



For Immediate Release

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FIRST GORILLA BORN AT ZOO ATLANTA TURNS 20

Milestone recalls beginnings of nationally-renowned great ape program

ATLANTA – March 12, 2009 - The famously dire Ides of March might have proved fatefully unfortunate for Julius Caesar, but such was decidedly not the case for an up-and-coming wildlife organization determined to prove to the world that it had been reborn. On March 15, 1989, Paki, a female western lowland gorilla, gave birth to a son. He was called Kekla – the name means “dawn” – and he was the first of his species born at Zoo Atlanta.

Now a handsome silverback weighing around 350 pounds, the Zoo’s breakthrough baby lives in a bachelor habitat with half-brothers Stadi, 17, and Charlie, 12. Described as a calm, collected, laid-back fellow, Kekla doesn’t realize he’s almost 20, nor is he aware of the significance of his birthday. In 1989, Zoo Atlanta was four years into its greatest period of renewal and reversal – an era illuminated by the opening of The Ford African Rain Forest in 1988. The landmark debut of that series of habitats, made famous by the iconic Willie B.’s first foray outside since his infancy, showcased naturalistic, expansive new homes, not just for the beloved Willie, but also for a group of new gorillas from Emory’s Yerkes National Primate Research Center. Kekla’s parents, Ozzie and Paki, were two such pioneers, and his birth was a celebratory occasion.

Since that day, 16 other western lowland gorillas have been born at Zoo Atlanta, 14 of whom still call the organization home. Ranging in age from Kekla down to Willie B.’s 2-year-old grandson, Gunther, these individuals flourish in five distinct social groups. Also since that day, Zoo Atlanta, now home to the nation’s second-largest collection of gorillas and the country’s largest collection of orangutans, has become a nationally-renowned powerhouse for the care and study of great apes. To date, Zoo Atlanta staff is responsible for more than 45 percent of the world’s publications on captive gorilla behavior.

Kekla’s father, Ozzie, who turns 48 this year, is the zoological community’s second-oldest living male gorilla. His mother, Paki, passed away in October 2004.

Birthday activities on Sunday, March 15

Guests are invited to join festivities honoring Zoo Atlanta’s firstborn gentle giant on Sunday, March 15 from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. in The Ford African Rain Forest. Kekla and fellow bachelors Charlie and Stadi will open birthday packages at 1 p.m. in Gorilla Habitat One. Shortly thereafter, visitors are invited to join a special

"Gorilla Safari" series of keeper talks. Well-wishers are also encouraged to bring old or unused cell phones for recycling on the day of the event; the individual bringing the most phones will win an exclusive gorilla experience. Proceeds from Zoo Atlanta's cell phone recycling program benefit The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, the Zoo's partner in gorilla conservation in Africa.

Birthday activities are weather-permitting; guests are encouraged to check their Zoo maps on the day of the event for details or changes. Kekla's 20th birthday celebration is free for Zoo Members and children under 3; free with general admission.

About Zoo Atlanta

An accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), Zoo Atlanta inspires value and preservation of wildlife through a unique mix of education and outdoor family fun. From well-known native wildlife to critically endangered species on the brink of extinction, the Zoo offers memorable close encounters with more than 1,000 animals from around the world. Zoo Atlanta is the proud home of Xi Lan, the only giant panda cub born in the U.S. in 2008, and the future home of the Southeast's largest parakeet aviary, an immersive experience opening in April 2009. Other highlights include one of the nation's most recognized collections of great apes and a global center of excellence for the care and reproduction of vanishing amphibians and reptiles. Zoo Atlanta is open daily with the exceptions of Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. Keeper talks, interactive wildlife shows, education programs and special events run year-round. For more information, call 404.624.WILD or go to zooatlanta.org.

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