



SEA LION PUP BORN AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM

First sea lion birth in the zoo's 119-year history

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TACOMA, Wash.—There's a new set of flippers at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium! Keepers in the Rocky Shores area of the zoo are celebrating the birth of a female California sea lion pup born on June 6. The pup is the first born at the Tacoma zoo in its 119-year history and the first for mom, Eloise.

Since her birth, the pup has been nursing, growing, moving, vocalizing, and getting accustomed to her care team behind the scenes.

"Eloise is a natural at parenting, and we've seen the pair bonding a lot already," said Curator Jen DeGroot. "Eloise is protective of the pup and encourages her to nurse. Soon she will begin to give her some 'swimming lessons' in shallow water."

Sea lion pups don't swim right away; for now, the pup is exploring water only about 1-2 inches deep behind the scenes. She will remain behind the scenes as she gradually takes on more water and continues to bond with mom before joining the other sea lions and seals in the public viewing pool later this summer.

The pup weighs 17 pounds and will nurse for up to one year before adding new foods, such as herring, capelin, and squid, to her diet.

"The first few weeks are critical for a pup," said Head Veterinarian Dr. Karen Wolf. "She received a neonatal exam and is completing a course of antibiotics due to a mild respiratory tract infection. The pup has been responding well to treatment."

"The Rocky Shores team is monitoring the pup around the clock, even checking a 24/7 camera throughout the night. The long hours are rewarding when we see the success of our planning and the milestones the pup is reaching," explained DeGroot.

Keepers will develop prospective names for the pup, and zoo guests can vote for their favorite later this month.

Eloise and dad, Boomer, were recommended to breed by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Species Survival Plan (SSP) to ensure a genetically diverse, demographically varied, and biologically sound population of sea lions into the future.

Eloise and Boomer arrived at Point Defiance Zoo in July 2019. Both were rescued and needed a home. The smaller of the two, Eloise, was spotted all alone in June 2018 at La Jolla Cove Beach in California. After watching for 48 hours, the rescue team determined that she had been abandoned and took her to be cared for at SeaWorld. Although dehydrated, she recovered well, suckling from a bottle and later eating fish.

Slightly larger, Boomer was rescued as a pup in July 2018 from the Tijuana Slough National Wildlife Refuge at Imperial Beach, California. Alone on the beach, he was handled and touched by humans, an action that can cause adult sea lions – who may be returning – to abandon their pups. When the rescue team arrived, he was dehydrated, lethargic, and shivering. At SeaWorld, the care team rehabilitated the pup, tube-feeding him until he was strong enough to eat fish. Boomer and Eloise are now thriving, swimming side-by-side in the pools at Rocky Shores.

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