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Press Release

San Francisco Zoo and The Marine Mammal Center Collaborate To Help Malnourished Elephant Seal Pups Return To The Wild

Northern Elephant Seal Pups Debut at Zoo on Monday, April 9

APRIL 9, 2007/SAN FRANCISCO, CA – For the second consecutive year, the **San Francisco Zoo** and **The Marine Mammal Center** will work together in providing a temporary home for some of The Marine Mammal Center’s rehabilitated elephant seal pups before they’re returned to the ocean. Today, (April 9, 2007) the first four of what will be several groups of rescued northern elephant seal pups arrived at the Zoo for the last leg of their recuperation and rehabilitation journey.

This unique collaboration started in 2006 as a result of a shortage of pen and pool space at The Marine Mammal Center due to its renovation project. The Zoo will provide swimming and recuperation spaces for the northern elephant seals that have undergone initial rehabilitation at The Marine Mammal Center’s facility. They will remain at the Zoo for three-to-four weeks to 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. Once the first group is released, additional groups of elephant seal patients will be transferred to the Zoo in order to free up pen space at The Marine Mammal Center’s hospital for critical patients.

“The San Francisco Zoo is again delighted to work with The Marine Mammal Center on this innovative wildlife conservation initiative,” said Manuel A. Mollinedo, the Zoo’s executive director. “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 families who visit the Zoo will have a unique opportunity to learn about these magnificent animals that inhabit our coastline.”

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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.

“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,” said B.J. Griffin, executive director of The Marine Mammal Center. “While we are under construction, our volunteers and staff continue to rescue and treat marine mammals and our veterinarians and researchers continue to study marine mammal diseases to get a better understanding of the health challenges pinnipeds like elephant seals face in the ocean.

About The Marine Mammal Center

Headquartered in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in Sausalito, California, The Marine Mammal Center is a nonprofit veterinary hospital, research and educational center dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of ill and injured marine mammals – primarily elephant seals, harbor seals and California sea lions – and to the study of their health. Since 1975, The Center has accumulated a body of knowledge about marine mammal health from its patients. By educating the public about marine mammals, The Center hopes to foster ocean stewardship and conservation. The Center is supported almost entirely by public funds.

On the web: www.marinemammalcenter.org

About the San Francisco Zoo

Encompassing 100 acres, the historic San Francisco Zoo is Northern California’s largest zoological park. In June, visitors will journey to the rugged regions of North America to view the Zoo’s female grizzly bears in a new expansive habitat -- Grizzly Gulch. The 1-acre exhibit features a sunny meadow, pool, mountain stream waterfall and underwater-viewing. Located on the Great Highway between Skyline and Sloat Boulevards, across from the Pacific Ocean, the Zoo is open daily, from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. For general Zoo information visit the Web site at www.sfzoo.org or call 415.753.7080.