



Cincinnati Zoo Sending Manatees Home

CINCINNATI, OH (October 15, 2009) - The Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden's two Florida manatee residents, 1,400-pound "Slip" and 2,000-pound "Lil' Joe" will make the 774-mile journey to Tampa, Florida and move one step closer to the wild. Both manatees are scheduled to depart Cincinnati this Saturday, October 17 and will be transported via DHL Express to Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo, where they will be monitored before release into the wild.

Slip and Lil' Joe will depart Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport on a DHL Express flight around Noon on Saturday and are scheduled to arrive in Tampa, Florida around 2:00 p.m. Seated in the aircraft's jump seats, Cincinnati Zoo Director of Animal Health Dr. Mark Campbell and Cincinnati Zoo Manatee Keeper Chris Edelen, will escort the manatees on the Boeing 767F aircraft.

Slip and Lil' Joe are veterans of air travel via DHL – the manatees were transported via DHL Express from San Diego, California to the Cincinnati Zoo in 2005. The manatees will ride in two separate specially-designed marine mammal containers, which are open at the top to allow Dr. Campbell and Edelen access during the two-hour flight. The container will not be full of water, but the Zoo staff will spray Slip and Lil' Joe with water every 10 minutes to keep their skin wet and will monitor the manatees' breathing and body temperature. The temperature inside the aircraft will be maintained at a constant 75 degrees to ensure the manatees' comfort.

"DHL is honored to play a role in rescuing these endangered animals and in their return to the wild," said Joe Collopy, Director of Air Capacity Sales for DHL. "The DHL team has reviewed every detail of the transport to ensure that Slip and Lil' Joe receive VIP treatment all the way home."

When the manatees arrive at Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo, they will undergo several months of pre-release conditioning at the David A. Straz Jr. Manatee Hospital. Staff will monitor both animals and begin the training process which will enable these two long-time captives to be released. Part of this training will be to get the animals accustomed to aquatic plants that they will be feeding on in the Florida waters. The exact release dates will be determined once the manatees reach their ideal weight and have been given a clean bill of health.

Slip is scheduled to be released first late this winter or early spring in Blue Springs State Park, near where he was born at SeaWorld Orlando. He lived at SeaWorld parks until August 2005 when he moved to the Cincinnati Zoo.

Lil' Joe will eventually be released following his evaluation after the pre-release conditioning. Lil' Joe was an orphan rescued from the Halifax River in 1989 near Daytona Beach, Florida. He lived at the Sea World parks for 16 years until he moved to the Cincinnati Zoo in August 2005.

The Zoo's manatee program will be on hold for the next five months when U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) will select more manatees to return to the Cincinnati Zoo next spring. During the anticipated five-month hiatus, the Zoo will make the most of the opportunity by upgrading the manatee tank and the mechanical systems at Manatee Springs.

"Without a doubt, manatees are one of the most charismatic creatures and certainly one of the Zoo's most popular animals," said Thane Maynard, Director of the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden. "We are extremely proud to be part of this conservation program since 1999 and excited to bring manatees back to the Zoo next spring."

The Cincinnati Zoo is one of only three facilities outside of Florida to participate in the USFWS Manatee Rescue, Rehabilitation and Release Program. This program began in 1973 with the mission of rescuing and rehabilitating distressed and injured Florida manatees. The fundamental purpose of the program is to release these rehabilitated manatees back into their wild habitat. Since the Cincinnati Zoo opened Manatee Springs in 1999, five manatees have been released back into the wild.

Douglas was released into the Biscayne Bay near Miami, Florida in March 2004. Stoneman and Dundee were both released in Blue Springs, Florida in February 2006. Rodeo was released in April 2006 in Merritt Island, Florida and last February 2008, Hurricane was released in Blue Springs, Florida.

Manatees can live up to 60 years of age. However, human activities throughout the years have accounted for about one-third of the known manatee deaths each year. Collisions with boats comprise the greatest threat. Most adult manatees bear permanent scars from boat propeller strikes. In January of 2009, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) reported a preliminary count of 3,807 manatees statewide. This aerial survey is the highest population count since 1991. Unfortunately, the number of known mortalities continues to increase.

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The world famous Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden was rated the #1 attraction locally and one of the top zoos in the nation by Zagat Survey. It was recognized by Parents Magazine as #7 on the "Top 10 Best Zoos for Kids." It has also been recognized by Child Magazine as one of "The 10 Best Zoos for Kids." Over one million people visit the Zoo's award-winning exhibits, and more than 500 animal and 3000 plant species annually. The Zoo is an accredited member of the American Zoo & Aquarium Association (AZA) and the American Public Gardens Association (APGA), is internationally known for its success in the protection and propagation of endangered animals and plants, and engages in research and conservation projects worldwide.