



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Northern Elephant Seals Returning to the Ocean

Seals to Depart from San Francisco Zoo on Wednesday, June 21

JUNE 19, 2006 – The Marine Mammal Center on Wednesday, June 21 will return six young northern elephant seal pups to the ocean, four of which have been temporarily rehabilitating at the San Francisco Zoo. They will be released at Chimney Rock at Point Reyes National Seashore in Marin County. This last, important step of the rescued seals’ recovery and rehabilitation is part of a conservation partnership between the Zoo and The Center to support the return of orphaned seal pups to their ocean home.

What: Media are invited to come to the San Francisco Zoo on Wednesday, June 21 at 9:45 AM to witness a three-step process involving removing the four seal pups from the Zoo’s seal pool, weighing the pups, and loading the pups into a transportation vehicle for their trip to Point Reyes. Media are also invited to accompany the rescue vehicles out to Point Reyes to view the release. Maps to the exact release location will be provided that morning.

When: Wednesday, June 21 at 9:45 AM. The event should take up to one hour.

Where: Media are asked to come to the Service Gate Entrance of the Zoo, which is located on the Zoo’s southeast side at the end of Herbst Road.

“We’ve been monitoring these young elephant seals since their arrival at the Zoo and are pleased that they have gained the proper strength and weight they’ll need to forage and compete for food in the ocean,” said Deb Wickham, manager of animal husbandry at The Marine Mammal Center. “We are grateful to the zoo for allowing us to utilize their pool, which has really helped these young pinnipeds develop their motor skills for a quicker recovery.”

Bob Jenkins, director of animal care and conservation for the San Francisco Zoo, added, “It’s been a great pleasure to partner with The Marine Mammal Center. The seal pups seemed to thrive here, with each consuming some eight to ten pounds of fish each day. Our visitors enjoyed seeing these wonderful animals prior to their return to the ocean.”

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Young northern elephant seals rescued by The Center due to malnutrition are treated for as long as it takes to get them to the proper weight and to get them to the stage of being able to eat fish on their own. The entire process – from rescue to release – takes approximately two to three months. The four seals being released on June 21 were first at The Center, where they learned how to eat fish on their own, passed a physical exam, and then delivered to the Zoo on June 1. The Zoo provided swimming and recuperation space for the young seals, allowing them to “fatten up” to achieve the proper weight needed to survive in the wild and to continue their muscular development and motor coordination needed for prolonged swimming.

About The Marine Mammal Center

Headquartered in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in Sausalito, California, The Marine Mammal Center is a nonprofit hospital dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of ill and injured marine mammals, and to the research of their health and diseases. Since 1975, volunteers and staff have treated more than 12,000 California sea lions, elephant seals, porpoises and other marine mammals along 600 miles of California coastline stretching from Mendocino County to San Luis Obispo County. The Center uniquely combines rehabilitation with scientific discovery and education programs to advance the understanding of marine mammal health, ocean health and conservation. On the web: www.marinemammalcenter.org

About the San Francisco Zoo

The historic San Francisco Zoo is Northern California’s largest zoological park and has an annual attendance of one million visitors. Encompassing 100 acres, the Zoo is located on the Great Highway between Skyline and Sloat Boulevards, next to the Pacific Ocean. The Zoo is open daily from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., 365 days a year. For more information, you can visit our web site at www.sfzoo.org or call (415) 753-7080.

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