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Month-old orphaned sea otter from Alaska to live at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium



Kaladi, a month-old orphaned sea otter, is hand-raised at the Alaska SeaLife Center before heading to her new home at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in Tacoma, Wash.

Tacoma, Wash. – A one-month-old orphaned sea otter arrived at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium on Friday after being rescued near Kodiak, Alaska by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The female otter pup, Kaladi (kuh-lah-dee), will live behind the scenes at the zoo until she is mature enough to live with the zoo's three resident female sea otters in the Rocky Shores exhibit complex.

"Pups this young don't have the skills to care for themselves in the wild," said zoo deputy director John Houck. "So we're happy to provide Kaladi a home where she will be given the chance to grow and thrive with other female sea otters."

The nearly 6 lb. pup came to the zoo from the Alaska SeaLife Center in Seward, Alaska, where she has been hand-raised by veterinarians and biologists since May 18.

"Kaladi weighed less than three pounds when admitted, so she was probably under two days old," says Tim Lebling, the Alaska SeaLife Center's stranding coordinator. "Her mother may have abandoned her soon after giving birth, though we rarely know how an animal gets orphaned."

Kaladi was found by a couple walking along the shores of Mayflower Cove on Kodiak Island, where sea otters are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. They contacted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge who notified the only permanent stranding facility for marine mammals in Alaska, the Alaska SeaLife Center.

"That's exactly how it should be done," Houck said, impressed. "It can be life-threatening to these marine mammals if people approach or attempt to handle them. So staying away and following the appropriate channels is paramount to their survival."

Additionally, the Marine Mammal Protection Act makes it illegal to intervene with a stranded animal unless authorized by the appropriate authority.

Point Defiance Zoo staff will care for Kaladi around the clock for her first few weeks in Tacoma and will bring one of its resident otters, Homer, behind the scenes to live with her once she becomes accustomed to life at the zoo.

“When Kaladi is ready, we’ll bring Homer back to teach her how to live as a sea otter,” said Houck. “We’ll let them live and play together for several weeks, and then bring them both out to the exhibit pool where they will live full-time.”

For more information on Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, visit www.pdza.org or call 253-591-5337.

To report a sea otter stranding in Washington state, call 1-87-SEAOTTER.

To report a sea otter stranding in Alaska, call 1-888-774-SEAL.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest’s only Zoo & Aquarium, is located in Tacoma’s beautiful Point Defiance Park, 5400 North Pearl Street. Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium promotes responsible stewardship of the world’s resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The Zoo, a facility of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).