



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: APRIL 26, 2013

Contacts:

Kris Sherman, 253-404-3800; 253-226-6718 or kris.sherman@pdza.org

Whitney DalBalcon, 253-404-3637 or whitney.dalbalcon@pdza.org

STINGRAY COVE TOUCH TANK EXHIBIT OPENS MAY 4 AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM

Visitors can get close to nature in a whole new way as they put their hands on dinner-plate sized stingrays and learn about these fascinating animals in an exhibit with the ambiance of a faraway cove

TACOMA, Wash. – Stingray Cove opens May 4 at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, giving visitors the opportunity to reach into the water and touch five species of stingrays.

The exhibit brings a new level of excitement to the zoo, headlining an exciting summer season that will be filled with the wonder of animals in the water as well as on land.



Varied shapes and colors of stingrays inhabit the approximately 1,000 gallon tank, some swimming placidly in the clear water as human hands dip in to gently touch them and feel their somewhat velvety surfaces.

Others lie camouflaged in the sandy bottom, barely visible as if hiding from predators in the ocean.

Stingray Cove visitors get a firsthand feel of the yellow rays at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.

The stingrays bring squeals of delight from excited children, and oohs and ahhs from enthralled adults.

A visit to Stingray Cove is free with paid admission or membership to Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. It puts a new spotlight on the South Pacific Aquarium, which is paired with the North Pacific Aquarium to give guests the

opportunity to see hundreds of cold and warm water fish. Point Defiance is the only place in the Northwest where a zoo and an aquarium are combined.

The stingray touch pool and an adjacent glass-fronted tank are set into volcanic-like rock, providing the ambiance of a faraway cove. A four-tiered waterfall bubbles in the background, next to a lagoon filled with a variety of coral reef inhabitants.

There are five species of dinner-plate sized stingrays on exhibit, ranging from the highly colorful bluespotted maskray to the mottled yellow rays that are expert at camouflaging themselves in the sandy tank bottom.

In addition to the yellow stingrays and bluespotted maskray, visitors will see bluespotted ribbontail, Chilean round stingrays and Atlantic stingrays (also known as sabina rays).

The zoo has more than 50 rays, and some two dozen or so will be in the touch tank at any given time.

Next to the stingray pool, electric-colored blue chromis, neon yellow Oriental sweetlips, harlequin sweetlips, an emperor red snapper, clown fish, angel fish and dozens of others dart to and fro, an oceanic rainbow in motion.

But the superstars of this show are the stingrays.

And Stingray Cove differs from most exhibits in zoos, because here, visitors are encouraged to touch the animals.

Interpreters will talk about the stingrays and give visitors guidance on how to gently touch them, sliding their hands along the pectoral fins, or sides, of the rays. The rays' bodies are smooth; some might describe the sensation as feeling gel spread along a soft surface.

The rays also are mesmerizing to watch, their pectoral fins undulating like graceful, silent wings as they swim in the 75-degree water.

Aquarists keep the stingrays' barbs clipped, so there's no need for visitors to worry about being stung. The clipping doesn't hurt them; it's analogous to a human fingernail trim.

Stingray Cove is part of the zoo's South Pacific Aquarium. The 300,000-gallon ecosystem boasts the Outer Reef, Blue Hole and Lagoon habitats. Together, they are home to 17 sharks and an assortment of Crevalle Jacks, soldierfish, Clark's clownfish, pinecone fish, Dussumier, Naso and yellow tangs, a Napoleon humphead wrasse, moray eel and a host of other species.

Stingrays are cartilaginous fish related to sharks, but their bodies are vastly different in shape and size. In the South Pacific Aquarium, the sharks and rays help tell a story about the health of the world's oceans, the reasons for choosing sustainable seafoods and actions zoo guests can take to aid in the preservation of these animals in the wild.

"We're delighted to present Stingray Cove to visitors at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium," said Neil Allen, the zoo's curator of aquatic animals. "It fits our mission of helping our visitors appreciate the great diversity of the world's land and sea animals. Allowing them to touch these animals provides an even greater connection to nature.

STINGRAY COVE GRAND OPENING MAY 4



Where: Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium,
5400 N. Pearl St., Tacoma

When: Grand opening May 4; open daily
10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Cost: Stingray Cove experience is free
with admission or membership to the zoo.

Admission: Prices range from \$6.75 to
\$17, depending on age and place of
residence. Discounted tickets are
available at www.pdza.org.

More information: www.pdza.org

“We’re particularly pleased that Stingray Cove will have enormous appeal for children,” Allen said. “It’s definitely an exhibit families will want to enjoy together.”

###

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).

Photo credit: Ingrid Barrentine/Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium