



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Nov. 10, 2016

MALE WALRUS WITH 17-INCH TUSKS TO DEBUT FRIDAY AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM
3,650 -pound Dozer is here to potentially mate with the zoo's females through the Species Survival Plan®

TACOMA, Wash. – A new male walrus with 17-inch tusks will make his public debut Friday afternoon at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.



The 3,650-pound walrus, named Dozer, is in Tacoma for several months on a breeding loan through the newly formed Walrus Conservation Consortium dedicated to aiding the imperiled species.

“We think our visitors will enjoy seeing this magnificent male walrus up close,” said Zoo general curator Dr. Karen Goodrowe Beck. “But he is here on an important mission to try to increase the dwindling number of Pacific walrus in North America.”



There are just 14 Pacific walrus in accredited zoos and aquariums in the United States, and only 19 in North America, said zoo senior staff biologist Lisa Triggs, “We hope he will breed with our female walrus as we work to increase this important marine mammal population through the Species Survival Plan.®

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium is home to two female walrus, Joan, 21, and Basilla, 33. Dozer is 23.

In the field of love among the animals, Goodrowe Beck and Triggs are superstars.

Goodrowe Beck holds a Ph.D. in reproductive biology and has a worldwide reputation among zoos as an expert in the field.

Triggs has researched walrus behavior and reproduction for over a decade and recently spoke at a scientific forum on walrus in China at the invitation of the Chinese government. She’s scheduled to make a similar presentation in Japan next year.

Dozer will likely show signs of rut in late December. Male walrus eat large quantities of food and gain huge amounts of weight in preparation for breeding, Triggs said. A dominant male will breed with as many females as possible and will not take time to eat while fiercely protecting his territory.

Female walrus generally are sexually mature between 8 and 10 years old. Males come into breeding age at around 10 years old and remain fertile well into their 20s, Triggs said.



Though male walrus remain in rut for several months, females have brief annual estrus periods that last between one and several days, Triggs said. Hormone levels show that Joan and Basilla reliably come into estrus each year. She and other staff track the animals' hormones with blood samples obtained voluntarily from the walrus.

Those hoping for a walrus calf must be patient. Hormone levels derived from blood samples will eventually allow staff biologists to know if one of the females is pregnant. But the process of producing a baby walrus takes time. Once a walrus egg is fertilized, it's not implanted in the uterus for four to five months. The gestation period is about 15 months.

Dozer is at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium on loan from Sea World San Antonio.

Zoo staff believe his presence, along with Joan and Basilla, also will inspire more guests to take action to help curb climate change. Making a difference can be as simple as not idling a car while waiting for a passenger.

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium is a recognized leader in walrus research and conservation.

Last year, The Zoo Society's Dr. Holly Reed Wildlife Conservation Fund supported a walrus research program at an Alaska Department of Fish and Game sanctuary in northern Bristol Bay.

In recent years, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium staff members also have engaged in studies and aided other researchers to:

- Investigate the physical characteristics and mechanisms that allow walrus to produce a variety of unique sounds
- Assess variations in food consumption and body conditions of walrus

- Identify a reliable blubber measurement to assess body condition in marine mammals, using Pacific walrus as the model
- Study the development of diving physiology and capacity in walrus

“Each of these studies helps marine mammal experts and other researchers better understand these magnificent mammals,” Triggs said. “The more we learn about them, the more we can help wild walrus as they adapt to changing climates and altered landscapes.”

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest’s only combined zoo & aquarium, practices and promotes responsible stewardship of the world’s resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).

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Photo captions:

1. Dozer splashes in a behind-the-scenes pool at the Rocky Shores area of Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium on Thursday, Nov. 10. He will go on public exhibit on Friday, Nov. 11, at noon.
2. Dozer opens his mouth to catch a capelin during a feeding session at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium on Thursday, Nov. 10. The male Pacific walrus weighs 3,650 pounds, and his tusks are 17 inches long.
3. Rocky Shores Senior Staff Biologist List Triggs feeds Dozer behind the scenes in the Rocky Shores area at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium on Thursday, Nov. 10. Dozer will go on public exhibit at noon Friday, Nov. 11.

Photo credit: Oona Copperhill/Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium