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3,650-POUND WALRUS WHISTLES, BELLOWS, CLACKS, SHOWS HIS FLIPPERS AND GETS FED WITH HIS 'GIRLFRIENDS' IN NEW VIDEO FROM POINT DEFIANCE ZOO

Pacific walrus Dozer is in Tacoma to potentially mate with the zoo's females through the Species Survival Plan®

TACOMA, Wash. – Dozer the Pacific walrus is wowing visitors to Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in Tacoma, Wash., with a repertoire of sounds that include a whistle, a bellow, a clacking noise and more. He's also getting acquainted with his new "girlfriends," Joan and Basilla.



A new video released by the zoo shows Dozer making many of his vocalizations, holding out a flipper for inspection, showing his 17-inch tusks to a zookeeper and being fed with Joan and Basilla nearby.

The video, which is just over two minutes long, also features Senior Staff Biologist Lisa Triggs talking about Dozer and the breeding program of which he is a part.

In it, she explains why male walrus sounds are an important part of courtship rituals.

There are just 14 Pacific walruses in accredited zoos and aquariums in the United States, and only 19 in North America. Dozer is on a breeding loan through the Walrus Conservation Consortium. He is also part of the Species Survival Plan.®

It is hoped that he will mate with Joan, 21, and Basilla, 33.

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

Dozer likely will show signs of rut, or breeding behavior, 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.

The gestation period for a walrus is about 15 months.

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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