

## **World's First Freshwater Porpoise Is Born In Captivity**

**The world's first-ever captive Yangtze finless porpoise and freshwater cetacean was born in China's Wuhan Baiji Conservation Aquarium. Following a long and uncertain labour, the young male weighing 6kg and measuring 70cm in length, finally emerged and took his first swim around his new 460m<sup>3</sup> nursery pool.**

Wuhan, July 7, 2005 – Just before midnight on July 5th 2005, the world's first-ever captive Yangtze finless porpoise and freshwater cetacean was born in China's Wuhan Baiji Conservation Aquarium. After 11 months of waiting and nail-biting uncertainty the first hour of the calf's life proved to be the most testing for aquarium staff.

Celebrations had to be put on hold as the calf struggled to swim properly and lost his balance on several occasions, often crashing into the side of the pool. His reportedly distressed mother swam frantically around the aquarium, avoiding him and giving rise to fears that she would not cope well with her new responsibility. Finally, after showing severe signs of exhaustion, staff stepped in and removed him from the rearing pool. The young male was comforted and fed with bottled milk until he regained his strength and could be safely returned to his mother.

Nine hours later onlookers breathed a sigh of relief as the mother began to steadily swim alongside and nurse her calf tenderly. The calf's father - who is separated from the nursery pool by a small metal gate - interestingly lost his appetite shortly after the birth. He now spends the majority of his days waiting at the gate, completely transfixed by the new arrival. The proud female regularly takes the calf to visit his father at the barrier and in a touching act of devotion - the male chews the fish he has saved from feeding time into tiny pieces and spits them across the bars to his son.

The long awaited birth of this Yangtze Finless Porpoise calf gives great hope to the scientists trying to save this endangered Red Listed species from extinction. The population of this unique freshwater porpoise has been rapidly declining for the last 20 years and faces an increasingly uncertain future as China's booming economy continues to place unsustainable pressure on its fragile Yangtze River habitat.

With reports of less than 2700 individuals left and no significant signs of halting the decline in the wild, Chinese scientists believe that the aquarium's small captive breeding population will play an increasingly important role in the recovery of this species.

Until now the thought of a successful aquarium-based breeding programme has been nothing more than a pipe dream. Unlike their marine cousins, freshwater dolphins and porpoises are notoriously difficult to keep in captivity due to their shy natures and ultra specific habitat requirements.

However, the Wuhan Institute of Hydrobiology (IHB) captive breeding project - which is the result of a long-term partnership between the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture, IHB and Japanese Enoshima Aquarium - appears to have finally discovered the secret formulae for raising freshwater cetaceans. Scientists hope the new arrival will improve their knowledge of the reproduction of this threatened species and attract new funding to help improve this captive breeding project.

Two months on, the young male is growing fast and enjoying a healthy and active life in the aquarium. Mother and baby once inseparable, are establishing a new relationship as the calf is becoming bolder, and learning additional life skills from the other young female with whom he shares the nursery pool. It is hoped that one day he will mate with this young female and like his parents play an active role in the success of the captive breeding program.

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