



Berlin, 13 July 2018

Press release

Puppy love

Zoo Berlin welcomes two adorable baby seals

At 7 a.m. on Monday morning, Zoo Berlin department head Norbert Zahmel begins his daily inspection of the seal habitat, cheerily greeting its glossy inhabitants and performing a head count: five, six, seven... Hang on, what's that? An eighth pair of shiny black eyes is staring back at him this morning! It soon becomes clear that harbour seal Shiva (23) gave birth to a pup during the night. On Thursday morning, the same routine – and yet another pair of big dark eyes greet Norbert. This time Molly (13) is the proud mother.

Where there were seven just a few days before, now there are nine! Zoo Berlin is home to an impressive extended family of harbour seals. *Pater familias* Leopold (21) already sired two pups last year. His sons Gregor and Herbert are still part of the group, which also includes females Lara (18) and Yohanna (1).

Harbour seals have a gestation period of up to eleven months. Pups are born with the same smooth fur as the adults and can swim almost from birth. Unlike California sea lions, which suckle for at least a year, harbour seal pups wean early – at the age of around two months. “Seal pups are much more vulnerable to attack on sand banks than they are in the water, so they have to grow up quickly,” explains Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem. “If visitors want to see the pups while they still look like babies, they will need to come by the Zoo very soon. Before too long, the newborn seals will be almost indistinguishable from their parents.”

In the wild, these delightful aquatic mammals are found all over the northern hemisphere – on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts as well as in the North Sea and the Baltic. However, they are very rare on these northern European coasts. Numbers have recovered since the commercial hunting of harbour seals was banned worldwide, but the harbour seal is still a threatened species in Germany.