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EVERY FIN COUNTS

National Aquarium In Baltimore Needs Volunteers for Annual Dolphin Count

Baltimore (August 9, 2004) – For the sixth year, the National Aquarium in Baltimore will lead a dolphin count along the Maryland coast in an effort to determine the dolphin population in Maryland. Volunteers are invited to participate on August 20, 2004 from 9:00 a.m. until noon.

Annual dolphin counts provide a “snapshot” of the population and inform scientists how dolphins use their ocean habitat. The counts also provide long-term information about dolphin populations, reproduction rates and ocean health. A healthy, stable dolphin population commonly indicates that the area in which they live is also healthy.

“Tracking population numbers over the years helps determine the health of the nearshore waters as well as the abundance of prey,” says David Schofield, the Aquarium’s manager of ocean health programs. Even with bad weather, last year’s dolphin count successfully identified 119 dolphins, including neonates and young of the year, which is considered a healthy population number.

Members of the public, Aquarium staff and volunteers from the Aquarium’s Marine Animal Rescue Program and the United States Coast Guard will line the 26 miles of Maryland’s coast, searching for Atlantic bottlenose dolphins. Community volunteers counting along the Ocean City and Assateague beaches allow the Aquarium to have more counting stations and support observations taken from marine vessels and aircraft.

Scientists became especially concerned about dolphin populations when half of the estimated 1500 individuals that lived along the Atlantic seaboard died in 1987 and 1988. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries Service monitors dolphin populations and regulations surrounding them; they have determined that the Atlantic bottlenose dolphins in a depleted status.

The dolphin count is part of Ocean Awareness Days, a five-day celebration of the ocean environment in Ocean City, Md., and the Delaware Shore.

Results from the morning’s survey will be announced at 5 p.m. at Seacrets, Jamaica USA located at 48th Street, bayside, Ocean City, Md. The Aquarium will lead family activities, such as scavenger hunts, face painting, and mock dolphin rescues from 3 – 5 p.m. After 5 p.m., the 21 and up activities will begin.

Those interested in volunteering for the dolphin count should register at the Ocean Health Fair on Wednesday, August 18 at the Ocean City Convention Center.

The National Aquarium in Baltimore, a non-profit organization, is Baltimore’s leading attraction, hosting more than 1.6 million visitors per year. The Aquarium’s mission is to connect people with aquatic life in order to create a better world for both. It is dedicated to education and conservation through more than a dozen programs that serve the environment and the community.

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