

CANADA

Birth of baby beluga makes waves

Calf healthy, but aquarium keeping watch

BY DAVID KARP

VANCOUVER

Looking relaxed throughout her 13-hour birthing ordeal, Aurora the beluga finally delivered the Vancouver Aquarium's newest resident on Sunday afternoon.

Experts believe the 1½-metre calf, who has yet to be named, is a female. It's the fourth to be born at the Vancouver Aquarium, the third to Aurora. The birth comes three days shy of the first birthday of Tiqa, Aurora's granddaughter. Aurora is approximately 21 years old.

The birth started 2:30 a.m. with the first fluids being expelled, said aquarium veterinarian Dr. Martin Haulena. At about 11 a.m., Aurora's mucus plug, which helps keep the calf inside, gushed out. The calf's tail poked out at 12:40 p.m., which started a series of contractions until the baby arrived amid a cloud of blood.

"This birth was really textbook. You couldn't really hope for a better birth," said Vancouver Aquarium senior vice-president of operations Clint Wright. "(Aurora) looked to be extremely relaxed throughout the whole thing."

Aurora spent the rest of her afternoon helping guide her



ANDY CLARK, REUTERS

Aurora and her newborn female calf, which was born Sunday afternoon at the Vancouver Aquarium. Aurora, a roughly 21-year-old beluga, gave birth to the as-yet-unnamed calf after 13 hours of labour.

calf around as it became oriented to its new home.

"Calves are really inquisitive right from the get-go," Wright said. "You can see the calf is kind of bumping up against her mother. It's amazing what a strong bond they develop in such a short time."

Aurora's calf appears to be healthy. However, the mortality rate for beluga calves is estimated at 40 to 50 per cent, so staff will be keeping a close eye on the calf. Aurora's only son, Tuvaq, died just before his third birthday in 2005.

"There can be congenital problems passed down — we hope that isn't the case. The calf has to stay strong, so we'll be watching to see how much energy the calf uses," Wright said.

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CLINT WRIGHT
Senior VP of operations,
Vancouver Aquarium

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