



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 30, 2006

CONTACT: Lora LaMarca, San Francisco Zoo
(415) 753-7081
Jim Oswald, The Marine Mammal Center
(415) 289-7341
Alexander Winslow, San Francisco Zoo
(415) 753-7174

San Francisco Zoo and The Marine Mammal Center In Unique Wildlife Conservation Initiative Orphaned Northern Elephant Seal Pups Debut Thursday, June 1

MAY 30, 2006 – In a unique partnership between the San Francisco Zoo and The Marine Mammal Center, the first of what will be several groups of rescued northern elephant seal pups arrive at the Zoo this week for the last leg of their recuperation and rehabilitation journey before returning to the open seas. The Zoo is providing the pool space while The Center continues its \$25 million construction project to upgrade its facilities into a state-of-the-art hospital for marine mammals. This project is scheduled to be completed late 2007.

Media are invited to see the first public display of the first four of these delightful and inspiring orphaned seal pups on Thursday, June 1 at 10:30 AM. The event will be held at the San Francisco Zoo's seal pool, which is the temporary home for the recovering pups.

“The San Francisco Zoo is honored and delighted to join forces with The Marine Mammal Center on this innovative wildlife conservation initiative,” declared Manuel A. Mollinedo, the Zoo's executive director and president. “We're going to help get these youngsters, whose survival once was at risk, strong and healthy enough for a successful return to the ocean. Also, the thousands of people who visit the Zoo will have a unique opportunity to learn about these magnificent animals that inhabit our coastline.”

The San Francisco Zoo will provide swimming and recuperation space for orphaned northern elephant seals that have undergone successful initial rehabilitation at The Marine Mammal Center's facility. This will allow the seals to continue their muscular development and motor coordination needed for prolonged swimming. They will also be “fattened up” with herring to achieve the proper weight needed to survive in the wild.

B.J. Griffin, executive director, The Marine Mammal Center, announced, “We are so grateful to the Zoo for lending us the pool space needed to give these elephant seals the best environment possible to

gain strength before their return to the ocean. While we are under construction, our volunteers and staff continue to rescue marine mammals such as northern elephant seals. Most of the pups we rescue are separated from their mothers prior to being weaned. Others, such as weaners who nursed for most of the lactation period, were washed away from the rookery during storms or were found on beaches along the California shoreline.”

Merrill Magowan, chairman of the board, The Marine Mammal Center, and member of the board, San Francisco Zoological Society, stated, “This is a great opportunity to combine the creativity, resources, and passion of two effective and dedicated wildlife conservation organizations. I’m honored to be involved with both of these conservation organizations. The result of this partnership will benefit the orphaned northern elephant seals as they begin the final phase of their journey.”

The orphaned seal pups are each three to six months old and weigh between 75 and 90 pounds. Each individual seal pup requires a rehabilitation regime that can last anywhere from a few days to a few weeks, depending on its progress with feeding, activity, weight, and other factors. Once it reaches a weight of 150 to 200 pounds, a pup is considered for release. When they are ready to return to the ocean, the pups likely will be released at either Point Reyes National Seashore in Marin County or Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in San Mateo County.

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.

##

NOTE: Media should come to the San Francisco Zoo’s Service Entrance Gate located off Herbst Road on the southeast side of the Zoo near Skyline Boulevard.