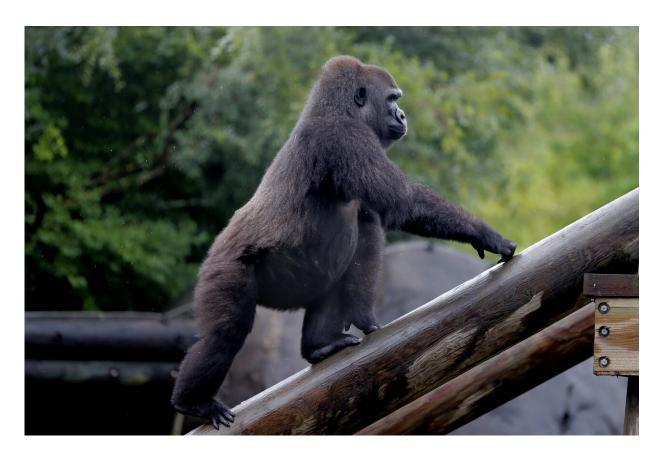
Alafia, who has successfully raised a baby, also has been trained to do all the same things just in case she has to step in as the infant's foster mother.

Tumani, a 13-year old critically endangered western lowland gorilla that is expecting to give birth later this summer, eats in her enclosure at the Audubon Nature Institute in New Orleans, Monday, July 6, 2020. If successful, it will be the first gorilla born at the zoo since 1996. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

Tumani, a 13-year old critically endangered western lowland gorilla that is expecting to give birth later this summer, looks for food in her enclosure at the Audubon Nature Institute in New Orleans, Monday, July 6, 2020. If the pregnancy is successful, it will be the first gorilla born at the zoo since 1996. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

Tumani, top right, a 13-year old critically endangered western lowland gorilla that is expecting to give birth later this summer, eats in her enclosure at the Audubon Nature Institute in New Orleans, Monday, July 6, 2020. Below is the father-in-waiting, Okpara. If the pregnancy is successful, it will be the first gorilla born at the zoo since 1996. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

Tumani, a 13-year old critically endangered western lowland gorilla that is expecting to give birth later this summer, eats in her enclosure at the Audubon Nature Institute in New Orleans, Monday, July 6, 2020. If the pregnancy is successful, it will be the first gorilla born at the zoo since 1996. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

McLean said both Alafia's experience at Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo and the fact that Tumani saw younger brothers and sisters raised at the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where she lived until 2017, are in favor of successful motherhood.

"But we still don't know how they'll respond," he said.

Citation: Endangered gorilla in New Orleans expecting 1st baby (2020, July 7) retrieved 23 June 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2020-07-endangered-gorilla-orleans-1st-baby.html