



*For Immediate Release*

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**WESTERN LOWLAND GORILLA PARTICIPATES IN GROUNDBREAKING ULTRASOUND**

*New technology helps Willie B., Jr. become the newest contributor to the Great Ape Heart Project*

**ATLANTA – November 10, 2011** — Willie B., Jr., a 13-year-old western lowland gorilla, participated in an awake ultrasound on November 3, 2011, in the first successful procedure of its kind at Zoo Atlanta. Made possible by new technology and the expertise of a team from Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, the procedure contributes valuable findings to a database managed by the Great Ape Heart Project, an inter-institutional effort headquartered at Zoo Atlanta.

Awake ultrasounds had long been a goal in ape cardiac care at Zoo Atlanta, but until recently, had been inhibited by a lack of technology. The Zoo Atlanta Veterinary Team now possesses a state-of-the-art GE Vivid I ultrasound machine, the device successfully used with Willie B., Jr., with the aid of volunteer sonographers from Children's.

"This is a tremendous leap forward. Cardiac ultrasounds had historically been performed on our gorillas only during annual exams, under anesthesia," said Lori Perkins, Director of Animal Programs. "Awake ultrasounds will give us the ability to monitor their heart health more frequently to better understand changes over time."

Ultrasound training is just one of the many goals of the Great Ape Heart Project, which seeks to understand, diagnose, and treat cardiac disease across all four great ape taxa (gorillas, chimpanzees, orangutans and bonobos). A leading cause of mortality among great apes living in zoological settings, the disease has already left its mark on the Zoo's most famous gorilla family. Willie B. Jr.'s father, the legendary late Willie B., died of heart-related complications in 2000. Willie B., Jr., and Taz, a 22-year-old silverback, are the first of the Zoo's gorillas to be trained for awake ultrasounds. By the end of the year, staff hopes to obtain voluntary ultrasounds on three other gorillas: Sukari, 13; Kudzo, 17; and Macy, 5.

Zoo Atlanta is home to the nation's largest collection of western lowland gorillas, with 22 individuals living in distinct social groups. The collection also includes four very special senior members: Shamba, 52; Ozzie, 50; Choomba, 49; and Ivan, 49. Gorillas are considered geriatric after the age of about 35.

**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. Complex Carnivores, a new series of exhibits featuring bush dogs, fossa and binturong, opened in April 2011. Zoo Atlanta is also proud to be one of only four zoos in the U.S. that giant pandas call home: Lun Lun's newest cub, born November 3, 2010, made his public debut in spring 2011. Other highlights include the nation's largest collection of western lowland gorillas, the nation's largest zoological collection of orangutans, and a global center of excellence for the care and study of vanishing reptiles and amphibians. The Zoo 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 visit [zooatlanta.org](http://zooatlanta.org).

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