

JUNE 23, 2009

BABY BELUGA UPDATE

Newborn calf is doing well

VANCOUVER, BC – Marine mammal staff and volunteers at the Vancouver Aquarium continue 24-hour observation of the female beluga calf born at 3:39pm, Sunday, June 7.

The calf is doing well and continues to become more comfortable in her habitat, exploring the water with increasing energy and curiosity. She is expending some energy on independent swims and dives and is returning to her mother's side for slipstreaming (a swimming behaviour whereby the calf is partially carried along in its mother's current to conserve its own energy).

The frequency of nursing events between the calf and her mother Aurora is reaching a plateau as expected. The nursing is consistent throughout each day and shows trends in frequency particularly in the early morning hours and late afternoon hours. Aurora's food base is also increasing as she continues to take in enough food to meet the nursing needs of her calf. Aurora's calf is nursing almost equally from both mammary glands. The calf's fetal folds are beginning to fill out as she gains weight. The folds are likely to become smooth during the summer months.

The calf and her mother are with two other belugas Qila (pronounced: KEE-lah) and Tiqa (pronounced: TEE-kah). The 24-7 volunteer Beluga Observer team has seen a variety of interactions and behaviours between the calf and the three belugas in her company.

Tiqa (born June 10, 2008 at the Vancouver Aquarium) continues to be very interested in and playful with the 15 day old calf. Aurora is keeping a close eye on interactions between the two calves and is maintaining her dominance within the habitat and being protective of her calf.

Underwater viewing for the public is available and is a special experience as it provides the opportunity to observe the beluga calf in the very early days of her development. This educational opportunity provides a very rare chance to learn more about the natural development of beluga whales and their social structure, and offers the connection to our natural world crucial to understanding how people can work to conserve it.

- Underwater beluga nursery viewing will be open daily from 10am – 4:15pm.
- Groups of 30 at a time observe the belugas from two underwater perspectives.
- The experience begins with a short video of the beluga calf's birth followed by a presentation of the Aquarium's beluga family tree and tips on how to tell them apart.
- The introduction is followed by moving to the first viewing window where an Aquarium interpreter provides visitors with context on beluga behaviours. At the first window, visitors will also see the Aquarium's volunteer beluga observer team and marine mammal research staff performing their studies and capturing data to better understand beluga behaviour.
- The second viewing window is for quiet viewing and an interpreter will be there to answer questions. Flash photography is not permitted.

About the Vancouver Aquarium

The Vancouver Aquarium is a self-supporting, non-profit association dedicated to effecting the conservation of aquatic life through display and interpretation, conservation practices, education, research, and direct action. Learn more at www.vanaqua.org

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