

JUNE 12, 2009

BABY BELUGA UPDATE

Newborn calf gaining independence and getting to know Tiqa

VANCOUVER, BC – Marine mammal staff and volunteers at the Vancouver Aquarium continue to observe the female beluga calf born at 3:39pm, Sunday, June 7, 2009.

Nursing events between the calf and her mother Aurora continue to increase in frequency and duration. Today we are expecting to record 3000 seconds of nursing. Aurora's calf is now nursing almost equally from both mammary glands whereas initially she nursed preferentially from the left mammary.

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 continues to test what kind of interactions Aurora will allow her to have with the new calf," says Brian Sheehan, Marine Mammal Curator, Vancouver Aquarium. "Tiqa just turned one and we've observed her swimming beside and chasing the calf in a playful manner. Aurora is allowing the two calves to swim together, but will intervene if Tiqa is too playful with the new calf. Aurora is also teaching the calf how to swim and dive and the calf's abilities are strengthening, showing Aurora's attentiveness and care for her newborn."

The calf is becoming more active and is getting stronger. Her rate of respiration has decreased slightly as expected as the calf becomes a stronger swimmer. Aurora's appetite is expected to increase significantly at any time as she is producing milk to feed her calf.

Underwater viewing for the public 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.

Details:

- 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.

The Vancouver Aquarium continues celebrating **World Oceans Day** (June 8) by encouraging everyone to learn more about our oceans with the **Oceans Week Trivia** online contest at www.vanaqua.org . Just watch five short videos about five amazing Aquarium animals including belugas, a sea turtle, arapaima, birds of prey and jellies. Then just answer some trivia questions about what you've learned from the videos! Participants must correctly answer all questions to be eligible to win an Aquarium family membership and an amazing sea turtle encounter with Schoona.

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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