



News Release

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SHEDD AQUARIUM ANNOUNCES DEATH OF BELUGA WHALE

CHICAGO - Shedd Aquarium is deeply saddened to announce the loss of a beluga whale, Puiji (poo-EE-gee). The 25-year-old female whale died yesterday evening.

"This is an extremely sad day for the Shedd Aquarium family," said Ken Ramirez, executive vice president of animal care and training. "We had been monitoring Puiji for the last several months, keeping a close eye on a health issue that was being treated. We became more concerned late Tuesday, as she began to show signs of a rapid decline in health. Based on our knowledge of her behavior throughout her long life, we knew something was wrong."

Puiji's posturing and movement became erratic approximately 10 to 12 minutes before she experienced an arresting seizure. Marine mammal and veterinarian staff did everything they could, working to resuscitate Puiji for 45 minutes.

"Shedd's animal health and care staff are some of the best in the world. I'm extremely proud of the passionate, dedicated, and unrivaled care that our experts gave to Puiji, and give to each of our animals every day," said Ted A. Beattie, president and CEO.

A full necropsy (animal autopsy) was performed by Shedd's veterinarians and pathologists. According to Caryn Poll, DVM, Section Chief, Medicine, at Shedd Aquarium, preliminary findings found changes in a number of organs, including her spleen and lymph nodes that had not been evident on previous repeated health assessments.

Additional evaluations will be conducted to determine if the findings were linked to advanced age or other factors; however, as is often the case, a specific cause of death may never fully be known.

The longevity of beluga whales in the wild is unknown. In zoos and aquariums, beluga whales can live to be 25 to 30 years old. As with any species, including people, individuals may live for a longer or shorter time.

Puiji had been part of Shedd Aquarium's animal collection since 1989, before the opening of the Oceanarium. She gave birth to two calves at Shedd: Bella, in July 2006, and Nunavik in December 2009. Shedd Aquarium currently cares for six beluga whales.

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*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 and Aquariums (AZA)
and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums.*