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Detroit Zoological Society, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium Collaborate to Provide Two Twin Polar Bear Cubs a New Home

Astra and Laerke, who have called the Detroit Zoo home since 2020, will move to Point Defiance Zoo this spring

ROYAL OAK, Mich. / TACOMA, Wash. (May 16, 2023) – The [Detroit Zoological Society](#) (DZS) and the [Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium](#) announced today that two [polar bear](#) cubs, Astra and Laerke, will move to Point Defiance Zoo in spring 2023. The transfer is being conducted per recommendations by [Association of Zoos and Aquariums](#) (AZA) polar bear population experts.

As with all recommendations, zoos collaborate to ensure the best possible outcomes for the animals. These recommendations support the sustainability of a healthy, genetically diverse and demographically varied polar bear population, as evidenced by one of the program’s main objectives – introducing vulnerable species of animals in hopes of mating.

Sisters Astra and Laerke were born on Nov. 17, 2020, to mother Suka and father Nuka. Just two days after her birth, however, Laerke suffered a medical emergency – separating her from her sister and leaving her weak and in need of constant, intricate lifesaving care from the DZS’s animal care staff.

The cubs were apart for more than two years before reuniting in spring 2023 at the Detroit Zoo’s [Arctic Ring of Life](#) habitat – and since then, they [have been inseparable](#), spending many days at the Zoo playing and roaming around the Arctic Ring of Life. At more than two years old, Astra and Laerke are at an age when they would be living on their own in the wild, away from their mother – so this move is natural and necessary for their continued development.

“We are saddened Laerke and Astra will be leaving us, but the Detroit Zoo is so proud to have played a role that influenced how these two cubs grew up,” said Betsie Meister, associate curator of mammals for the DZS. “With that said, we know they are going to a great home at Point Defiance Zoo, another outstanding, AZA-accredited facility, and we are confident they will thrive in their new environment.”

“Astra and Laerke are high-energy, playful bears who each have an incredible story,” added Malia Somerville, interim general curator for Point Defiance Zoo. “Our animal care and veterinary teams have decades of experience caring for polar bears, and we are looking forward to introducing the sisters to our community here in Tacoma – where we will help them grow in their new home.”

Point Defiance Zoo has been a home to polar bears for more than 80 years and, along with the Detroit Zoo, is certified by Polar Bears International as an Arctic Ambassador Center. [Blizzard, Point Defiance Zoo’s last remaining polar bear](#), was diagnosed with liver cancer and humanely euthanized in May 2022. Since then, the zoo has been preparing and making improvements to the habitat to accommodate new polar bear residents.

“We know Astra and Laerke will be warmly welcomed to Point Defiance Zoo,” Somerville said. “Our guests, staff and volunteers have been eager to see polar bears return, as they have always inspired our community to take action in their own lives to reduce their carbon footprint and help protect polar bears in the wild. Polar bears need sea ice to survive, but the seasonal ice they depend on is shrinking due to climate warming.”

Polar bears are listed as threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s Species Survival Commission has designated the species as facing a high risk of global extinction.

About the Detroit Zoological Society

The Detroit Zoological Society – a renowned leader in humane education, wildlife conservation, animal welfare and environmental sustainability – operates the Detroit Zoo and Belle Isle Nature Center. One of Michigan’s largest paid family attractions, the Detroit Zoo in Royal Oak hosts more than 1.3 million visitors annually. Its 125 acres of award-winning naturalistic habitats are home to more than 2,000 animals representing more than 200 species. The Belle Isle Nature Center sits on a 5-acre site on Belle Isle State Park in Detroit. For hours, prices, directions and other information, call (248) 541-5717 or visit detroitzoo.org.

About the Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium is the Pacific Northwest’s only combined zoo and aquarium. Established in 1905, the 29-acre zoological park in Tacoma, Wash. sits within 700-acre Point Defiance Park, offering spectacular views of Mount Rainier, the Olympic Mountains and Puget Sound. The zoo is nationally accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and envisions a future where all people in our communities are engaged in the care and protection of nature.