

Monterey Bay Aquarium Sea Otter Gidget Has Died

Popular Member of Sea Otter Exhibit, Behind-the-Scenes Surrogate Mother, Face of Sea Otter Genome

The Monterey Bay Aquarium is deeply saddened to announce the death of Gidget, a 10-year-old female sea otter who was a popular member of the sea otter exhibit and surrogacy program. Her DNA was also used to sequence the sea otter genome.

Gidget had chronic health problems because of osteoarthritis in her hips. Her condition declined precipitously in the past week, and efforts by the aquarium's veterinary and animal care teams were unable to alter the course of her illness. She passed Sunday evening while being kept behind the scenes for treatment.

A necropsy - the veterinary version of an autopsy - is planned to learn more about the precise cause of her death.

"Gidget touched millions of people with her beauty, charm, and an exuberance of mischief," said aquarium veterinarian Dr. Mike Murray. "She is an example of why we do what we do, for the animals in our care and for their wild kin."

Gidget was found stranded on Morro Strand State Beach in San Luis Obispo County in October 2008 as a 10-week-old pup. She was rescued by volunteers from The Marine Mammal Center and a California Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist, and taken to the aquarium for care.

Gidget was declared non-releasable by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and was transferred to the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, California, where she was raised as part of its sea otter exhibit. On January 21, 2013, she came back to the Monterey Bay Aquarium to join the sea otter exhibit and to serve as a surrogate mother for other rescued otter pups. She reared four rescued pups until she was retired from those duties for health reasons.

Gidget's blood sample was used by researchers at UCLA to sequence the [sea otter genome](#) for the first time.

"Gidget is going to be a reference point for future genetic studies of southern sea otters for years to come," said Annabel Beichman, who is leading the initiative at UCLA's Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology.

Mapping the genome will contribute to recovery of California's threatened sea otter population. In that way, she says, "Gidget's contributing to the conservation of her entire species."

The Monterey Bay Aquarium's [Sea Otter Program](#) has been researching and advancing the recovery of the threatened southern sea otter since 1984. To date, the aquarium has rescued over 800 ill and injured otters and returned many back to the wild. The surrogate program continues to raise and release stranded pups, and places non-releasable animals on exhibit in Monterey and at other accredited aquariums across North America.

About the Monterey Bay Aquarium

With a mission to inspire conservation of the ocean, the Monterey Bay Aquarium is the most admired aquarium in the United States, a leader in science education, and a voice for ocean conservation through comprehensive programs in marine science and public policy. Everything we do works in concert to protect the future of our blue planet. More information at montereybayaquarium.org.