



Pier 3 / 501 East Pratt Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202-3194

Contact: Jen Bloomer
410-576-3860
jbloomer@aqua.org

WE'RE EXPECTING!

THE NATIONAL AQUARIUM PREPARES FOR THE BIRTH OF AN ATLANTIC BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN CALF

Staff begins 24-hour observations on expectant dolphin during final weeks of pregnancy

Baltimore, February 22, 2010 – The National Aquarium, Baltimore is pleased to announce the pregnancy of an Atlantic bottlenose dolphin, Jade. After months of regular check-ups, ultrasounds and other health assessments, Aquarium experts estimate that Jade will give birth between mid-February and mid-March. The Aquarium's marine mammal staff and a group of 50 trained volunteers have begun 24-hour observations to monitor the expectant mother for signs of labor as she enters into this final stage of pregnancy.

The observation team is monitoring Jade around the clock for signs of labor so the marine mammal staff can prepare an ideal setting for the mother and newborn upon delivery. Initial labor signs include reduced appetite, front arch, back flex or side-to-side motions, speed swimming, excretion of milk from the mammary glands, and spiraling.

Close observations and careful preparation are important steps in ensuring the best possible outcome for the calf during its first hours of life. In both natural settings and in aquariums, dolphin calves have a high mortality rate and approximately 1/3 of all calves do not live to one year of age.

“We do everything we can to provide the right habitat conditions, nutritional needs and care for the mother and calf, but ultimately survival of the calf depends more on the mother than anything else,” commented Sue Hunter, director of animal programs at the National Aquarium. “Dolphin calves are especially fragile and depend on their mother’s care in the two to three months of life. Our staff is prepared to help if necessary.”

Upon birth, the amphitheater will close for 24-48 hours to provide undisturbed time for the mother to establish a bond with her calf. Staff will avoid moving around the calf’s pool for the first week so as not to disrupt nursing or startle the calf.

Round-the-clock observations of the mother and calf will continue for two to three weeks after the birth. The marine mammal staff has prepared a dolphin milk formula and can assist with feeding in the event the calf does not nurse from its mother.

Jade has given birth to one other calf, Foster, who is now two years old and living at the Aquarium. While raising Foster she shared nursing responsibilities with two other experienced dolphin moms. Jade is in good health, all exams have shown positive results, and Aquarium veterinarians and animal care staff are cautiously optimistic about the pregnancy.

When Jade was suspected to be pregnant, the Aquarium's marine mammal staff reduced her high-energy behaviors, began observations of her behavior, and increased veterinary exams. The veterinary staff immediately began providing special care that has included periodic ultrasounds to monitor fetal growth and health, daily vitamin supplementation and diet monitoring and blood assessments.

The National Aquarium maintains high standards for excellence in animal care, including meeting or exceeding stringent standards set by Federal agencies, and rigorous review, inspection and accreditation by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Accredited marine mammal facilities like the National Aquarium dedicate extensive resources to meeting the physiological and social requirements of animals. Animals are housed in habitats that allow them to exhibit a full range of natural behaviors, such as breeding.

The dolphin colony at the National Aquarium is thriving and very dynamic, with three generations of dolphins ranging in age from 38 years old to one year old. Seven of these dolphins were born at the National Aquarium. They receive regular check-ups and health assessments from Aquarium veterinary staff. The marine mammal trainers interact with the dolphins for some 16 hours a day and monitor behaviors that help interpret their well-being.

At the National Aquarium we are committed to education on the aquatic environment and believe that face-to-face encounters with living animals are vital experiences that help to connect the public to environmental challenges all around us. Through each of our exhibits and through our extensive science-based education programs, we teach people respect for animals, inspire them to preserve aquatic habitats, and empower them with information and opportunities they can act on. For many of our visitors their visit is their first step toward making their own commitment to conservation.

The public is encouraged to visit Waterlog, the Aquarium's blog, at www.aqua.org/blog to learn more about the dolphins, and register at aqua.org for the latest updates from the marine mammal team as they prepare for the expected birth.

###