



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Joan Barns Virginia Aquarium | 757.385.0252 | jmbarns@VirginiaAquarium.com

Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center Exhibits

(Virginia Beach, Va., 2009) - The Virginia Aquarium has over 800,000 gallons of aquariums and more than 300 interactive scientific and technical exhibits. Following are descriptions of some of the Aquarium's most popular exhibits. For more information, please visit www.virginiaaquarium.com.

North American River Otters

The Virginia Aquarium has five male river otters: Cash, Rudee, Pungo, Willoughby, and Tippy. The first four came to live at the Aquarium in 1996 when they were approximately one year old; Tippy joined the group in 2008. Like their wild counterparts, the Aquarium's otters are very playful and spend a lot of time swimming, wrestling with each other and enjoying the toys and enrichment programs provided by the Aquarium's staff. But also like their wild cousins, the Aquarium's otters like to lounge about and sleep often. The boys are fed a daily diet of fish, chicken and mice along with snack of vegetables, fruit, shellfish, minnows, crickets and hardboiled eggs. The otters are located in the Marsh Pavilion.

River otters are the largest members of the weasel family, and range throughout the United States and Canada. They are typically found in streams, rivers, lakes, estuaries and salt and freshwater marshes. When hunting and playing they can swim at speeds up to 7 mph, but normally move slower utilizing their speed in short bursts. River otters can dive up to 60 feet and stay underwater six to eight minutes. The average lifespan for a North American river otter is approximately 10 years.

Sting Ray Touch Pool

The Aquarium's stingray habitat is one of the most popular exhibits in the Bay & Ocean Pavilion. Every day, Aquarium visitors flock to this touch pool for a chance to touch some of these graceful creatures. It is not unusual to find some rays rising to the surface to find a hand to rub against.

The Aquarium's rays are fed twice a day. In the morning they are hand-fed by an aquarist who gets in the water with the animals. A lighter snack is distributed in the afternoon from the side of the pool. Both feedings offer guests a chance to learn more about these amazing animals and ask questions to the aquarists.

The Aquarium's collection includes cownose rays (*Rhinoptera bonasus*), Southern stingrays (*Dasyatis americana*) and roughtail rays (*Dasyatis centroura*).

Harbor Seals

The Aquarium has five male harbor seals named Peter, Piper, Pongo, Norton and Hector. All are brothers except Hector, the latest addition to our harbor seal family. The five brothers were born at the Mystic Aquarium in Mystic, Connecticut. In the fall of 1996, they moved to our Aquarium at the ages of six to 11 years. Hector came from Sea World Orlando in Florida. The boys are fed twice a day, at which time the mammal care staff utilizes behavioral training activities. This training allows the seals to learn through positive reinforcement, which enables staff to give them routine medical care and to move them on and off exhibit.

Other activities, such as interaction with guests during the Harbor Seal Splash program or ice blocks with treats frozen inside, provide enrichment for the animals. Each of the Aquarium's seals has his own personality, along with likes and dislikes, which make them all unique.

Harbor seals are marine mammals and classified as pinnipeds, which means fin-footed. Males average five to six feet in length and can weigh over 300 pounds. As mammals, they breathe air, but have the ability to hold their breath for almost a half hour and dive over 500 feet deep. Their streamlined bodies help them move gracefully through the water, reaching speeds up to 12 mph. While they have no feet, they can move surprisingly fast on land using an inchworm-like movement. The typical lifespan for seals is 15 to 30 years.

Norfolk Canyon Shark Aquarium

The Aquarium has five sand tiger sharks in its Norfolk Canyon Aquarium. They co-exist with nurse and brown sharks, as well as other fish and rays. The individual sharks are identified by unique physical characteristics, such as the number of notches on their dorsal fin. Weighing in at just over 200 pounds and measuring 8 feet long, the largest of the Aquarium's sharks is a female named Double Notch.

Sand tiger sharks are found throughout the world's temperate oceans. In the North Atlantic region they can be found from the Gulf of Maine to Florida and into the Gulf of Mexico. They are often found in shallow, sandy waters but can be found at depths over 600 feet as well.

Light Tower Sea Turtle Aquarium

The loggerhead sea turtles (*Caretta caretta*) at the Aquarium can be found in the Light Tower Aquarium, which simulates an area off the Virginia coast surrounding the Chesapeake Bay Light

Tower. They share their aquarium habitat with fish and two other sea turtle species, the Kemp's ridley and the green turtle.

The loggerheads are fed individually and their diet is supplemented with multivitamins. The largest turtle in the Aquarium is Camden, a loggerhead weighing just over 250 pounds with a shell three feet long.

Two Kemp's ridley turtles, the most endangered turtle species, share the Light Tower Aquarium with the loggerheads.

#