



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Birmingham Zoo's California Sea Lions to Join New England Aquarium** Permanent Closure of the Sea Lion Habitat

**BIRMINGHAM, AL** – The Birmingham Zoo has made the difficult decision to rehome California sea lions, Farley and Giovanni (Gio), who will move to the New England Aquarium in Boston, Massachusetts later this spring, in cooperation with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) California Sea Lion Species Survival Plan (SSP). This move will be a part of the permanent closure of the Zoo's Sea Lion Habitat.

Born in 2008, Farley and Gio joined the Birmingham Zoo family through a recommendation by the California Sea Lion SSP after their rescue by the Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito, California in 2009. The Birmingham Zoo joins other zoos and aquariums around the world in participating in SSP programs that manage animal populations in zoos and related facilities, including providing standards for care, health and wellbeing.

Farley and Gio have been staff and visitor favorites, winning the smiles of everyone who comes to see them, just as the sea lions before them have for almost 50 years. "While we are very sad to see them go, we are excited about this great opportunity for them," explains Mollye Nardi, Birmingham Zoo's General Curator.

Built in 1974 through generous donations from Parisian Stores and the Alabama Zoological Society, the California sea lion habitat is no longer in keeping with zoological best practices and is in need of significant repairs. "Renovations to this habitat are not feasible and the only option would be to build a new facility which cannot happen soon enough to address the current issues," explains Hollie Colahan, Birmingham Zoo Deputy Director.

"Our amazing staff cares deeply for these animals and has been dedicated to providing them with excellent care despite the many challenges posed by their outdated habitat," added Scott Kayser, Zoological Manager of Predators.

Sea lions are social animals and live in colonies in the wild. The AZA-accredited New England Aquarium has a larger habitat and their own resident sea lions.

"When we reached out to the California Sea Lion SSP to place Gio and Farley, we hoped that they could stay together and go to a top-quality facility," Colahan says.

“We are thrilled that both of these requests were met, and they will be housed with other sea lions and cared for by an experienced team at another AZA-accredited facility.”

She adds that “sea lions are a favorite of guests and staff. Sending them away is a difficult decision for us but we believe that every animal in the zoo deserves the best life possible, even when that life is somewhere else.”

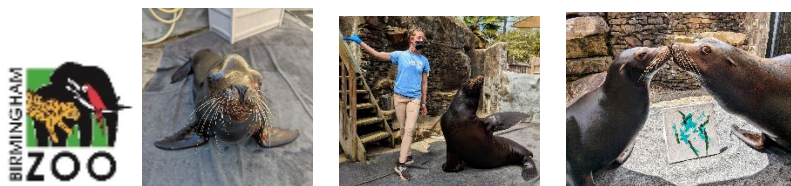
Farley and Gio will be joining three female California sea lions at the New England Aquarium: 12-year-olds Sierra and Zoey and 10-year-old Tipper, all rescued animals who could not be released and were given a forever home in the New Balance Foundation Marine Mammal Center.

“We are very excited for the addition of a male sea lion and an additional female sea lion. Farley and Gio are at the perfect age to socialize with our resident sea lions, and we feel that this will not only be very enriching for all five of the animals but also align with our goal of providing the highest level of animal welfare for the animals in our care,” said Kristen Van Oss, Curator of Pinnipeds and Penguins at the New England Aquarium. “It has been a pleasure collaborating with the team at the Birmingham Zoo and utilizing our experiences to set up for a safe transition and acclimation of the animals from their facility to ours.”

Birmingham Zoo Staff are working very closely with the New England Aquarium to ensure a smooth and successful transition for Gio and Farley. The Zoo will also be announcing plans for a “sea lion send-off” that will provide the Birmingham community an opportunity to say goodbye with details in the coming weeks.

The Birmingham Zoo does not have any current plans to build a new sea lion habitat.

## **ZOO LOGO, PHOTOS OF CALIFORNIA SEA LIONS – Gio and Farley**



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## **ABOUT THE BIRMINGHAM ZOO**

The Birmingham Zoo is an independent, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) organization and is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

**OUR MISSION** *Inspiring Passion to Conserve the Natural World*

Approximately 500 animals of 172 species call the Birmingham Zoo home, including sea lions, zebras, elephants, bongos, and endangered species from six continents. The Birmingham Zoo is the only AZA-accredited zoo in the state of Alabama.

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