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ELDERLY SEA OTTER HUMANELY EUTHANIZED AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM AFTER SUDDEN ILLNESS

TACOMA, Wash. – Nellie, a 19-year-old southern sea otter who raised awareness about her species with her ability to stack a series of cups, was humanely euthanized at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium Sunday after a sudden acute illness.



Nellie gained an international following three years ago after the zoo posted a YouTube video of the agile otter using her forepaws to stack a series of colorful cups of different sizes into correct order. The video, posted on the zoo's YouTube channel, has been viewed more than 2.6 million times.

Nellie learned to stack the cups as a form of enrichment designed to provide physical activity and mental stimulation.

She was orphaned at about 2 weeks old in 1996 and arrived at Point Defiance Zoo in 2004.

Sea otters are listed as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Female sea otters typically live 15 to 20 years in the wild.

The sea otters at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium are a keystone of the zoo's educational messaging about the health of the world's oceans and actions people can take to keep pollutants out of the world's waters. The zoo celebrates Sea Otter Awareness week each year with a special event in September and participates in annual censuses to help determine sea otter population size and status in Washington state.

Three other orphaned sea otters live in the zoo's Rocky Shores area: Libby, Abra and Kaladi.

To learn more about sea otter conservation, go to www.pdza.org/sea-otter.

For more information about the zoo, go to www.pdza.org.

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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).

