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NATIONAL AQUARIUM IN BALTIMORE BIDS FAREWELL TO SECCA THE SEAL

Marine Animal Rescue Program Releases 80th Rehabilitated Animal

Baltimore, March 3, 2008 – National Aquarium in Baltimore staff were joined by volunteers and an enthusiastic crowd on the beach at 40th street in Ocean City, Maryland to release a female harbor seal rehabilitated by the Aquarium’s Marine Animal Rescue Program (MARP).

MARP volunteers named the seal *Secca*, which means “dry” in Italian, because of her preference for lounging dry on the deck instead of getting wet in the rehabilitation pool.

Secca was found stranded on the beach in Ocean City January 2nd. She was admitted to the Aquarium’s rehabilitation program with severe emaciation and dehydration, and had an injury to a front flipper and several lacerations. Secca gained nearly 30 pounds on a diet of herring and capelin while in the Aquarium’s care, and once she recovered from her wounds, she was ready to return to her natural habitat.

“Secca thrived while in rehabilitation, and we have every reason to believe that she will have a successful reintroduction back into her natural environment,” says MARP coordinator Jennifer Dittmar, “We strive to return these stranded animals to the ocean as soon as they are ready, and to minimize contact while they are in our care, in order to avoid them coming to associate humans with food.”

This is not the last the Aquarium will see of Secca – she was fitted with a satellite tag provided by the Riverhead Foundation for Marine Research and Preservation, which will transmit information about her location and speed.

The public is invited to follow Secca’s progress by viewing a satellite map of her travels by visiting the Aquarium’s website at <http://www.aqua.org/tracksecca.html>. Information will be gathered until the adhesive fails and the tag falls off. This same tracking device was most recently used by the Aquarium to track a group of kayakers as they participated in a two-week paddle and portage down the Susquehanna from Lake Otsego, NY to the Chesapeake Bay.

Secca is the 80th animal rehabilitated and returned to their natural habitat by MARP since the program was established in 1991. MARP works with the North East Stranding Network and typically responds to 30 to 35 stranded animals every year. The animals rescued by MARP include dolphins, porpoises, whales, sea turtles, manatees and, of course, seals. Their first rehabilitated animal, also a seal, was released in Plymouth, Ma. on April 11, 1991.

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The Mid-Atlantic coast is a popular destination for migrating seals. If a beachgoer spots a stranded animal they are required by law to keep their distance, and encouraged to call the Stranding Hotline at **1-800-628-9944** to report the animal to the Maryland Natural Resource Police.

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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