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WE HAVE A BABY BEAVER!

Beaver kit born to mom Nutmeg and dad Walnut at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium: whole family doing great (and looking adorable).

TACOMA, Wash. – First there was Walnut, a male beaver living at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. Then came Nutmeg, a female beaver who came to Tacoma from Northwest Trek Wildlife Park as a companion for Walnut.



And now baby makes three.

Born late last month, the new kit is thriving and growing daily. Fuzzy brown, around 13 inches long and weighing just under 24 ounces, the baby beaver is a nursing champion, taking every chance it can get to nestle up to mom. He or she also eagerly explores the beaver's habitat at behind-the-scenes at the zoo's Wild Wonders

Outdoor Theater. The kit is not yet viewable by the public.

Girl or boy? No-one knows, right now. Beavers' genitalia are hidden inside, making it impossible to determine their sex just by looking. In a few weeks the veterinary team will send a blood sample for genetic testing, which will reveal the sex. At that point, the Wild Wonders staff will choose a name.

Beavers are born precocial, meaning they are a miniature version of adults, seeing well and moving independently.

It spends most of each day snuggled up with mom and dad in their maternity suite at the zoo, where Nutmeg and Walnut have been crowd favorites in the Wild Wonders Outdoor Theater live animal show. They're also popular during Close Encounters, where guests can get up-close views of various animals.



Meanwhile, the veterinary team is visiting daily, weighing the beaver kit to track growth and check on its health.

"It's doing very well," said Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium Head Veterinarian Karen Wolf.

"Since birth this kit has been an eager beaver – if you'll excuse the pun! – stomping around and looking for a nipple to nurse."

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium Head Veterinarian Dr. Karen Wolf gives the newborn beaver kit a checkup behind-the-scenes at the zoo's Wild Wonders Outdoor Theater.

A second kit also was part of the litter, but sadly, it had medical problems, and wasn't able to nurse. Keepers took shifts around the clock to bottle-feed the little one every two hours, but after a week the veterinary team made the difficult but compassionate decision to euthanize it. A necropsy revealed multiple severe internal problems that would have prevented the kit from surviving.

"It's sad, but it's a part of life," Wolf said. "We gave it our best effort, and it shows the incredible dedication of our zoo staff to care for every animal."

Nutmeg and Walnut are vigilant parents, taking turns to nudge the kit when it roams too far, and snuggling up as a threesome for much of the day.

"They're really good parents," said Maureen O'Keefe, senior staff biologist at Wild Wonders. "If Nutmeg or Walnut go for a swim outside, they'll cover the kit up with straw to keep it hidden."

Dad Walnut has also started pulling branches across to the door leading out of the den to the outdoor swimming area.

"We think he might be building a ramp for the baby," O'Keefe said. "He's never done that before now."

Beavers are nature's engineers, using their phenomenal chewing powers to alter their environment and build lodges (indoor dens) and dams. They're also very social animals, with family units living together. And, of course, they're excellent swimmers, with kits learning skills in shallow pools inside the lodge. Keepers are giving the kit supervised swimming time each day in a baby-sized pool.

Walnut, who has lived at the zoo since he was two months old, is already happy to be back at his role in the Wild Wonders show, where he walks up a ramp and into a pool to show off his swimming skills. He's appearing occasionally at the 3:30 p.m. show on weekends.



Nutmeg and baby will rest behind the scenes for a few months. Sometime this summer, all three will make an appearance during a Close Encounter, O'Keefe said.

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium is open from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays and 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays.

The beaver kit family snuggles together.

The zoo will be open from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. for the Memorial Day holiday on Monday, May 27.

The Wild Wonders Outdoor Theater presents "The Wildest Show in the West," an action-packed show featuring zookeepers and animals at 12 p.m. on weekdays, and 12 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. on weekends. Shows are free with zoo admission or membership.

For more information, 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).

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