



Seal Training and Feeding Demonstration

How to Use This Document

The following text is similar to what a presenter will say during a public demonstration. You may follow along, but please note that the exact wording and sequence will vary depending on staff and animal activity. Feel free to ask the presenter questions after the program. Thank you for joining us today!

Pre-Demonstration Announcement

Hello! In a few minutes, Animal Care staff will begin a training session with the seals. If you would like to watch, please find a place in the stadium or at the front of the pool. If you decide to watch from the stadium, please stay back from the railing or remain seated. That will ensure other guests have a good view and keep staff safe as they walk near the railing. The demonstration will start shortly and will last five to ten minutes. If you have any questions before we begin, please let me know.

Introduction

Welcome to Kovler Seal Pool at Lincoln Park Zoo! My name is _____, and I'm with the Learning Team. The training session beginning now demonstrates our commitment to care. Keepers will be standing on flat rocks in the habitat working with the seals. There are two types of seals that

live here at Kovler Seal Pool: harbor seals and grey seals.



Harbor Seal



Gray Seal

The harbor seals are the smaller of the two types of seals. They have short noses and darker colored bodies that are covered in white spots. The grey seals are the larger of the two types of seals. They have longer noses and lighter colored bodies. Each seal is voluntarily taking part in their own care by participating in training today!

Benefits

Training makes all sorts of care tasks easier, from brushing a seal's teeth to giving them medicine. Today the keepers will ask the seals to do several things related to different care tasks, even if they don't do the task itself. For instance, they ask the seals to hold their mouth open at almost every training session, but they only need to brush their teeth a few times a week. Daily training is like

practicing for the real thing, and it makes the real task familiar and comfortable. Keepers can also touch the seals lightly or hold objects up to them, giving them sensations that are similar to what they might experience during a wellness exam with a veterinarian. That kind of training allows the seals to take part in veterinary exams willingly.

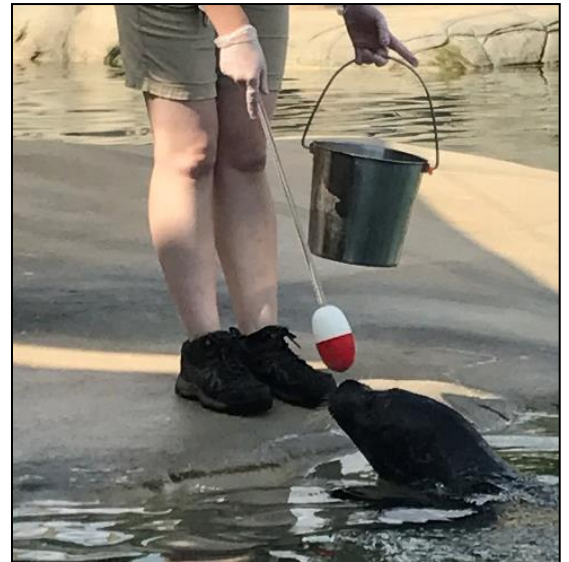
Other behaviors may not be connected to a particular care task, but they're still beneficial. They help the seals and the keepers build a relationship and become familiar with each other. That way, the keepers notice right away if anything is unusual in a seal's appearance or behavior. Training also provides variety and novelty. That keeps the seals healthy through mental stimulation and physical exercise. For enhanced variety, no two training sessions are ever exactly alike, and the seals learn new behaviors all the time.

Training Method

I've described why we do training, so now let's talk about how we do it. Training at Lincoln Park Zoo involves four "r's": **r**request, **r**esponse, **r**eward, and **r**epeat.

First, the keepers **request** a certain behavior. A request is different from a command. It's important for animals to have choice, and the seals are free to choose whether or not to do each behavior—or whether to take part in

training at all! We use the word *request* because the keepers are asking for behaviors, not demanding them. They can give the request with a hand signal or a spoken signal. You might notice the handheld poles with



colored shapes at the end. Those are called target poles, and they are another way to give requests.

After the request, the seals **respond** by doing whatever was requested. When they see the target pole, for example, they respond by touching it with their nose.

Since training is always voluntary, sometimes the seals choose not to respond. That's fine! Or they might respond in a way that doesn't match the request. In either case, the keepers make the request again or simply move on to a different request.

But more often than not, the seals respond with the behavior that was requested. That earns them a **reward**.

The silver buckets carried by the keepers are filled with

food: three kinds of fish (herring, mackerel, and capelin) as well as squid and sometimes pieces of gelatin.

All the food is part of their veterinarian-approved diet. Food is a great motivator for seals, just like it is for dogs,

cats, and other familiar animals. You might notice the keepers blowing a whistle right before they offer the food. The whistle is called a "bridge," because it bridges the short time between a correct response and receiving food.



That helps them know exactly which behavior is being rewarded.

The last step—**repeat**—is important. The keepers can't talk to the seals and tell them what each request means. But the seals learn which response to give if they keep getting rewarded for it. Repetition is what makes that learning possible.

Behaviors You Might Observe

Target follow: Keepers use their target pole to ask seals to follow them around the habitat. They can even use it to ask the seals to lift themselves out of the water.



Move on land or in water: You might see the seals bending, turning, rolling, or even lifting themselves out of the water. This lets the keepers

check the seals' mobility and make sure they're free of injuries.

Hold out flipper: As I described earlier, seals have nails at the ends of their flippers that need to be trimmed, just like ours. Keepers practice touching their flippers and using nail clippers so the seals feel comfortable with the process whenever it happens.

Open mouth: Seals may get their teeth brushed and mouth checked during these training sessions, just like going to the dentist.



Blow bubbles: Keepers may ask a seal to blow bubbles. Seals breathe air just like other mammals, and blowing bubbles allows the keepers to check that their nasal passages are clear and their respiration is normal. Seals can hold their breath for up to 30 minutes. They rarely

stay submerged for that long; on average, they go six to eight minutes between breaths.

Reduce Single-Use

Training helps Animal Care staff keep seals healthy at Lincoln Park Zoo. We can all keep seals in the ocean healthy by using less single-use plastic. Single-use plastic items are things that you throw away after using them just once, like plastic bags or water bottles. These items can eventually make their way into rivers, lakes, and the ocean. Once there, they can harm seals and other wildlife. Reusable items, like cloth bags and refillable water bottles, show your commitment to caring for our natural resources.

Conclusion

Now that the session is over, we encourage you to spend some time watching the seals swim. There is an underwater viewing area below the stadium where you can continue to watch them. I hope you've enjoyed learning about the high quality of care that Lincoln Park Zoo

provides animals. Once again, my name is _____, and I'm with the Learning team. Please find me if you have any questions. Thanks for being here! Your support helps us conserve wildlife.