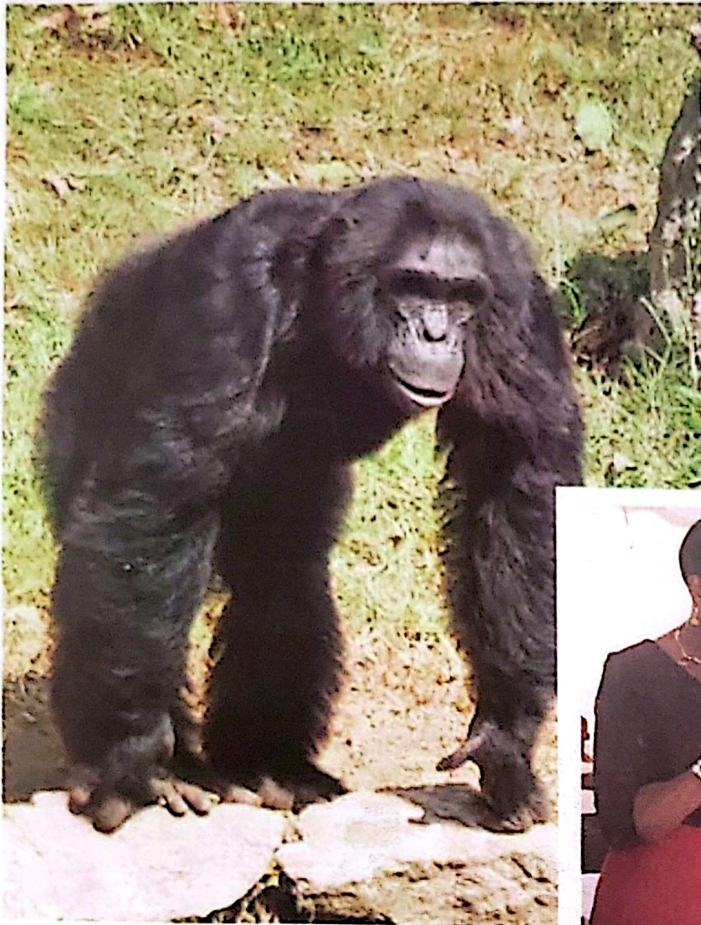


# At 54, Zakayo has grown from angry youngster to fatherly peacemaker



Above, the celebrated chimp. Right, state minister for Primary Education Rose Seninde displays a portrait of Zakayo during the birthday celebration last weekend.  
PHOTO BY BENJAMIN JUMBE

**EXTRAORDINARY APE.** At 54, Zakayo is thought to be the oldest chimpanzee in captivity in East, West and Central Africa.

BY BENJAMIN JUMBE  
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

For anyone who has had an opportunity to visit the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC) in Entebbe, Zakayo needs no introduction.

He has been a household name for many years and the biggest attraction for many tourists visiting the centre. Zakayo the chimpanzee, is no doubt the pride of UWEC.

The ape celebrated his 54th birthday last week and is believed to be the oldest chimp in East, West and Central Africa and yet still shows no signs of frailty or brittleness.

The centre's executive director James Musinguzi says seeing him live up to this age is a great

milestone to the conservationists and the country at large.

#### Aging gracefully

"Zakayo, the oldest chimpanzee is very attractive to the public and people come to visit UWEC simply because it is historical for a chimpanzee to make it to 54 years. He has been a leader in his group with distinguished leadership characteristics that have made the group grow and remain in harmony for all these years," Musinguzi says.

Zakayo was the alpha male from 1970s to 2011, when he handed over power to Matooke who was later toppled by Aluma. Although he is no longer the alpha male and super active individual of the 1970s, he continues to be a peace lover and maker and is no longer involved in aggressive displays or fights.

Several of the chimpanzee keepers that have worked with him through the years speak of him so fondly with each having a memorable story to tell.

## SECRET BEHIND ZAKAYO'S LONG LIFE

One may wonder how Zakayo has been able to survive this long.

UWEC Executive Director James Musinguzi says this has been made possible through a coordinated approach involving doctors, animal caregivers, veterinarians, and educators.

"We have set up a very strong and robust team that has worked very hard to ensure the welfare of Zakayo. He has been given the right food at the right time, the right medication and treatment and this has prolonged his life," Musinguzi says.

Zakayo loves eggs, porridge and sugarcane but jackfruit and watermelon are his favourite.



Zakayo eats the right food at the right time. NET PHOTO



## THE FATHER FIGURE AND GOOD PARTNER

According to Hellen Atim an animal keeper who has worked with him from 2001 to 2014, Zakayo commands respect in the community and is fatherly to all.

"He is fatherly to newly integrated chimps and is a family man with two partners, Ruth and Amina. However, he loves Amina more than Ruth because Amina is friendly compared to Ruth who is sometimes a trouble causer in the group," Atim says. However, she says Zakayo has been able to ensure his two partners live together harmoniously without fighting each other. They often join hands to defend their man and fight anyone who dares to attack him.

cage," Musinguzi adds.

He tells of an incident where Zakayo was enraged by a truck driver who used to bring him food.

"Whenever he would come near the cage, the driver would start hooting. This noise annoyed Zakayo and he started moving around the cage banging the doors but the driver thought Zakayo was making fun. One day he made the same noise, and unfortunately in the process of banging the door, Zakayo broke out of the cage, run to the car, attacked the driver, broke his hand, and went back to his cage," Musinguzi narrates.

Sam Waigo, a maintenance supervisor who also worked with Zakayo reveals that the chimp used to smoke cigarettes.

"While in the cage, many people used to give him cigarettes to smoke in his small cage," Waigo says.

Waigo who is now working in the education department of the centre, says Zakayo is unique. He is very protective of the young chimpanzees, respectful and has a good memory.

"When there is a newcomer who has been rescued, the chimp is first introduced to Zakayo because he is very protective and calm. He is very unique and clever and loves sharing," Waigo says.

#### Adventures of Zakayo

"I remember Zakayo did not like Black (dark skinned) people. I think whoever kept him before we rescued him was a Black person," says Gerald Musinguzi, his handler from 1994-1998 when he was still caged at the entrance of the zoo.

"When school parties were brought to the zoo, and loud music played, with people dancing and making noise, Zakayo would get very irritated, stressed and "start banging the cage, pacing around upright on his two legs and throwing faeces, stones and leftovers at them," recalls Musinguzi.

Since the wire mesh cages were not that strong, Zakayo would sometimes break out and escape.

"Zakayo used to break the cages in the morning. He knew where we kept the food, so he would go there, get the food and get back to his