

NEWS RELEASE

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Virginia Aquarium Welcomes New Seal

(Virginia Beach, VA) The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center has welcomed a new juvenile male harbor seal (*Phoca vitulina*) to our home. Just over a year old, the seal was previously in rehabilitation at the National Marine Life Center (NMLC) in Buzzards Bay, MA.

This young seal was rescued a total of three times in his short life. He was initially admitted to NMLC on May 27, 2020 after a well-meaning citizen collected him out of the water. After months of rehabilitation, he was released on September 2, 2020. Sadly, he was unable to thrive on his own and was readmitted to NMLC September 12, 2020 after several interactions with humans and dogs. A few weeks later, on October 15, 2020, he was again released. After nine days of monitoring, he was discovered to have become entangled in fishing gear. The International Fund for Animal Welfare's veterinarian removed the lure in the field and cleaned and rinsed the wound. The seal was again admitted to NMLC on October 24, 2020. Since he has habituated to being around humans, and not able to thrive on his own, he has been deemed non-releasable.

On Friday, June 11, our friends at Turtles Fly Too, along with staff from the NMLC transported the seal to Norfolk, where Aquarium staff safely transported him to the Virginia Aquarium.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for a young, stranded seal to begin a new life," said William "Chip" Harshaw, Vice-President of Animal Care. "I am also hopeful that we can use his story to illustrate the importance of maintaining a safe distance from marine mammals along our beaches and shorelines."

The seal will begin in quarantine away from the Aquarium's iconic seals, Hector and Rudder. This quarantine is for the health and safety of Hector, Rudder, this seal, and our staff, and is a standard procedure when introducing a new animal to the Virginia Aquarium.

The Aquarium animal care team will also begin behavior training with our new seal. A crucial component of this training will be giving him a name. Later this week, the Aquarium will open a Naming Auction for the new seal, where participants can bid for the opportunity to name the newest member of our marine mammal family. The auction will run from June 15 through June 25, 2021.

The Aquarium team is grateful to our partners at [Marine Mammals of Maine](#), the [International Fund for Animal Welfare Marine Mammal Rescue](#), the [National Marine Life Center](#), [Turtles Fly Too](#), and their pilot Richard for helping with this transport. As the seal acclimates to the Virginia Aquarium we'll continue to share updates on his progress on our [website](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#).

If you see a seal, sea turtle, dolphin, or whale on a beach, call the Virginia Aquarium's Stranding Response Team's 24-hour hotline at (757) 385-7575. The public is reminded of the Marine Mammal Protection Act, a federal conservation law, that requires members of the public remain at least 50 feet away from marine mammals, including seals resting on our beaches. Pets should always be leashed when wild animals are near to prevent injury, reduce the likelihood of

bites, and reduce the spread of disease. Seals are wild animals that can injure or spread disease to pets and humans.

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. The Aquarium is also a member of World Association of Zoos and Aquariums. The Virginia Aquarium's mission is to inspire conservation of the marine environment through education, research and sustainable practices. It is located at 717 General Booth Boulevard, just south of Rudee Inlet in Virginia Beach.

The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, supports the work of the Virginia Aquarium. The Foundation procures and maintains the Aquarium's exhibits, including the animals and habitats. It is also responsible for annual and capital fundraising, administration and funding for the Virginia Aquarium Stranding Response Program, conservation and scientific research efforts, and the Aquarium's mission-related education programs. You can be a part of our mission: make a [tax-deductible donation](#) to support our incredible programming.

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