



MALIA SOMERVILLE NAMED GENERAL CURATOR FOR POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM

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TACOMA, Wash.—Malia Somerville, a lifelong zoologist with a deep understanding and passion for animal wellbeing, is the newly named General Curator for Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.

Somerville has been with Point Defiance Zoo since 2018 as Curator of Marine Mammals and Birds and served as interim supervisor of the zoo's two aquariums for one year. In her new position, she will oversee all zoological departments and the commissary at the zoo.

Somerville succeeds Dr. Karen Goodrowe Beck, who recently retired after 21 years as General Curator at the zoo.

"Point Defiance Zoo is fortunate to have Malia represent the zoo in this critical role," the zoo's Deputy Director, Sarah Oliver, said. "Malia's collaborative management style and commitment to the care and conservation of all animals make her the perfect person for this important position."

During her tenure as Curator of Marine Mammals and Birds, Somerville served as chair of the zoo's animal wellbeing committee. In that position, she implemented event-based animal assessments, ensuring that zoo events didn't interrupt an animal's natural behaviors or comfort. She was also a member of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums' animal welfare committee. She plans to continue in both of those roles.

Other accomplishments of Somerville include coordinating the recent arrivals of several key species to Point Defiance Zoo, including two young walruses, a rescued sea lion and sea otters, and twin polar bear sisters. Seven penguin chicks and nine puffin chicks were successfully hatched under her direction.

In addition, Somerville provided crucial leadership during an inspection process that led to a five-year accreditation from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums in 2017. Point Defiance Zoo is one of only 238 zoos and aquariums in North America that meet the professional peer group's rigorous standards for superior animal care, fiscal management, and operational excellence.

In her new role, Somerville will help advance the zoo's new strategic plan and other priorities, including staff development, animal wellbeing, conservation, and state-of-the-art animal experiences.

Somerville holds a bachelor's degree in biology and psychology from William Smith College in Geneva, New York, and a master's degree in conservation biology from American University in Washington, D.C.

She began her career conducting research on the giant panda, Asian elephant, and golden lion tamarin. From those beginnings, she moved on to working with rare and exotic species at Smithsonian Institution's National Zoological Park and served as General Curator at Buffalo Zoo before arriving at Point Defiance Zoo.

Her resume also includes stints as a legislative specialist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a research assistant for the U.S Senate Committee on the Environment and Public Works, and an adjunct professor at Canisius College leading undergraduate courses about animal behavior, ecology, and conservation.

"I'm very excited about this opportunity," Somerville said. "Dr. Karen Goodrowe Beck set the stage for a bright future at the zoo," she added, pointing to the highly successful opening of the Asian Forest Sanctuary in 2004 and the management of the Dr. Holly Reed Wildlife Conservation Fund, among other projects.

Those strong foundations will leave Somerville free to put great emphasis and focus on conservation initiatives.

"It's our job to provide the best possible care to the animals at the zoo," said Somerville. "It's also important that we inspire our community to be advocates for wildlife."

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