



AQUARIUM
OF THE **PACIFIC**®
A non-profit institution

Contact: Marilyn Padilla / Adrian Samora / Claire Atkinson
Aquarium of the Pacific
(562) 951-1684 / (562) 951-3197 / (562) 951-1678
mpadilla@lbaop.org / asamora@lbaop.org / catkinson@lbaop.org
Digital Images Available Upon Request

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AQUARIUM OF THE PACIFIC TEACHES PUBLIC ABOUT CURRENT CONSERVATION ISSUES WITH WORLD'S LARGEST AND SMALLEST WHALES

Endangered blue whales in SoCal and critically endangered vaquita whales of Mexico are the focus of Aquarium's whale programs this summer

July 9, 2015, Long Beach, California—The largest animal to ever have lived on Earth, the blue whale is massive in size and visits the waters off California each year to feed. The vaquita, which is found only in the northernmost portion of the Gulf of California in Mexico, is the smallest whale. Both of these whales are endangered; about 2,000 blue whales are estimated to live in the Southern California region, and the vaquita population is down to fewer than 100. Experts believe that the vaquita could become extinct in about two years. The Aquarium is launching a campaign to educate the public about the conservation issues surrounding these whales. The campaign officially begins on International Save the Vaquita Day, July 11, 2015.

During this campaign the Aquarium will highlight the critically endangered vaquita on all of its daily blue whale cruises. On July 11 Aquarium visitors will learn more about the vaquita during all animal and dive shows. On August 13 the Aquarium will host a panel of experts to discuss the vaquita and ways to protect the species. And at the Aquarium's annual Baja Splash Cultural Festival on September 26 and 27 presentations will be made in both English and Spanish about the plight of the vaquita and what people can do to help, and the Aquarium will also debut the newly updated *Whales: Voices of the Sea* exhibit kiosk with stories and interviews with vaquita experts. The exhibit features the 'songs' of various whale species, including the blue whale and vaquita, delving deeper into how the whales communicate and how they live.

"Engaging the public in learning more about these endangered species is key to helping to protect these animals' future," said Dr. Debborah Luke, senior vice president of conservation and science at the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), through which the Aquarium of the Pacific is accredited. "Through the recent launch of AZA SAFE: Saving Animals From Extinction, an initiative that combines the conservation science and research, expertise, and public engagement of all 229 AZA-accredited aquariums and zoos, we are focusing our efforts on protecting species in the wild. The vaquita has been selected as one of AZA SAFE's ten inaugural species, and we are committed to efforts ensuring its protection. We encourage guests at the Aquarium of the Pacific to take the opportunity to engage in these activities offered by the Aquarium and join us in helping to ensure these animals don't disappear forever."

Harbor Breeze Cruises and the Aquarium have begun the blue whale watch season with trips offered daily at noon and 3:30 p.m. out of Long Beach. Trips are also now offered out of San Pedro. These whale watch trips give guests a chance to witness the largest animal on Earth in its natural habitat. They also help Aquarium staff members conduct the blue whale photo ID program and teach the public about the vaquita whale. To find out more about the Aquarium's whale watching in partnership with Harbor Breeze Cruises, visit aquariumofpacific.org.

The nonprofit Aquarium of the Pacific is dedicated to environmental education. Its vision is to create a sustainable future for nature and its resources by building relationships between and among people. The

Aquarium is home to over 11,000 animals in more than fifty exhibits. It is located at 100 Aquarium Way, Long Beach, CA 90802. For more information call 562-590-3100 or visit aquariumofpacific.org.

Harbor Breeze Cruises has been providing public whale watching, world port, and charter cruises for over twenty years in the Los Angeles and Orange County areas. Their experienced captains provide comprehensive narration about the characteristics of each cruise. The double-deck sightseeing vessels are U.S. Coast Guard-inspected, certified safe, and are complete with seating, snack bar, restrooms, salon, and plenty of outside viewing room for everyone. For more information, visit <http://www.2seewhales.com/>.

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