



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Media Contacts:

Roger Germann, Sr. Director, Public Affairs
312/692-3265; rgermann@sheddaquarium.org

Melissa Kruth, Public Relations Manager
312/692-3330; mkruth@sheddaquarium.org

FIFTH BELUGA WHALE CALF BORN AT SHEDD AQUARIUM

CHICAGO - At 6:36 a.m. on Monday, Dec. 14, Shedd Aquarium's beluga whale Puiji (poo-EE-jee) successfully gave birth to a calf. Shortly after birth, the calf took its first breath, and began to swim and bond with its mother. The calf however was born breech (head first), which is rare as beluga whale calves are generally born tail (fluke) first. Over the past 24-hours, Shedd animal care and animal health experts have been closely monitoring both mom and calf.

"We are thrilled to welcome the newest member of the Shedd beluga family; however, a newborn calf must reach several milestones in its first days and months so we remain cautiously optimistic," said Ken Ramirez, senior vice president of animal collections and training. "The calf has made tremendous progress over the past 24 hours, including bonding with mom and nursing, which happened for the first time this morning. We are pleased at what we've seen and will continue to provide the very best 24-hour care over the days and months to come."

Because of the breech birth, Shedd Aquarium animal care and health staff conducted physicals last night on both mom and calf. Puiji is doing well and initial results indicate the calf is in good condition. During the physical, Shedd staff determined the calf is a male, is 5'4" in length, and weighs 162 pounds.

"While not the norm, breech births obviously can be successful," said Ramirez. "While both mom and calf continue to do well, a breech birth poses additional hurdles and we will continue to closely monitor the natural behaviors of each whale over the coming days and weeks."

In addition to the breech birth, the calf's tail is slightly curved and Shedd animal care and animal health staff will continue to closely monitor his ability to dive. "Puiji is an incredible mom and is teaching the calf how to dive, which is essential for nursing. While we will continue to watch the calf's swimming patterns, we are pleased with his diving progress," said Ramirez.

Animal care is Shedd's top priority, thus mother and calf are currently off exhibit where they will continue to receive the very best care. Along with mom and calf, the majority of the beluga whales are currently off exhibit, except for those appearing in Shedd's newest marine mammal show, *Fantasea*.

Shedd Aquarium is one of six North American aquariums and zoos committed to public display and breeding of beluga whales, and will share this vital and important knowledge with the marine mammal community. "There's still so much we are learning about marine mammal life cycles and through this amazing breech birth, we will learn even more about the reproductive health of beluga whales in order to help them in zoos and aquariums and in the wild," said Caryn Poll, DVM, Section Chief, Medicine at Shedd Aquarium.

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Naya (Ny-ah), another of Shedd's eight beluga whales, continues to progress well with her pregnancy and Shedd's animal care experts continue to monitor her.

Puiji

The 23-year-old Puiji came to Shedd Aquarium in 1989. This is the third time she has given birth. In 2006, she gave birth to Bella. Puiji, which means "those who show their noses" in Inuit, weighs about 1,500 pounds and is approximately 11 feet in length.

Naluark is father of the calf, as well as of Shedd's other beluga calves, Bella and Miki (MEE-key). Puiji gave birth to Bella in 2006, and Miki was born to Mauyauk in 2007. Bella and the newborn calf are full siblings with the same mother and father.

The John G. Shedd Aquarium, a nonprofit organization dedicated to public education and conservation, is one of the world's largest indoor aquariums. The facility houses over 32,000 aquatic animals, representing some 1,500 species of fishes, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, birds and marine mammals from waters around the world. Since its opening in 1930, the Aquarium's mission has been to enhance public understanding of aquatic life and connect guests to the natural world, inspiring them to protect and preserve the planet.

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Special Note: Photos and video of the birth are available to the media upon request. Please contact Melissa Kruth or Roger Germann for more information.

*Shedd Aquarium is supported by the people of Chicago and the State of Illinois.
Shedd Aquarium is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the
Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums.*