

C O M O F R I E N D S

INSIDER

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First-Class Animal Care

From flu shots to first aid, providing great animal care at Como Zoo is a full-time mission



Photo by Susannah Baughn

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Como Friends is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization whose mission is to inspire community generosity in support of Como Park Zoo and Conservatory so it thrives for generations to come.

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Como Park Zoo and Conservatory's mission is to inspire our public to value the presence of living things in our lives.

Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). Look for the AZA logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things.



The American Public Gardens Association (APGA) serves and strengthens public gardens throughout North America by supporting and promoting their work, value and achievements in horticultural display, education, research and plant conservation.



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FOR RESERVATIONS

Winter Hours: (October 1 – March 31) 10 am – 4 pm
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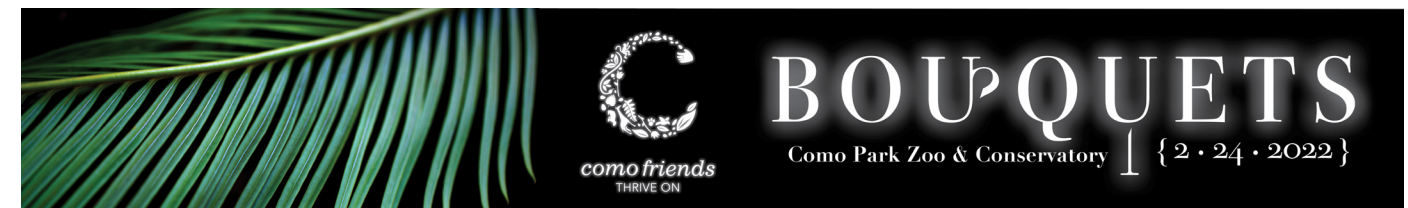
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COMO NEWS & EVENTS



GREAT CAUSE, GORGEOUS SETTING BOUQUETS RETURNS THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24

Come in from the cold and feel your spirit unfurl in the balmy beauty of Bouquets, an intimate, after-hours benefit for Como Park Zoo and Conservatory. From the soaring Palm Dome, to the fresh and fragrant Sunken Garden, the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory is the verdant backdrop for Como Friends' annual winter fundraiser, featuring extraordinary wine, food and fun.

With in-person and virtual options available, Bouquets is an accessible event for all Como Friends' supporters. However you choose to participate, you will be able to bid on the fantastic online silent auction. Visit www.comofriends.org to select your ticket. And be sure to check out the Bouquets Marketplace going live on Como Friends' website on February 1, 2022. Great deals and discounts curated exclusively for Como Friends by the generous community of restaurants, caterers, wine vendors and breweries who have always been critical to the success of Bouquets.

PURCHASE YOUR TICKETS TODAY!



FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

With major improvements and new public programs on the horizon, 2022 promises to be a big year at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory. Stay up to date on everything from flower shows to furry new arrivals by following Como Friends on all of our social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram. And share your favorite Como snapshots with all of Como Friends' supporters.



COMO NEWS & EVENTS



GIVING BACK TO A COMMUNITY TREASURE

Como Friends' community of supporters set a new record for online giving November 18 during the statewide Give to the Max Day fundraiser, contributing more than \$118,000 to support Como Park Zoo and Conservatory. "It's very heartening to see how much this community cares about Como, and how much our supporters really want Como Zoo and the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory to be the absolute best they can be," says Jackie Sticha, president of Como Friends.

From the fantastic new improvements taking shape in Como Zoo's Aquatic Animals Building, to the virtual Como Connections program that's bringing the Como field trip experience to kids across greater Minnesota, private contributions from people like you help us meet our mission, inspiring all of us with the wonders of the natural world.



LEAVE A LEGACY

Como Park Zoo & Conservatory is a treasure in our backyard. Owned by all, enjoyed by all, and free to all.

Include Como Friends in your estate plan to keep Como admission free and vibrant for future generations. Your support is key to keeping Como a world-class natural wonder in the heart of the city that is accessible to all and here for years to come.

To learn more about what your planned gift can make possible today and tomorrow, contact Laurel Lundberg, Director of Individual Giving, at 651-487-8296.

COMO NEWS & EVENTS



RAISING THE BAR

Once again, Como Zoo earns accreditation from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums

In November, Como Zoo was accredited once again by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, the non-profit organization committed to ensuring that the nation's top zoos meet the best practice standards for animal care and conservation.

Started in 1985, the AZA accreditation program requires zoo facilities to submit a lengthy written application prior to a rigorous multiple-day on-site inspection that explores every aspect of zoo programming, from animal welfare and well-being, to conservation efforts and guest safety. Each institution must renew the accreditation application every five years.

"It's an incredibly rigorous process and we spend nearly two years just preparing the documentation for our application," says senior keeper Allison Jungheim who notes that fewer than 10 percent of all animal exhibitors registered with the USDA meet the AZA's high standards. "Being AZA-accredited is one of the ways our visitors can feel confident about the animal care and conservation that goes on at Como every day."

As part of the process, a team of independent experts came to Como Zoo in June, studying every aspect of zoo operations, from keeper training and veterinary care, to Como's educational programs and financial stability. "They have a lot of different standards they look at, but they were very complimentary of Como Harbor and the fact we were able to build it and open it during the pandemic," Jungheim says. "They were also very happy about how inclusive Como is with our free admission. They thought the fact that everyone can come to Como is just a wonderful thing."

Como Zoo has been continually accredited since 1984, a year before the process became a mandatory part of membership in the AZA. One of 242 AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums, Como Zoo and its partner institutions together reach more than 183 million visitors each year. Bring your Como Friends' membership card when you travel to any of the AZA accredited reciprocal zoos for free or reduced admission. To become a member or find a reciprocal zoo or aquarium, visit comofriends.org/give/membership/.

ACCREDITED BY THE
**ASSOCIATION
OF ZOOS &
AQUARIUMS**

FIRST-CLASS CARE

From flu shots to first aid, providing great animal care at Como Zoo is a full-time mission

We envision a future where Como Friends ensures Como Park Zoo and Conservatory is a global leader in conservation, animal care and horticulture with barrier-free access for all.



A team of nearly three dozen veterinary specialists, farriers, zookeepers, wildlife experts and other vital staff members gathered behind the scenes at Como Zoo in October and held their collective breath as Skeeter, a nearly 16-foot-tall reticulated giraffe, underwent a brief but risky anesthetic procedure to treat a foot injury.

The tallest land mammal in the world, the giraffe's respiratory system wasn't designed for lying down—just one of the many medical challenges Skeeter's caregivers had to factor into their plan for immobilizing the 2,000-pound male during the procedure. After a tranquilizer dart to the giraffe's right hip delivered a potent mix of anesthetic agents, the assembled teams flew into action, threading a nearly four-foot tube down Skeeter's trachea to keep him ventilated during surgery, and working quickly to remove a boot splint applied weeks before to help stabilize the fractured bone in his front left foot to promote healing.

Creating this complex care plan took months of cross-country collaboration between Como Zoo's keepers and veterinary technician, veterinary and wildlife epidemiology partners at the University of Minnesota, and giraffe experts from the Columbus, San Diego and Cheyenne Mountain zoos who flew in to lend a hand. "Immobilizations of giraffes can be dangerous and difficult to execute because of their unique anatomy and physiology, and sheer size,"

explains Andrea Persson, Como's onsite Veterinary Technician. Persson worked with U of M veterinarian Dr. Fausto Bellezzo to organize a team that included Steve Foxworth, a world-renowned hoofstock farrier, the veterinary team from the Minnesota Zoo, and the U of M Veterinary Medical Center's anesthesia team, all of whom provided assistance on the day of the procedure.

As Skeeter began to stir after surgery, there was one face in the crowd that the 13-year-old male sought out first—that of his favorite zookeeper, Jill Erzar. Though she was on maternity leave at the time, Erzar brought her baby daughter in a front pack to meet her favorite patient, who bounded back on his six-foot-long legs while his care team whooped, hugged and wiped tears of relief.

"Moments like that really illuminate the extraordinary bonds that develop between animals and keepers, and how critical those relationships are to the great animal care that happens at Como Zoo every day of the year," says Jackie Sticha, president of Como Friends. "The deep connection that keepers like Jill have with the animals they care for makes it possible for them to notice small but meaningful changes in animal behavior to help diagnose problems, to help minimize stress during veterinary procedures, and to encourage animals to cooperate in their own health care in ways that promote longevity and wellness."

Supporting great animal care has been a leading investment priority for Como Friends, which provided the original funding to launch Como Zoo's operant conditioning animal training program, an approach that relies on positive reinforcement to build trust between keepers and animals, and to keep animals healthy and curious. Starting first with the sea lion training program nearly 20 years ago, Como's animal training efforts have expanded to include several dozen species of animals, from the Galapagos tortoises to the western lowland gorillas. Those daily training sessions have helped to reap important health benefits for Como Zoo's animals, from encouraging orangutans to voluntarily present their shoulders for their annual flu shots, to getting glimpses of the gorillas' cardiac health through voluntary ultrasounds. Several years ago, Como even became one of the first zoos in the world to teach polar bears to present their paws for a voluntary blood draw, a procedure that provides helpful insights for keepers and veterinarians as they care for Neil and Nan, two of the oldest polar bears now living in North America.

The work Como's professional keepers have put into training animals to stay calm during routine vet checks or not to be nervous around needles will have an important pay-off this year, as vaccines become more widely available to animals who are susceptible to the COVID-19 virus and its variants. While Como Zoo's keeper staff is fully vaccinated, they've maintained strict health protocols throughout the pandemic, wearing masks and gloves and maintaining healthy distances to limit the possibility of passing illness between humans and animals. "There have been a number of cases of COVID among primates and large cats that have been reported at other zoos, so we've been tracking that information closely and are being extremely cautious as we work with our animals," says senior keeper Allison Jungheim. "We're really looking forward to being able to vaccinate some of our most vulnerable

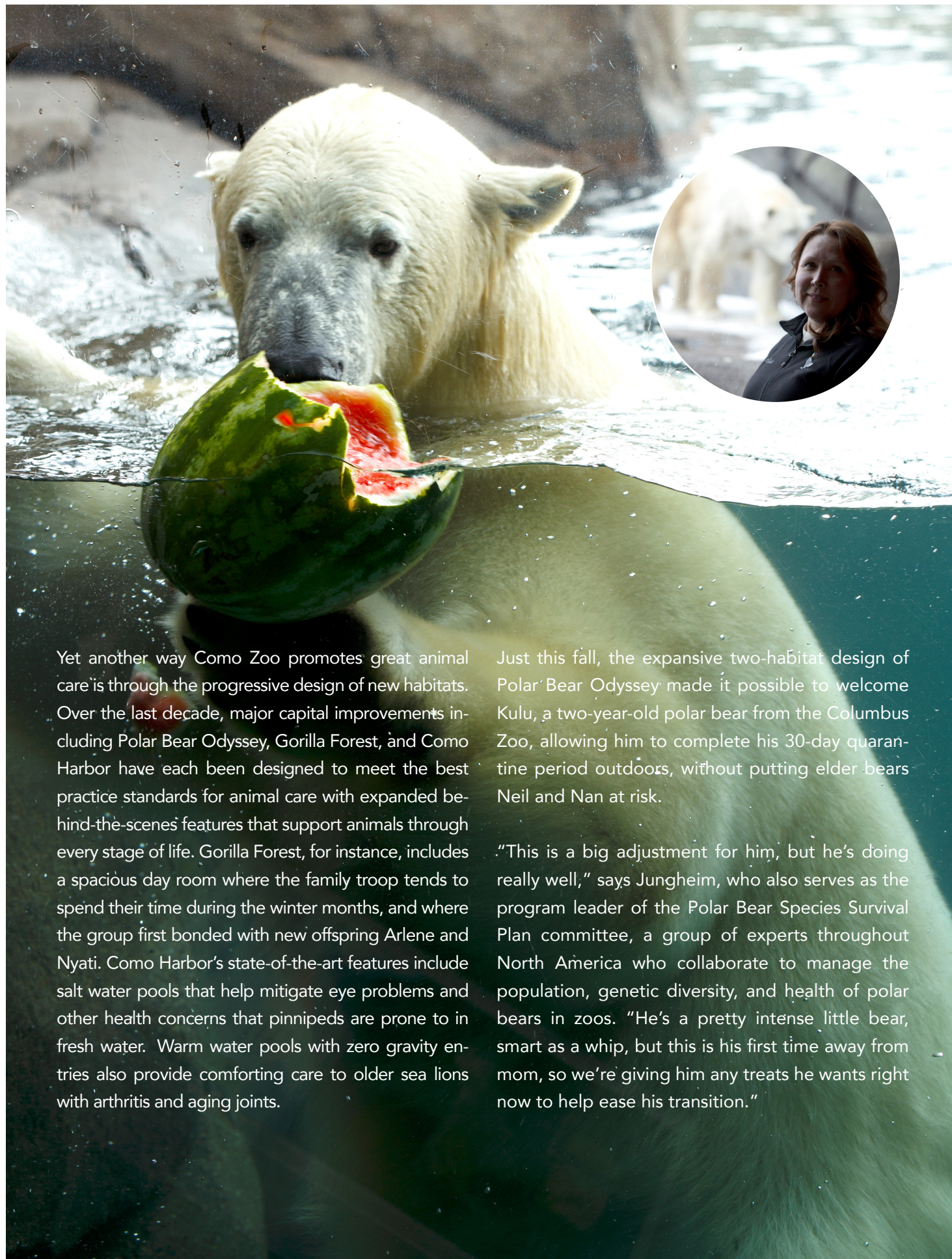
animals and cutting that risk of transmission as much as possible."

Beyond immunizations and routine preventive care, first-class animal care also relies on close observation, and recognizing the first signs that an animal may be under the weather. "Most animals have evolved to hide the signs of illness or injury to prevent being vulnerable to predators, so it's not always easy to know what their health needs might be," says Jungheim. That's one reason why Como Zoo conducts weekly rounds with long-time partners at the University of Minnesota School of Veterinary Medicine. The frequent check-ups allow keepers to share any concerns with veterinary staff, and to provide ongoing care to animals such as gray seals Stanley and Wallace, who both have visual impairments. It also allows keepers to flag possible health problems at first notice, a strategy that recently helped prevent four-year-old Nyati, a western lowland gorilla, from succumbing to a rare parasitic infection.

In the fall of 2020, keepers noticed that the young female gorilla seemed to be off balance and was walking with an unusual gait, and immediately began searching for answers. In December, Nyati was brought to the University of Minnesota for an MRI and a spinal tap, which revealed she'd been infected with *Baylisascaris procyonis*, a raccoon-borne parasite that can cause serious neurologic disorders and fatalities in humans and some animals. "When this type of infection occurs in the brain, the parasite is typically diagnosed post-mortem—it's not something that is easily caught early enough to make a difference," says Como Zoo primate keeper Michelle Hays. "We're really glad that we diagnosed it when we did and treated it, because it saved her life. Though her balance and movement will always be affected, we're hopeful that she will continue to have a great quality of life."



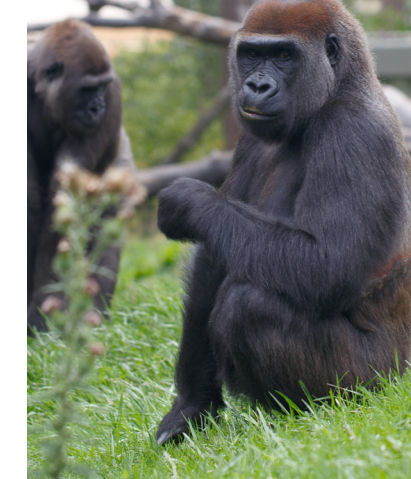
Currently, keepers are working with Nyati on physical therapy to increase the grasping strength in her hands and monitoring her welfare daily. They're also working closely with a U of M pediatric neurologist who has recommended a medication that may alleviate some of the challenges created by muscle spasticity resulting from Nyati's condition. While visitors will notice that Nyati moves differently than the other gorillas, they'll also see how her family troop looks out for her. "Schroeder has always been a great dad, but he's extra attentive to Nyati. He and the other females always make sure that she's doing okay when shifting locations and will run over to see what's going on if she vocalizes," Hays says. "Nyati is an integral part of the group, and we feel good about her future because she's got a lot of support from the other gorillas."



Yet another way Como Zoo promotes great animal care is through the progressive design of new habitats. Over the last decade, major capital improvements including Polar Bear Odyssey, Gorilla Forest, and Como Harbor have each been designed to meet the best practice standards for animal care with expanded behind-the-scenes features that support animals through every stage of life. Gorilla Forest, for instance, includes a spacious day room where the family troop tends to spend their time during the winter months, and where the group first bonded with new offspring Arlene and Nyati. Como Harbor's state-of-the-art features include salt water pools that help mitigate eye problems and other health concerns that pinnipeds are prone to in fresh water. Warm water pools with zero gravity entries also provide comforting care to older sea lions with arthritis and aging joints.

Just this fall, the expansive two-habitat design of Polar Bear Odyssey made it possible to welcome Kulu, a two-year-old polar bear from the Columbus Zoo, allowing him to complete his 30-day quarantine period outdoors, without putting elder bears Neil and Nan at risk.

"This is a big adjustment for him, but he's doing really well," says Jungheim, who also serves as the program leader of the Polar Bear Species Survival Plan committee, a group of experts throughout North America who collaborate to manage the population, genetic diversity, and health of polar bears in zoos. "He's a pretty intense little bear, smart as a whip, but this is his first time away from mom, so we're giving him any treats he wants right now to help ease his transition."



"Zoo animals have different needs and live longer than their cousins in the wild, so it's important to have facilities that allow us to take care of them at many different stages in their lives, whether they're full of energy like Kulu the polar bear, or living well into their old age like Neil and Nan," says Como Friends' Sticha. "Many of Como Friends' most committed supporters care deeply about the welfare of our animals, and they should feel very proud of improvements that are putting Como Zoo on the leading edge of zoo animal care."

HEALTHY MOVES

Goodbye Alice, Hello Nicky and Cerberus

While Como Zoo's facilities meet the best practice standards set by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, sometimes an individual animal's specific needs require a new environment.

That's the decision that Como Zoo keepers and the Gorilla Species Survival Plan committee recently made about Alice, a 21-year-old female gorilla who first came to Como Zoo as part of the opening of Gorilla Forest in 2013. In September, she was moved to the Little Rock Zoo in Arkansas in hopes that a change in environment would improve her persistent skin-picking condition.

"I've been getting regular updates from her keepers in Little Rock and she's doing great," says primate keeper

Michelle Hays. "They love her spunky attitude." While Alice was the dominant female in Gorilla Forest and a good mother to baby Nyati, Alice's skin condition remained a persistent source of concern for veterinarians and gorilla experts who shared her diagnosis and treatment plan with the public in 2019. "We could see that her condition generally improved when she was out in the sunlight during the summer, so it was decided that for her best quality of life, she would do better in a warmer climate with more access to the outdoors. We really miss her, but we're also very hopeful that the change in environment works for her."

Meanwhile, Como's Wolf Woods have welcomed two new residents, Nicky and Cerberus, a pair of litter-mates born at the Wildlife Science Center in Stacy, Minnesota. With the death of previous residents Denali and Shy-Anne, who had each lived to twice the typical age, keepers are just now getting to know the nearly three-year-old pair. "Wolves are hard to work with and very skittish and it takes awhile to build trust," says Marisa Paulat, part of a team of wolf and large cat keepers who've been spending quality time with the wolves. The pair is also getting a warm welcome from neighbors Jasper and Ruby, a pair of orphaned mountain lions who've been living at Como since 2018. "Those two love sitting up on the rocks and watching what the wolves do," she says. "It's like binge-watching—just hours and hours of fun for them."



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The Season for Self-Care

Pamper yourself this winter with soul-soothing gifts and accessories from Garden Safari Gifts. From luxurious lotions and inspiring incense, to fuzzy-soft slippers and sparkling accessories, take care of yourself this season while you help support the plants and animals you love at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory.

Remember, Como Friends' members enjoy 15% off every purchase.

