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Introducing Tara the Orangutan

To our friends in the media: Tara is not available for photo or video at this time.

Tengku and Melati, the zoo's Sumatran orangutans, are about to make a new friend: Tara, a female orangutan, is the newest member of the orangutan family.

"Tara is full of personality," says zoo keeper Angie Selzer, who cares for the orangutans. "We're thrilled to have her in Fort Wayne."



Tara arrived in Fort Wayne in April, and, after completing a routine 30-day quarantine period, is getting to know male orangutan Tengku, who turns 27 on July 3, and female Melati, age 28. Introductions are taking place behind the scenes. "We first allow the orangutans to see each other through mesh doors," explains Selzer. "Only after we are comfortable with their interactions will we let them meet face to face."

The introduction process could take a few months, Selzer says, so it could be a while before zoo guests see Tara in the Orangutan Valley exhibit. During the introduction period, Tengku and Melati will be allowed to move back and forth between the exhibit and the behind-the-scenes areas where Tara lives, so there could be times when no orangutans are in the exhibit.

Born at the Rio Grande Zoo in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Tara is 18 years old, which is middle aged for an orangutan (the median life expectancy for female Sumatran orangutans is 32 years). She moved to the Columbus (Ohio) Zoo in 2002. Tengku arrived from Zoo Atlanta and Melati came from the Yerkes Primate Center in 1995 for the opening of Orangutan Valley.

“Tara is an awesome orangutan,” says Selzer. “The staff at the Columbus Zoo took excellent care of her.” Selzer notes that Tara is already trained on several medical behaviors, such as presenting her arm for a blood draw, which make her daily management much more efficient.

Tara can be distinguished from the other orangutans by her petite build and darker fur on her face, hands, and feet.

Sumatran orangutans are a critically endangered species and are managed in zoos by a Species Survival Plan (SSP), which seeks to maintain genetic diversity in the captive population. These rare apes are found only on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, where their future is threatened by persistent habitat destruction as forests are converted to palm oil plantations, timber concessions, and mining operations. Zoos could prove to be the last stronghold for this species, which some experts predict could become functionally extinct in the wild within 10 to 20 years.

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About the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo: The Fort Wayne Children's Zoo is northeast Indiana's largest tourist attraction, hosting more than 500,000 guests annually. The zoo was voted Indiana's #1 “Gotta-Do Summer Attraction” and is consistently named one of the nation's **Top Ten Zoos for Kids** by national media outlets.

The zoo is a conservation leader, contributing \$50,000 annually to local, regional, and international efforts to protect wild animals and habitats, and participating in cooperative management programs for 15 endangered species.

As a self-supporting facility, the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo receives no tax dollars for operations. The zoo's operations are funded entirely by earned revenue and donations.

The zoo is open April 20-October 13, 2013. Admission is \$13.50 for adults; \$10.50 for seniors age 60+; and \$8.50 for children ages 2-14. Babies age 1 and under and Zoo Society Members are admitted free.