



For Immediate Release
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Dane County Henry Vilas Zoo Announces Birth of Healthy Orangutan

Dane County's Henry Vilas Zoo is excited to announce the birth of a healthy female Bornean orangutan to first-time parents Kawan and Datu. The new infant, named Keju ('kay-joo'), Malay for "cheese," was born on Thursday, April 9. Keju is important to the national effort to maintain a population of this endangered species through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Orangutan Species Survival Plan (SSP). Orangutans are found only on the islands of Sumatra and Borneo, and are the only great ape found in Asia. Bornean orangutans are endangered and Sumatran orangutans are critically endangered with less than 6,000 individuals left in Sumatra.

"We are excited to have Keju as part of our zoo family," Dane County Executive Joe Parisi said. "No matter where she goes in life, her name is a reminder that she is a true Wisconsinite. We take great pride in the work we do to protect endangered species."

As any parent can understand, there is a steep learning curve for your first child. Despite the intensive maternal training zoo staff conducted with Kawan to prepare her for motherhood (including participating in ultrasounds, accepting injections, and retrieving and trading objects with her keepers) this has been a confusing time for her. While Kawan initially showed good maternal instincts such as picking up and cleaning off the infant after birth, she unfortunately did not continue full-time care of Keju, which can sometimes be the case in both the wild and captivity, so zoo staff stepped in to help care for her.

Staff is continuing Kawan's intensive maternal training and keeping her interactions with the infant positive with the goal of reuniting mother and infant as soon as possible. Unlike human babies, orangutan babies cannot be placed in a basinet or bouncy seat. They spend the first year of life exclusively on their mother. Keju is receiving round-the-clock care from zoo caregivers.

"We are so fortunate to have a healthy mother and infant," said Zoo Director Ronda Schwetz. "Teaching Kawan appropriate infant care will help ensure a good bond between her and Keju. Our caregivers model the behavior of an orangutan to help Keju grow strong and ready for life with mom."

Infant orangutans spend their first year of life clinging onto their mother and have the second longest infant dependency behind humans. To emulate the mother orangutan, zoo caregivers wear a special vest with fleece strips for the infant to hold onto. Caregivers make sure to model appropriate behaviors of mother orangutans like grooming, moving around and changing position. The zoo continues to work closely with the Orangutan SSP, the top orangutan husbandry experts in North America, on working towards reuniting mom and infant and eventually, dad, Datu.

“The Friends of the Zoo join in congratulating our two orangutan parents on the birth of Keju,” said Alison Prange, Executive Director of the Friends of the Henry Vilas Zoo. “The birth is a wonderful reminder of the work the Henry Vilas Zoo does to lead efforts in animal conservation and survival of endangered species. Community support of our zoo is critical to this work, and we thank you.”

Both species face the loss of their forest home in response to the global demand for palm oil, found in processed and preserved food and many health and beauty products and the demand for young orangutans as pets. You can help be a part of the solution by ensuring that the products that you purchase are made from orangutan friendly, sustainably produced palm oil. This list of sustainably produced palm oil products can be found on the link at our website at www.vilaszo.org.

The timing for getting the family back together is driven by the behavior and health of all members of the family. Keju will be viewable by the public at a later date. The zoo will post updates on its Facebook page. It is possible that visitors will not see any orangutans on exhibit during the times that zoo staff is training with them behind-the-scenes. We thank everyone for their understanding.