

Corky

Corky is the longest surviving cetacean in captivity. She has been trapped in a concrete pen for nearly four decades.

Corky is a female orca (killer whale) held at San Diego's Sea World facility and the longest surviving orca in captivity, currently in her 38th year of imprisonment. WDCS is calling for her to be returned to her family in the wild ocean!

She was captured on 11th December 1969, when she was about four years old. From photos taken at the capture scene and from knowledge about the composition and behaviour of orca families, researchers have been able to work out which group of whales is Corky's family and, most importantly, who her mother was. Corky has sisters and cousins that she has never met. Corky has spent more than 30 years in captivity. Until 1987, she was held at Marineland Palos Verdes, near Los Angeles and was then transferred to Sea World, San Diego, where she is now. This year marks the 37th anniversary of Corky's capture and imprisonment in captivity for the entertainment industry.

In 1969, Corky's world suddenly changed. Concrete walls replaced the cliffs, rocks, sand, and caves of the vast and almost limitless ocean. Suddenly, the four walls of her tank represented the new boundary of her world. There were no longer any passageways, nooks and crannies to explore. Choices were limited. Gone were the familiar sounds of the sea. Instead, there was the constant drone of filtration pumps, and, when any of the whales called, their sounds reverberated off the barren walls. There were no waves, no currents, no fish to chase and hunt, no porpoises to play with - everything had changed forever.

Life in Captivity

At about 11 years of age, Corky began to mature sexually. On 28th February 1977, Corky delivered her first calf, a male. This was the first live orca to be born in captivity. Orky, Corky's cousin and also the father of all her calves, helped the calf to the surface after the difficult birth. The situation grew tense when the calf failed to nurse. The staff intervened, drained



Corky is by far the longest surviving orca in captivity. For 38 years she has been held in a concrete pen, forced to play parlour tricks for paying audiences.

the pool, and force fed the calf several times a day. Despite these efforts, the calf continued to lose weight, and eventually died of pneumonia. He lived for just 16 days. Corky has now been pregnant seven times. The longest any of her babies lived was 46 days. Finally, at the youthful age of 21, Corky stopped ovulating.

In the wild, Corky would have been considered

“The longest any of her babies lived was 46 days”

young at 35 years old. She would probably have at least a couple of calves by now and several more reproductive years ahead of her. A female orca in the wild might look forward to about 25 reproductive years and have perhaps four to six offspring.

In December, 1986, 17 years after Corky's arrival, Marineland and its surrounding lands were purchased by Sea World's corporate owner, the U.S. publisher Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, for a rumoured \$23 million. Corky was then transferred to Sea World in San Diego where she became Sea World's main performer, "Shamu".

Shamu is the Sea World trade name for its orcas. The name is passed from performer to performer. Corky's physical condition has fluctuated over the years. At one point, Sea World listed her condition as "poor", perhaps because her kidneys were not functioning well. Her lower teeth are worn and she is almost blind in one eye. Sea World considered Corky

as an "old" animal and tells visitors that orcas only live to about 35 years. They used to say 30 years.

For a while, Sea World even decreased the number of shows Corky did, but now she is back doing a full schedule. When she is not performing, Corky is held in one of the back pools with seven other orcas. She spends most of her time simply circling her tank. During her time in captivity, Corky has experienced some social difficulties, most notably with an Icelandic orca named Kandu V who appeared to be jealous of Corky. There had been a lot of tension, on and off, between the two females. Then, in August 1989, just as their public show was beginning, Kandu rushed out from the back pool and charged at Corky. In the attack, Kandu fractured her jaw, a bone fragment severed an artery and she bled to death. No one had ever seen or heard of an orca attacking another orca before. Kandu's son, Orkid, was just one year old at the time and, in an odd twist of fate, Corky became his surrogate mother.

Life in the Wild

Back in the wild, Corky's family lives on. The pod once had 18 members but six were removed in another capture in 1968. These six are now all dead. Of the six taken in 1969, only Corky survives. Slowly, over the years, as their fortunes have waxed and waned, the wild pod has been rejuvenated. In 1999, A5 consisted of 13 members, which is about the same number as in 1969. Currently, the A5 pod now consists of 9 orcas. The group still loves to hunt the big spring salmon and they still continue to travel the waters of Johnstone Strait, Blackfish Sound and the rest of the Inside



Corky's "stage name" is Shamu; the name is trademarked and passed on through successive performers.

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Passage. But they have never been seen near Pender Harbour since the orca captures that occurred there in 1969. It seems that orcas, like elephants, have long memories.

Corky still remembers her family. She visibly shook and vocalised poignantly when a tape recording of her family’s calls were played to her in 1993. Corky still ‘speaks’ the same dialect as her family, the so-called A5 pod.

Corky deserves to be free!

How you can help!

1. Tell your friends about Corky and about other whales and dolphins in captivity. Ask them not to visit dolphinariums when they are on holiday.
2. If you have photos of any dolphinariums, send them to WDCS so we can maintain our up-to-date database. If you are aware of plans to develop a dolphinarium anywhere in the world, alert WDCS.
3. Become a member of WDCS or adopt an orca. Your support helps WDCS continue its valuable work.
4. Write a polite letter to August Busch III of Anheuser-Busch, owners of Sea World and brewers of Budweiser beer. Ask Mr Busch to implement a plan of action that will set Corky on the road to freedom. The message is simple:

“Please give Corky a great gift... the chance of a new free life with her relatives back in her ocean home.”

Send to:

Mr August Busch
CEO Anheuser Busch 1,
Busch Place,
St Louis, MO 63118, USA
Fax: + 1 314 577 2900
E-mail: budmaster@budweiser.com

Thank you for supporting the WDCS Free Corky



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The Sea World captive facility in San Diego, Corky’s world for the past 21 years. Imagine what it must be like for an intelligent creature to be trapped in such a small, featureless space for so long.

Campaign. Please see our accompanying campaign factsheets. In them you will find information on:

- **The Corky Story - Background information about Corky and her plight in captivity.**
- **Orca’s in Captivity – Information about the captivity industry and its effect on whales and dolphins.**
- **Orca’s in the Wild – Learn more about how orca’s live in their natural environment.**
- **What you can do to help with the campaign and help support WDCS - Why not get your friends and family to join one of our many fundraising activities and help ensure a better future for whales and dolphins like Corky?**
- **Information about how you join WDCS or participate in other WDCS activities. With your support, we can help ensure that not only Corky but all whales and dolphins have the chance for a better future. On behalf of the staff at WDCS, Corky and the other whales and dolphins which will benefit from your support, a very big thank you.**