

Formal Presentation Abstracts

BABY BOOM AT THE DOLPHINARUM OF THE BOUDEWIJNPARK

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In the summer of 98, three dolphin calves were born in the Brugge dolphinarium within a six-weeks period. Restructuration of the social group was done in preparation of the event, among which the transfer of the dominant male to another facility. The maternity pool was again protected with a removable net in order to prevent the calves from hurting the walls and being injured in the first days of their lives. The mothers were trained to be separated from each other and enter the protected pool alone. This training was necessary since a dominant pregnant dolphin had killed another dolphin's calf the previous year, trying to steal it, while both mothers were in the back pool. This year, the 18-months-old calf of that same dominant female had to be trained to be separated from her mother, as we didn't want her with a possible three calves in the back pool. Most difficult had been to predict the respective birthing dates, through regular, and every other day at the end, ultrasound check-ups of the foetus, to know which animal had to be brought first at the back to prevent the same kind of accident to happen again. This complex situation has been a continuous challenge for all the team and of course an unforgettable experience from which a lot was learned again.

BUBBLE NET: A UNIQUE SOLUTION TO UNIQUE SITUATIONS

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The following scenario is a common one experienced by many in our profession: a stimulus is given and then refused. Eventually, after numerous time-outs, the animal or trainer gives in and quite often the outcome is an unwanted response or the behavior is flatly ignored. Recently, at Dolphin Quest, we experienced this with our population of *Tursiops truncatus* and *Steno bredanensis* within our three facilities. Allowing our populations of babies, juveniles and adults of mixed gender full interactive time to themselves in our main lagoons can sometimes cause social extremes, which frequently lead to the loss of behavioral control and attention. In addition, our natural lagoon environments hinder us from the standard barrier (netting) practices - which can also have dangerous, even fatal consequences. There was a need for a behavioral tool that would provide a safe and effective stimulus to assist in behavior modification, but with the highest margin of safety. We believed that utilizing compressed air, driven through a 3/8" inch hose and released through tiny openings, would create a curtain of air bubbles simulating a solid object. Initial trials have shown the apparatus to be a successful stimulus in redirecting unwanted, even dominant, behavior. Moreover, in our facilities where interactive sessions are performed in open ocean lagoon, the bubble net has shown promise in possibly replacing the need for permanent barriers, which may take away from the pristine natural surroundings. This poster will demonstrate the applications of the bubble net and what may be possible in the future.