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First Baby Zebra Sharks Born From Artificial Insemination Debut at the Aquarium of the Pacific on Tuesday, January 27

The Aquarium breeds a large shark species through artificial insemination

January 26, 2015, Long Beach, CA—The Aquarium of the Pacific is announcing that it is the first to be able to successfully reproduce zebra sharks through artificial insemination. More than 100 million sharks in the wild are killed annually due to human impact. Being able to artificially inseminate large shark species like the zebra shark can further research in helping dwindling shark populations in the wild. The 10-month-old sharks are slated to go on exhibit in the Aquarium's Shark Lagoon on Tuesday, January 27. Fern, approximately 20 years old, is the mother of the two female sharks.

Fern arrived to the Aquarium in 1997. She was inseminated in September 2013, and both babies hatched from their eggs in late March of 2014. The Aquarium's experts have been caring for the youngsters in their behind-the-scenes shark nursery. The zebra shark pups are now about 2-and-a-half to 3 feet long and are now ready to be introduced in the shallow pools in Shark Lagoon. The public will be able to see these special sharks when the aquarium opens at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday.

The 140-pound and 7-and-a-half-foot long mother zebra shark can be seen swimming in the Aquarium's Shark Lagoon exhibit with other large sharks. Aquarium experts have been working with Fern, who is trained to come to the surface for food as well as to voluntarily participate in her own medical exams.

Zebra sharks, often called leopard sharks in Australia, are found in the Indo-West Pacific. This includes the Red Sea, East Africa, New Caledonia, Japan, Australia, and Tonga. This species of shark prefers inshore marine or brackish water. They grow to be 5.5 to 11.5 feet in length and are 9 feet long on average. These sharks are nocturnal foragers, feeding on snails and bivalves, crabs, shrimp, and small bony fishes.

Young juveniles are dark brown or black with narrow pale yellow or white vertical bars resembling a zebra's stripes. When they begin to develop their adult features, the juvenile shark's bars fade, becoming dots or open circular designs no longer resembling a zebra. These sharks reach maturity when they are about 5 to 6 feet in length. Pups normally hatch in about five-and-a-half to six-and-a-half months and are only about 7.9 to 10 inches when they emerge from their egg cases. Once hatched, they are immediately independent, able to swim and hunt on their own.

Zebra sharks can live about twenty-five to thirty years, but face many threats in the wild. This species is listed as vulnerable to extinction under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List mainly because of human activities. Overfishing poses a big threat, as these sharks are sold for human consumption or fish meal. Livers are processed for vitamins, and there is a large market for their fins. In Australia, where zebra sharks are not a target species for fishing, their population for that region is listed under IUCN Red's List as Least Concern.



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