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HARBOR SEAL PUP BORN AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM; MOTHER SHILA AND PUP ARE DOING WELL Another seal, Qilak, is due to give birth any day through a cooperative breeding program with Seattle Aquarium

TACOMA, Wash. – Eight-year-old Pacific harbor seal Shila gave birth at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium on Sunday to a 23-pound pup. The pup, a male, is doing well and nursing.

The new mom and pup are in an off-exhibit space in the Rocky Shores section of the zoo.



They need time to bond and nurse to gain a blubber layer so he can regulate his own temperature before they make their public debut, zoo general curator Karen Goodrowe Beck said.

It's too early to say when that might be, but it likely will be a

Shila and her newborn pup bonding with each other on Monday.

couple of weeks, she added.

When the public is able to see the new mom and pup "is just going to depend on the development of the pup and the attention of its mother," Goodrowe Beck said.

"Shila is showing wonderful maternal instincts," Goodrowe Beck said. "She's pretty calm. She's a great mom."

A second harbor seal, 9-year-old Qilak (pronounced Kee-lak), also is expecting, and her delivery could occur any day, Goodrowe Beck said.

The pups' father is Q, a 14-year-old male, who spent about 14 months at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium on a breeding loan from Seattle Aquarium. He returned to Seattle two weeks ago to be one of the stars in that aquarium's new harbor seal exhibit.

Harbor seals' gestation period is 9 to 11 months and involves delayed implantation of a fertilized egg.

The seals generally have one pup a year in the wild.

Their pups can range from 18 to 30 pounds. At 23 pounds, the new Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium pup is about 12 percent of her mother's 180-pound torpedo shape. But seen together, the pup looks about one third as big as his mom.

He's a mottled whitish-gray, with irregular-shaped black speckles covering his body.

Harbor seals' specific name is *Phoca vitulina*, meaning "sea calf" or "sea dog."

Males can grow from 150 to 375 pounds and 5 to 6 feet long; females generally weigh between 100 and 300 pounds and are 4 to 5 feet long.

In the wild, they live up to about 25 years.

Pacific harbor seals are found north of the equator in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. On the West Coast, they range from Alaska to Baja California. They live in near-shore coastal waters and frequent rocky islands, sandy beaches, mudflats, bays and estuaries.

These marine mammals are abundant in the waters of Puget Sound and other areas of Washington.

They are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

- **Boy, can they swim:** Harbor seals can dive up to 1,200 feet and remain under water for about 30 minutes while hunting, though their dives generally last only a few minutes.
- They snooze under water, too: Harbor seals can take naps on land or just below the water surface, coming up to breathe every five to 10 minutes, all without completely waking up.

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium now has five harbor seals: Blackie, 37; Louise, 36; Shila, Qilak and the new pup.

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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).

Photo: Shila and her new pup bonding behind the scenes Monday at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.

Photo credit: Jesse Michener/Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium

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