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## **Mad about meerkats: A birthday bash on Saturday; naming contest for babies** *Adorable critters celebrated at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium*

Tacoma, Wash. - Meerkats are getting their day in the sun this weekend. There'll be a birthday party at noon Saturday for Huxley and Carlile, two of Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium's many meerkats.

They'll explore an exhibit filled with birthday presents and receive some tasty treats.

But that's not all the fun. There are four oh-so-cute meerkat babies – called kits – in the exhibit at the Kids' Zone area of the zoo.

And staff members are seeking help from the public to name them.

There are two sets of names for which people can cast ballots:

- Finch, Theory, Beagle and Ori
- Marvin, Manny, Marie and Mae

Votes may be cast by going to the zoo's Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/PtDefianceZoo> or at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/meerkat>.

All of the names were submitted by zoo staff members.

One set is derived from the kits' mother's name, Darwin, after Charles Darwin.

Theory and Ori refer to Darwin's Theory of Evolution and his landmark work "On the Origin of the Species." Beagle comes from the name of the ship on which Darwin sailed on his scientific discovery missions; and Finch is for Darwin's finches, the birds he first collected in the Galapagos Islands.

The alliterative Marvin, Manny, Marie and Mae come from names used in the zoo's Kids' Zone exhibit. The sexes of the 5-week-old meerkat kits aren't known yet.

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium has 15 meerkats in two groupings, called "gangs." There are five in one gang and 10 in the other. They're small mammals belonging to the mongoose family.



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*Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo and 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).*