

PRESS RELEASE

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Elderly river otter passes away

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo is mourning the loss of Duncan, a male North American river otter who has died due to age-related issues. Duncan was just five months shy of his 22nd birthday.

The geriatric river otter had been under treatment for age-related osteoarthritis, explained Woodland Park Zoo associate veterinarian Dr. Tim Storms. "Duncan had been on a variety of medications for arthritis and had been under quality of life observation for nearly four years because of concerns with weight loss, rear limb weakness and reduced flexibility in his spine. Fortunately, he passed away quickly without any prolonged pain," said Storms.

Duncan was found as an orphaned pup in the Port Townsend area and spent time at a rehabilitation center before moving to Woodland Park Zoo in 2004.

"For more than 15 years, Duncan showed off his graceful swimming and gliding, and brought many smiles to our visitors and zoo family. Thanks to the dedication of our animal care and veterinarian teams, Duncan lived a long, enriched life. We're really going to miss this awesome otter," said Tina Mullett, an animal care manager at Woodland Park Zoo.

"Duncan was compatible with past companions and was best buds with a male companion, Ziggy. The otter keepers gave Ziggy access to Duncan after he died so he could be aware of his death," added Mullett.

Otter fans can enjoy seeing river otters in the zoo's award-winning Northern Trail exhibit. In addition to Ziggy are a female, Valkyrie, and her four offspring born this past spring.

In zoos, river otters can live 18 to 20 years due to the evolving field of zoo medicine. "We have made remarkable strides in this field including improved husbandry and management techniques, geriatric care, enhanced nutritional plans, and diagnostic and therapeutic techniques," said Storms. In the wild, river otters live eight to 10 years.

In part to address the longer life expectancies for many animal species, Woodland Park Zoo has a formal process to evaluate quality of life daily, sometimes multiple times daily, over the course of weeks or months once there is a specific concern identified for an individual's health or well-being. Specific symptoms and indicators of health are monitored and quantified, so that improvement or decline can be measured.

As a standard procedure, the zoo's animal health team performed a necropsy (an animal autopsy) and will share the results nationally among scientific colleagues to help advance the understanding of medical issues in otters.

North American river otters are semi-aquatic members of the Mustelid family, which includes weasels. Their habitat ranges over most of North America in coastal areas, estuaries, freshwater lakes, streams and rivers; they can be found in water systems all over Washington state. River otters consume a wide variety of prey such as fish, crayfish, amphibians and birds. At the top of the food chain, river otters are an excellent reflection of the health of local ecosystems.

All otter species are considered threatened while five of the 13 species are endangered due to water pollution, overfishing of commercial stock and habitat destruction. The community can help contribute to important research on river otters and other terrestrial mammals by



reporting sightings, interactions and vocalizations using the web-based tool, **Carnivore Spotter**: www.zoo.org/carnivorespotter.

For more information about Woodland Park Zoo, visit www.zoo.org or call 206.548.2500.

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