



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Dec. 1, 2010

Contact: Whitney DalBalcon, 253-404-3637 (office), 253-278-6343 (cell) or whitney.dalbalcon@pdza.org

Point Defiance Zoo tiger cub who nearly died is reunited with brother and mother

Tacoma, Wash. – Mali, the endangered Sumatran tiger cub who nearly died two weeks ago, has recovered and was reunited with her family yesterday, announced Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium officials.

Zoo general curator Karen Goodrowe Beck called the recovery of the 6-month-old cub “miraculous” and said zoo staff are “ecstatic and relieved” at Mali’s extraordinary progress following emergency surgery on Nov. 15.

“Two weeks ago, Mali’s heart stopped and she almost died and today she is playing with her twin brother and nuzzling her mother,” said Goodrowe Beck, who noted that staff have nicknamed her ‘Miracle Mali.’

Yesterday morning, Mali’s keepers moved her from the zoo animal care hospital where she had been living to a behind-the-scenes area next to her brother and mother. Mali’s brother, Bima, immediately approached her wanting to play and Mali’s mother, Jaya, rubbed against the wall and “chuffed” at her. Chuffing is a tiger vocalization that is a sign of greeting or endearment.

When zookeepers lifted the door separating Mali from her family, Jaya again “chuffed” to Mali and then began licking and grooming her. Keepers monitored the tiger family the rest of the day and all night.

Mali underwent emergency surgery on Nov. 15 after staff noticed she was lethargic and her stomach was taut and distended. Zoo veterinarians found several pieces of cartilage from a large bone blocking food from reaching her intestines. Bones are a normal part of a tiger’s diet.

Several hours after surgery, Mali had a seizure, went into cardiac arrest and was resuscitated. Zoo veterinarians believe she experienced some brain damage due to low oxygen during her cardiac arrest.

Zoo veterinarians consulted with emergency veterinarians and neurologists about Mali’s case and treatment options and continued to monitor her around-the-clock and provide physical therapy every two hours. She continued to show dramatic improvements every day in her coordination and activity level and zoo veterinarians remained cautiously optimistic that she would regain her vision.

Zoo head veterinarian Dr. Karen Wolf said today that Mali appears to have regained her eyesight. “She is jumping up on 3-foot-high shelves and her brother and acting like a normal, healthy tiger cub in every way,” said Wolf. Wolf cautioned that Mali still may show some effects in the future. However, the tiger

cub has not had a seizure since Nov. 15 and has been weaned off phenobarbital, a medication to prevent seizures.

Mali and Bima, born May 25 at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, are among about 75 Sumatran tigers living in North American zoos. There are only about 300 of the endangered species in the wild worldwide.

“She is a precious girl here at the zoo and worldwide,” said Goodrowe Beck. “We’re thrilled that she will be able to grow up and add to the conservation of this endangered species.”

Goodrowe Beck thanked the community for their outpouring of support since Mali became ill. “We are touched and very appreciative of the kind words, cards, blankets and other expressions of support.”

###

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium 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).