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NATIONAL AQUARIUM IN BALTIMORE TO RELEASE REHABILITATED HARP SEAL

Rescue Program Celebrates 15 Years Releasing Rehabilitated Animals

Baltimore. April 4, 2006 – The National Aquarium in Baltimore’s Marine Animal Rescue Program (MARP) will release a harp seal in Ocean City on Thursday, April 6, 2006.

The seal, named Kola, stranded on Bethany Beach in Delaware on February 8. Marine Education, Research and Rehabilitation Institute volunteers initially responded to the emergency call; when it became apparent that the seal needed further attention, the Aquarium’s MARP team arranged to rehabilitate the seal in its hospital facilities.

During her rehabilitation, the Aquarium’s veterinary staff and MARP staff and volunteers provided the seal round-the-clock care as she recovered from a mild case of pneumonia and a mild gastrointestinal irritation. During her treatment, she’s gained 34 pounds and grown three inches.

Kola’s release marks the program’s 15th anniversary of its first successful release. The Aquarium’s first release of a rehabilitated animal, another seal, took place in Plymouth, Ma. on April 11, 1991.

“Each animal that comes ashore provide more insight to their species’ habitats and health. Rescue programs like MARP have provided tremendous scientific benefit over the years,” says Glenn Page, the Aquarium’s director of conservation. “We’ve learned more about whale breeding, birthing and nursery areas. We have learned the best locations for marine protected areas and the fishing industry is using the research to develop more advanced technology that reduces risks, like entanglement, to marine animals.”

Harp seals are best known for their white, fuzzy fur as pups. As they grow, they shed this fluffy fur, and grow a coat of thick cream-colored fur with black spots, shaped somewhat like harps; their faces are also black.

Kola will be the second seal ever released in the state of Maryland. She is named for a region in Russia known for its large population of harp seals. Historically seals have been flown or driven to the Northeast coast for release. As more of these animals travel to the Mid-Atlantic each winter, scientists agree that releasing them in the same region where they stranded makes sense.

The National Aquarium in Baltimore's Marine Animal Rescue Program is part of the North East Stranding Network. On average, MARP responds to between 30 – 35 strandings each year and has the capacity to care for numerous animals at once.

The National Aquarium in Baltimore, a non-profit organization, is Maryland's most exciting and popular cultural attraction, as well as one of the region's leading conservation and education resources, 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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