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HAPPY BIRTHDAY SURPRISE! MOOSE CALF BORN AT NORTHWEST TREK WILDLIFE PARK

Female moose named in honor of wildlife park's cofounder delivers the best gift ever



EATONVILLE, Wash. – Happy Birthday, indeed!

A female moose named to honor one of Northwest Trek Wildlife Park's founders gave birth to an apparently healthy calf sometime late Friday or early Saturday.

Keepers spotted the mother and newborn, long legs still wobbling, Saturday morning in the wildlife park's 435-acre Free-Roaming Area.

They observed the calf during the day, and it appeared to be healthy, Northwest Trek Deputy Director Alan Varsik said. However, they did not get close enough to determine its gender.

Northwest Trek opened on July 17, 1975, so Friday was the wildlife park's 40th birthday. The moose calf's arrival comes in the midst of a three-day celebration of Northwest Trek's history, its place in the community and its stature as a leader in the presentation and conservation of native Northwest animals.

This is the first moose calf born at Northwest Trek in 15 years.

Mother Connie and father Ellis are both 3 years old. The wildlife park has one other female moose.

Connie moose was named in honor of Northwest Trek cofounder Connie Hellyer. She and her husband, David T. "Doc" Hellyer, long dreamed that their forest-and-lake studded land in the shadow of Mount Rainier would one day be a wildlife park. They donated 507 acres to Metro Parks Tacoma in the early 1970s for that purpose.

Keepers knew there was a possibility that Connie moose might be pregnant, but the huge ungulates wander the

marshes and forests of the large Free-Roaming Area at will, and staff members had been unable to confirm a pregnancy. The gestation period for moose is 240 days.

“The birth of a moose calf at any time is cause for rejoicing,” Varsik said. “The delivery during the celebration of Northwest Trek’s 40th birthday celebration is all the more special.”

The story of all three adult moose at Northwest Trek is a very happy tale to tell – and a rescue success story that involved wildlife officials in three states.

Connie and Ellis came to Northwest Trek in the summer of 2012 from Idaho. They were calves then, and each had been orphaned. A hunter found the male abandoned in an Idaho stream, dehydrated and malnourished. The female was discovered beneath a house in Idaho, her mother nowhere to be found.

Northwest Trek took the fragile animals in, and keepers nursed them to health, patiently bottle feeding them until they were ready for solid food. A third calf, orphaned in Alaska, also came to Northwest Trek that summer.

The male was named Ellis to posthumously honor longtime wildlife park Deputy Director Dave Ellis, who died unexpectedly that summer. The other female was named Nancy to honor Ellis’ widow.

Ellis and Nancy grew quickly and were released into the Free-Roaming Area in April 2013. At the time, he weighed about 600 pounds. She weighed about 500 pounds.

Connie, however, needed a bit more care. She remained in a special habitat in the central area of the wildlife park for months until she gained additional strength.

Once wildlife park officials determine the gender of the newborn calf, there will be discussion about what to name it, Varsik said.

Moose are herbivores that munch on twigs, roots, woody stems, branches and leaves. When fully grown, an adult moose can weigh well over 1,000 pounds.

Visitors should be on the lookout for them from the wildlife park’s 50-minute tram tour, which winds through tall stands of trees and along meadows that are home to bison, Roosevelt elk, woodland caribou, big horn sheep, mountain goats, deer and other animals. The tour is narrated by naturalists, who are experts at spotting and pointing out animals to tram riders.

Northwest Trek is open from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.

For more information, go to www.nwtrek.org.

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Northwest Trek, accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, is a 725-acre zoological park dedicated to conservation, education and recreation by displaying, interpreting and researching native Northwest wildlife and their natural habitats. The wildlife park, a facility of Metro Parks Tacoma, is celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2015. It’s located 35 miles southeast of Tacoma off State Highway 161.