

Cat-Orangutan Duo Share Home, Hearts

Orange tabby credited with helping extend ape's life at Florida's ZooWorld.

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ZooWorld officials credit T.K. with helping Tonda the orangutan live longer by providing her with companionship. Photo courtesy ZooWorld. An orange tabby cat can take the credit for helping Tonda the orangutan reach her 50th birthday, a milestone that makes her the third oldest great ape in North America, according to her caretakers at ZooWorld in Panama City, Fla.

The cat, named T.K. for Tonda's Kitty, came in as a stray with no formal training as a therapy pet. But to the elderly orangutan, the feline was just what she needed to get over a case of depression after the death of her mate, said Stephanie Willard, ZooWorld director of education. "Most likely, Tonda would not have made it to age 50 without the cat's companionship," Willard said.

At first, the cat and the orangutan were kept apart so that they were only able to see each other without making contact. As they grew familiar with each other, they started interacting.

The cat's calm, affectionate personality was a perfect match for Tonda, Willard said. The two live together at the zoo, spending the day lounging and sleeping. Tonda has taken on a motherly role with the cat, petting him and kissing him, and carrying him inside their enclosure when he won't listen to her calling him.

"She's very attentive to him," Willard said. "He is still a typical cat ... a cool cat."