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5-YEAR-OLD FEMALE SEA OTTER SEKIU ARRIVES AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM

Through a cooperative agreement with Seattle Aquarium, Sekiu will be a companion to Libby

Tacoma, Wash. – Sekiu, a Northern sea otter born at Seattle Aquarium in January 2012, made a little jaunt down I-5 Monday morning to a temporary new home at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.



Sekiu (pronounced “see-cue”) will be a companion for Libby, Point Defiance Zoo’s Southern sea otter.

Libby, who is 6, has lived in the Rocky Shores habitat at Point Defiance Zoo nearly all of her life. She came to Tacoma in late 2011 at about 7 months old from Monterey Bay Aquarium, which took her in after she was abandoned in the wild.

The two are expected to make their debut together later this week during the Grand Re-Opening of Rocky Shores, which has just undergone an extensive renovation. The \$2.7 million project was funded through a bond issue approved by Tacoma voters in 2014.

Sekiu presents her paw to a keeper during a training session at Seattle Aquarium.

Libby has been living in an area behind the scenes while the work was being done.

“It’s an exciting week for us,” said Zoo General Curator Karen Goodrowe Beck. “We are thrilled to officially open the renovated Rocky Shores area on Thursday. “But more than that, the arrival of Sekiu showcases the cooperative conservation work we undertake with Seattle Aquarium and other partners to tell the story of these endangered animals.”

“We want visitors to come to the zoo to appreciate the power and beauty of these marine mammals as they watch walrus swim, hear a California sea lion bark or see sea otters tumbling in the water,” Goodrowe Beck added. “We also want our visitors to walk away knowing there are actions we all can take to help these animals’ counterparts in the wild.”

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and Seattle Aquarium each has a robust marine mammal conservation program and participates in the Association of Zoos’ & Aquariums’ Species Survival Plan® (SSP) for sea otters. Traci Belting, curator of mammals and birds at Seattle Aquarium, coordinates the SSP. And keepers from both facilities have helped count sea otters in the field.

The charismatic mammals whose water aerobics and antics thrill so many are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and listed as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature on the IUCN Red List.

Only an estimated 125,000 sea otters remain in the wild.

It is not uncommon for sea otters to be stranded in the wild and require specialized care for a return to health. These otters, not releasable back to the ocean, become “ambassador” animals for their species in zoos and aquariums.

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and Seattle Aquarium have long legacies of caring for orphaned sea otters. Sekiu’s father was rescued after being stranded in Alaska; her mother was born to a pair of otters that found a home at Seattle Aquarium after being stranded.

For more information, visit www.pdza.org/sea-otter or www.pdza.org/rocky-shores.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest’s only combined zoo and aquarium, practices and 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).

Contacts

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

Whitney DalBalcon, 253-404-3637; 253-278-6343 or whitney.dalbalcon@pdza.org