



BELUGA WHALE SANCTUARY UPDATE: Little Grey and Little White take first swim in their new sanctuary home

28th September 2020: The SEA LIFE Trust is pleased to confirm that the two beluga whales, Little Grey and Little White, have taken their first swim in their open water sanctuary home in Iceland.

Carefully monitored by the whales' expert care team, Little Grey and Little White were released for the first time to fully explore the natural surroundings of the wider sanctuary at Klettsvik Bay on Heimaey, one of the Westman Islands off the south coast of Iceland.

The whales have been making good progress since moving to their bayside care pools in August and Little Grey and Little White's first swim out in the wider bay is part of a carefully managed welfare programme to help introduce the whales gradually into their much larger sanctuary home.

Led by their expert care team, the 'Little Steps' programme will see the whales continue to be introduced to the bay (which is approximately 32,000 sqm with a depth of up to 10m – which is equivalent of the size of 117 tennis courts) and return to the sea sanctuary care pools over a short period of time while their health and well-being is assessed and monitored on a daily basis.

Andy Bool, Head of SEA LIFE Trust, said: *"We're absolutely thrilled by the progress that Little Grey and Little White have made since moving to their bayside care pools. They are feeding and acclimatising well to the more natural surroundings as well as all of the outdoor elements. We are introducing them gradually to the bay in little steps, but seeing them swim together and deep dive amongst the flora and fauna of the wider bay for the first time was amazing to witness and gave us a real sense that Little Grey and Little White are enjoying being back in the sea."*

The Beluga Whale Sanctuary, operated by charity the SEA LIFE Trust, is the first of its kind and was built with the support of a generous donation from Merlin Entertainments.

Created in partnership with Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC), the *SEA LIFE TRUST Beluga Whale Sanctuary* is one of the biggest developments in captive whale and dolphin care and protection in decades and the first of its kind to be created for cetaceans.

Cathy Williamson, WDC's End Captivity programme lead said; *"We're delighted that Little Grey and Little White are now exploring the wider bay and adapting well to their new, natural, stimulating environment. WDC has been on this journey with Merlin Entertainments and the SEA LIFE Trust from the beginning and we are truly honoured to be a partner to the world's first whale sanctuary. As well as providing an exciting home for*

Little Grey and Little White, we look forward to welcoming other belugas here and encouraging the development of sanctuaries in other parts of the world.”

Williamson continues: *“We hope this will mean that many of the more than 3,500 whales and dolphins held in captivity for shows and swim with attractions can be brought to sanctuaries to live more natural lives or be rehabilitated for a return to the wild. As the documentary will reveal, many people have worked very hard to make the sanctuary a reality and take the first bold steps to helping bring about an end to the keeping of whales and dolphins in captivity for human entertainment.”*

Little Grey and Little White’s amazing journey back to the ocean will be told as part of a new two-part feature length documentary to be shown on ITV this October over consecutive nights, showing the complexities and dedication around the world-first project with comedian and animal lover John Bishop an integral part of the two-year mission.

For more information about the *SEA LIFE TRUST Beluga Whale Sanctuary* or to make a donation, visit www.sealifetrust.org.

For further information please contact at Andrew Boocock at Stripe Communications on 07855795403 or email: belugasanctuary@stripecommunications.com

About SEA LIFE TRUST

SEA LIFE TRUST is a registered charity (no. 1175859) working globally to protect the world’s oceans and the amazing marine life that lives within them. Our vision is of a world where our seas are healthy, protected and full of diverse life. We own and operate marine wildlife sanctuaries, run inspiring conservation campaigns and fund projects and education programmes that champion the need for plastic-free oceans, sustainable fishing, effective Marine Protected Areas and an end to over-exploitation of marine life. www.sealifetrust.org

About Merlin Entertainments

Merlin Entertainments is a global leader in location-based, family entertainment. As Europe's Number 1 and the world's second-largest visitor attraction operator, Merlin now operates over 130 attractions, 20 hotels and 6 holiday villages in 25 countries and across 4 continents. Merlin’s purpose is to deliver memorable experiences to its 67 million guests around the world, through its iconic brands and multiple attraction formats, and the commitment and passion of its c.28,000 employees (peak season). www.merlinentertainments.biz

About WDC

WDC, Whale and Dolphin Conservation is the leading charity dedicated to the protection of whales and dolphins, working globally through campaigns, lobbying, advising governments, conservation projects, field research, rescue, education and much more. WDC operates through offices in the UK, North America, Germany and Australia. Our vision is a world where every whale and dolphin is safe and free. www.whales.org

Plimsoll Productions – making the documentary

Plimsoll Productions creates and produces non-scripted content from its offices in Bristol, Cardiff and Los Angeles. The creative team has produced many hits and won Baftas, Emmys and RTS awards. In little more than five years, the company has secured orders for more than 50 series, working for clients in the US, UK and Canada. Completed shows and formats are sold all over the world: Plimsoll controls distribution after acquiring a significant stake in Magnify Media. The company is now one of the fastest growing UK indies and already one of the largest: it's currently listed as 3rd in the annual Broadcast survey of true indies. We believe that diversity of talent, thought and experience are key elements of the creative process and we aim to promote equality, respect and inclusiveness across the company.

<http://www.plimsollproductions.com/>

