

NOTE: All docents when visiting Gorilla World should remove their vests and keep them out of site while they are around the exhibit.

Docent Assistance at Gorilla World

The primate team appreciates the docents and all they do for the zoo and for our primates. However, at the Gorilla exhibit the docents' presence can be frustrating for our dominant silverback, Oscar Jonesy which could result in aggressive behavior. For the safety of the docents, visitors and our infant gorilla we will need to mitigate these times of aggression.

The role of the docents now at the gorilla exhibit is to monitor the public and answer general questions. The infant is now fully integrated and does not require constant monitoring. Again, the primary responsibility of the docents now will be to assist in crowd control. The docents should not spend any significant time at the gorilla exhibit. They should move along to different viewing stations and avoid the window station all together.

Human Behavioral Guidelines for Gorilla World Visitors

Our silverback, Oscar Jonesy, has been exhibiting a number of aggressive behaviors directed toward people standing at the GW viewing stations. Last summer a graduate student was stationed outside the exhibit collecting data for her thesis on stress behaviors in captive gorillas. She estimated that 95% of Oscar's aggression was triggered by docents. The gorilla keepers have noted that his displays are mainly directed at people who visit the grotto regularly (people that he recognizes) and who also do one or more things that is bothersome to him. Naturally, for the well being of the gorillas, including our newest member Hasani, the staff would like to keep the atmosphere at GW as relaxed as possible. If GW visitors understand Oscar's body language and practice proper "gorilla etiquette" there should be a dramatic reduction in the number of Oscar/human negative interactions.

How can visitors reduce the chances that Oscar will react negatively to them? Do not engage him!

- **Do not bring rowdy tour groups to GW.**
- **Do not walk up and stand in front of him; view him at a distance.** (If he is at the first viewing station on the east or west side of GW when you arrive, do not stop; walk past him and view him from the other side of the grotto.)
- **If you are giving a tour, stop before you reach GW and prepare your group.** Give the group some basic facts about gorillas so when you get to the viewing station the tour members can enjoy observing the gorillas and you can then answer specific questions. This preparatory stop would be most beneficial if you have a large group.
- **Stand back from the railing and let your tour members stand in front of you.**
- **Do not look at Oscar.** It is OK if your group members so if they do not "stare him down" and Oscar seem relaxed.
- **Do not talk to him or any of his females.**

- **Do not gesture toward him, say his name, talk in a loud voice, or climb up on a planter.** Climbing up on a planter will place you even higher above him which is threatening.
- **Do not go to the window!** You want to keep as much space between him and yourself as possible.

What body language says that Oscar is upset? Aggressive gorilla body language
(See attachment photo of a silverback in a tense-lipped, stiff-stance, hard stare stance.)

- **Stiff stance:** gorilla stands very stiffly.
- **Tense lipped:** gorilla's upper lip is pulled in tightly over his upper teeth.
- **Rush display:** gorilla rushes toward or past the visitor.
- **Shadowing:** gorilla follows the visitor around the exhibit.
- **Hard stare:** this behavior is often accompanied, preceded, or followed by one or more of other listed behaviors.
- **Raspberry sound:** gorilla makes a very distinct sound sometimes using his hand.
- **Hitting the window:** This behavior is can be triggered by the presence of adult or young adult men at the window or people being rowdy. However, it is usually triggered by the too close proximity of people he recognizes and has taken a dislike to.
- **Strong musty scent:** This smell is the unmistakable pheromonal scent of an agitated silverback which means: leave me alone!

What should you do if Oscar already reacts aggressively toward you? Can the behavior be de-programmed? Probably.

If Oscar has directed toward you any of the above described aggressive behaviors try the following:

When you notice that Oscar has “spotted” or “zeroed in” on you, **leave GW immediately!** You want to retreat **before** he threatens you. By your body language you will be saying, “Oscar, you’re in charge.” Observe all the “Do not engage him” tips mentioned above. Keep your visits initially very short and infrequent until he does not react to you any longer. Changing your appearance so he is less likely to recognize you might help as well.

Remember the goal is not for Oscar to like or acknowledge you but for him to be indifferent or oblivious to your presence.