Gorilla trio celebrate first Valentine’s Day together at London Zoo

Monday 13 February, 2023

Love was in the air today at London Zoo, as keepers played matchmaker to recent arrival Kiburi and his new ladies Mjukuu and Effie - treating the Western lowland gorillas to a heart shaped piñata filled with tasty vegetables and nutritious greens.

And as they celebrate their first Valentine’s Day together, zookeepers have revealed the love match to be a resounding success.

18-year-old silverback Kiburi, who joined the conservation zoo’s troop last November as part of a European breeding programme for the Critically Endangered species, has spent the past few months settling into his new Gorilla Kingdom home and getting to know the new females in his life.

Gorilla keeper Jo Barnes said “Kiburi is definitely the strong silent type, and the girls have been working hard to get his attention - but it’s clear he has developed a real affection for Mjukuu and Effie.

“We’ve spotted them grooming him and Mjukuu, the dominant female, is often caught gazing lovingly at Kiburi - all really good signs that they’re big fans of the strapping, 181kg new gorilla in their life. All being well, we hope it won’t be long before we hear the pitter-patter of baby gorilla feet!”

The gorillas, who eat a whopping 5kg of food each per day, made a bee-line for the red pinata and once Mjukuu - clutching a bouquet of leafy greens - had pulled it open, they made short work of their special Valentine’s Day set menu, featuring a sweet potato starter, cucumber main and sweetcorn dessert.

“Western lowland gorillas are critically endangered in the wild,” Jo added. “So Kiburi getting on so well with Mjukuu and Effie is real cause for celebration - bringing this new troop of gorillas together will help protect this incredible species for the future, which is at the core of the Zoo’s conservation values.”

Western Lowland gorillas - the largest of the great apes – are native to the dense, remote rainforests of central Africa. The threats of poaching, habitat destruction and human-spread diseases have sadly decimated wild populations.

ZSL is working to protect the species at London Zoo by taking part in this vital breeding programme, while investigating wildlife diseases at ZSL’s world-leading Institute of Zoology, working with partners in the field to strengthen wildlife protection and surveillance, and empowering local communities to combat wildlife crime.

Visitors can see Kiburi and his troop, as well as almost 15,000 other incredible animals, at the iconic London conservation zoo - the perfect date-spot for all animal lovers this Valentine’s Day. Book tickets online at www.londonzoo.org.

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