

# NEWS RELEASE

717 General Booth Blvd. Virginia Beach, VA 23451



## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Joan Barns | 757-385-0252 | [jmbarns@VirginiaAquarium.com](mailto:jmbarns@VirginiaAquarium.com)

Images available upon request

February 24, 2011

## Spotted Eagle Rays Weigh-In with Health Physicals

(Virginia Beach, VA) – Today the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center conducted health physicals on five spotted eagle rays, (*Aetobatus narinari*) that soar above guests in the Red Sea Tunnel Aquarium. This is the first time annual physicals have been conducted since the rays were transferred to the new habitat, which is part of the ***Restless Planet*** exhibit that opened just over a year ago.

According to the 2009 American Elasmobranch Society’s “National Captive Elasmobranch Census” (includes all participants from continental United States and its territories) only seven facilities, including the Virginia Aquarium, have spotted eagle rays in their permanent collections. The Virginia Aquarium has the third- largest population of spotted eagle rays reported in that recent national census.

A team of consulting veterinarians, staff and trained volunteers participated in a highly orchestrated procedure. Each ray was corralled to the hospital tank, a holding area above the Red Sea Aquarium. When the ray was placed on a stretcher, it was then lifted from the tank and taken to the scale for weighing. Once the ray was weighed, the spine was trimmed as needed (this is like trimming fingernails on a human and doesn’t cause the ray any pain). Similar to a human’s annual physical, blood was drawn. The four female rays were given an ultrasound to determine their sexual development. Lastly, each ray was measured for its “wing” length and tail length. All this was accomplished in the course of 10 minutes per ray.

Curator of Fishes Beth Firchau said, “Since the acquisition of the six spotted eagle rays in the spring of 2008, the rays have really been prepared for this day of physicals.” Staff began conditioning the rays to come to a target held in the water to receive their food. Once they were transferred to the Red Sea Aquarium exhibit in late 2009, they have been conditioned to feed over a platform and come into the hospital tank. Additionally, the rays have regular “tactile” sessions in which aquarists work to get them accustomed to being touched to reduce stress during handling and health management sessions.

The rays were young when they arrived, so they have all gained a healthy amount of weight. Their weight range is from 41-55 lbs. Currently this collection is fed a mixture of squid, shrimp, scallop, fish filet, and herring. These rays have a high metabolic rate and they are fed according to its body weight to ensure they get the food amounts they need to grow and develop properly. They are fed twice a day by hand.

The rays measured in disc width from 38 – 45 inches. The longest tail length, from tip of body insertion to tip, was 58 inches. “The procedures went well and the rays appear to be in excellent health. It is always the Aquarium’s goal to provide the best possible environment for all of our collections,” concluded Firchau.

# # #

*The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums whose mission is conservation through education. The Aquarium is located at 717 General Booth Boulevard, just south of Rudee Inlet in Virginia Beach. For more information on exhibits, movies, boat rides and special events call (757) 385-FISH (3474), (TDD 385-4305) or visit [www.VirginiaAquarium.com](http://www.VirginiaAquarium.com).*