

News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CABRILLO MARINE AQUARIUM RELEASES CRITICALLY ENDANGERED GIANT SEA BASS

San Pedro, CA -- In an unprecedented effort to boost a critically endangered species, Cabrillo Marine Aquarium released 180 baby giant sea bass into Santa Monica Bay this week.

Once plentiful along the Southern California coast, only 500 giant sea bass remain in local waters today. Fully grown, giant sea bass can reach the size of a Volkswagen Beetle and weigh more than 550 pounds. They are said to be as endangered as the Black Rhino.

While a few giant sea bass babies have been hatched and kept in captivity, never before have hundreds of them been kept alive and released into the ocean. Cabrillo Marine Aquarium, a facility of the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, collaborated with the Aquarium of the Pacific, Southern California Marine Institute and California State University Northridge on this first-of-its-kind conservation project.

Dr. Andres Carrillo, curator of Cabrillo Marine Aquarium's Aquatic Nursery, began the process of hatching and rearing the baby giant sea bass in the summer of 2019. Together, the team of Aquarists, volunteers and researchers worked tirelessly to develop unique live foods and nutrition plans, health management procedures, and larval rearing techniques. This care and dedication resulted in successfully raising more than 400 baby giant sea bass. As the baby giant sea bass grew from tiny specks to the size of a credit card, Cabrillo Marine Aquarium scrambled to find room for the brood, eventually buying temporary tanks and sharing about half of the orange-and brown-spotted fish with the Aquarium of the Pacific. Cabrillo Marine Aquarium's dive team, led by Chief Aquarist Jeff Landesman, spent many weeks preparing and planning with the Aquarium of the Pacific and Gray Owl Biological Consulting for a successful release.

"Dr. Andres Carrillo, Chief Aquarist Jeff Landesman, and their teams put incredible effort into this initiative and their efforts were well rewarded by this successful release," said Cabrillo Marine Aquarium Executive Director Crislyn McKerron, who witnessed the release. As a protective measure, the release site is being kept secret.

The Aquarium's SCUBA dive team lowered the baby giant sea bass into the water in a specially designed receiver. Divers opened the cage and released the baby giant sea bass onto the soft bottom of the nursery site. Most of the baby giant sea bass swam away from the divers in various directions, behaving appropriately; while a few remained in the proximity of Cabrillo Marine Aquarium divers. At one point, one of the team divers observed a newly released baby giant sea bass feeding on shrimp, making it clear the release was successful.

The following day, Mike Couffer, of Gray Owl Biological Consulting, who was also part of the release, surveyed the release site via SCUBA and discovered approximately 15 baby giant sea bass within the general vicinity of the release site. "All of the fish were behaving normally and seemed healthy," he said.

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