

CRITICALLY ENDANGERED WESTERN LOWLAND GORILLA, CHARLES, CHOOSES NAME FOR HIS DAUGHTER



Wednesday, April 30, 2014, Toronto Ontario: This morning, Western lowland gorilla silverback, Charles, chose a new name for his infant daughter who was born at the Toronto Zoo on January 10, 2014. Charles was presented with three enrichment displays; each with one potential name, Nia, Nneka and Nyota, and equally favoured treats such as fruit, nuts, palm leaves and bamboo. After some consideration, Charles was most intrigued by the display bearing the name Nneka. Nneka, which means mother is supreme/renowned/prominent. This is our female gorilla Ngozi's second birth and the 10th offspring sired by Charles. This newest addition to the Toronto Zoo Family is genetically significant for the North American Western lowland gorilla population, as it is a critically endangered species.

In celebration of the month of APE-ril the Toronto Zoo asked the public for help in naming the newest member of the gorilla troop. From April 2, 2014 to April 22, 2014 the public could submit names at torontozoo.com. It was asked that the name be suitable for a female, be of African descent and that the name begin with the letter "N". Since 1974, the Toronto Zoo has held the tradition of naming baby gorillas with the first initial of the mother's name. Over 10,000 name submissions were received from the general public after which a special panel of Wildlife Care judges reviewed the top 20 name submissions and narrowed it down to the top three, Nia (Purpose), Nneka (Mother is supreme/renowned/prominent) and Nyota (Star) with the final decision left up to dad, Charles. Ngozi came to the Toronto Zoo from the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle on March 4, 2008, to breed with Charles and with great success as their first son, Nassir, was born at the Toronto Zoo on September 2, 2009. Ngozi has taken to motherhood very well and can be seen tenderly holding her daughter and patiently managing her son, Nassir, curiosity with his new sibling.

"We are thrilled to have Nneka join our gorilla troop and become part of our successful breeding program. This significant birth will help raise awareness on the plight of this critically endangered, species and brings us one step further in our efforts to help in the protection of Western lowland gorillas" says Maria Franke, Curator of Mammals. "As well, it helps to showcase the important role zoos play in global conservation. We invite everyone to come out and see Nneka and the rest of the troop in the African Rainforest Pavilion" she adds.

Toronto Zoo is an active member of the North American Gorilla Species Survival Plan (SSP). The plan focuses on maintaining genetically and demographically healthy captive gorilla populations at the same time working on conservation efforts to protect them in the wild.

The Toronto Zoo currently has seven gorillas, Charles, Josephine, Ngozi, Johari (female, born 2001), Sadiki (male, born 2005), Nassir (Male, born 2009) and the new baby, Nneka. The Toronto Zoo plays an important role in educating the visiting public about the need to save gorillas in the wild, through such programs as **PhoneApes** a cell phone recycling initiative. The Toronto Zoo has allocated thousands of dollars to gorilla conservation through the Toronto Zoo Endangered Species Reserve Fund.

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In 2014 the Toronto Zoo is celebrating 40 Years of saving and protecting animals and their habitats at home and abroad.

More than a tourist attraction, the Toronto Zoo boasts a number of leading programs for helping wildlife and their natural habitats – from species reintroduction to reproductive research. A world-class educational centre for people of all ages, the Toronto Zoo is open every day except December 25 and attracts approximately 1.3 million visitors each year.