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New Exhibition Strives to Save Seadragons

Birch Aquarium's newest venture will feature one of the largest seadragon habitats in the world.

La Jolla, Calif. (Nov. 16, 2018)—Next summer Birch Aquarium at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, UC San Diego is launching a new permanent exhibition that brings seadragon conservation to the forefront. The exhibition, which has yet to be named, will be home to Weedy and Leafy Seadragons, as well as several species of seahorses and pipefish.

The centerpiece of the exhibition will be one of the most expansive seadragon habitats in the world. The 18-foot-wide, 9-foot-tall exhibit will hold 5,375 gallons of water — that's 70 bathtubs! More than being a stunning display, the habitat has been designed to create the ideal environment to breed Leafy Seadragons, something that has never been done in captivity before.

"We have had great success propagating seahorses for more than 20 years, but Leafy Seadragons have never been bred in an aquarium environment," said Jennifer Nero Moffatt, the aquarium's senior director of animal care, science and conservation.

"The life history of seadragons is somewhat similar to their seahorse relatives, but a lot is still being learned," Moffatt continued. "Seadragons in courtship can be seen mirroring one another, nodding and nudging one another and gracefully swimming to the surface where egg transfer can occur. We have designed an environment that allows for the depth, the exercise, the social and behavioral requirements we feel will promote the best possibility of a successful egg transfer."

From an expanded seahorse nursery to a hands-on camouflage experience for young learners, and a sneak peek into the behind-the-scenes Seadragon Lab, the exhibition will immerse aquarium guests into the underwater lives of seahorses and seadragons, while giving them a peek into the work Birch Aquarium's world-class Husbandry Team is doing to ensure that these species survive into the future.

The husbandry of these species is increasingly vital due to the impacts of climate change, warming oceans, and illegal collection of wild populations, whose numbers are still widely unknown. Joining our partners in the [Association of Zoos and Aquariums \(AZA\)](#), Birch Aquarium's seahorse and seadragon conservation efforts are part of the Species Survival Plan (SSP), a cooperatively managed program that

oversees the population management of select species within AZA member institutions and enhances conservation of species in the wild. Each SSP Program coordinates the individual activities of participating member institutions through a variety of species conservation, research, husbandry, management, and educational initiatives.

“Investment in the protection, conservation and breeding of critical species is essential for their survival. We are thrilled to be able to support these beautiful and charismatic fish,” said Moffatt. “They are ambassadors for the oceans and help to communicate to our guests the need for protection and conservation programs, like ours.”

This exhibition is made possible by generous donations from our community. Additional opportunities to support this groundbreaking exhibition are still available. Those interested in giving may contact Katarina Trojnar at ktrojnar@ucsd.edu or (858) 534-1966.

Slated to open shortly before Memorial Day, the new seadragon exhibition will replace The *Infinity Cube* installation, as well as *There’s Something About Seahorses*, which opened in 2009. It will be the fourth major exhibition Birch Aquarium has opened in three years and the largest indoor aquarium addition since the grand opening in 1992.

Additional details will be announced soon. Once open, the seadragon exhibition will be included in the cost of Birch Aquarium admission, which is \$19.50 for adults, \$15 for children (3-17). [Annual memberships are also available](#). For more information, [visit aquarium.ucsd.edu](http://visit.aquarium.ucsd.edu).

About Birch Aquarium at Scripps

Birch Aquarium at Scripps is the public exploration center for the world-renowned Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego. Perched on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the aquarium features more than 60 habitats of fishes and invertebrates from the cold waters of the Pacific Northwest to the tropical waters of Mexico and the western Pacific. An interactive museum showcases research discoveries by Scripps scientists on climate, earth and ocean science, and features interactive elements. Accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, Birch Aquarium has an annual attendance of more than 470,000, including 50,000 school children.

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