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**NEWS
RELEASE**

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El Paso Zoo and Botanical Gardens Mourns Loss of Beloved Sea Lion

EL PASO, Texas— The El Paso Zoo and Botanical Gardens is heartbroken to share the loss of our cherished California sea lion, Little Bit, or “L.B.” He passed away on Sunday at the age of 25 after a period of declining health.

For nearly two weeks, our dedicated zookeepers observed unusual behavior in L.B., including signs of discomfort and a severely diminished appetite. Despite the best efforts of our veterinary team, who provided oral medications and symptomatic care, L.B.’s condition continued to deteriorate.

A necropsy revealed a significant, fluid-filled mass the size of a cantaloupe on his right shoulder and neck, along with ulcers in his stomach. While the precise cause of death may be determined once histopathology results are finalized in about eight weeks, veterinarians suspect he may have suffered from heart or kidney disease—both common in elderly sea lions but not always detectable.

“L.B. was more than just an animal in our care; he was a beloved member of our Zoo family,” said El Paso Zoo and Botanical Gardens Director, Joe Montisano. “For years, L.B. participated in daily demonstrations, showcasing his unique talent. As the only military veteran animal in any zoo, he would perform a salute to the crowd, and we’d proudly salute him back. He was a gentle giant with a huge personality, and his absence will be deeply felt. Our thoughts are with his devoted care team and the entire community who loved him.”

About Little Bit “L.B.”

Born in 1998, L.B. spent three years as part of the U.S. Navy’s Marine Mammal Program, SPARWA, where he was trained to assist in underwater detection, location, and recovery missions. After his honorable discharge from the Navy, L.B. arrived at the El Paso Zoo in 2013, becoming one of the very few military veteran animals in any zoo.

L.B. touched the lives of countless Zoo visitors during his years here, educating the public about the remarkable lives of sea lions and the threats they face in the wild. Each week, he delighted guests with his presentations, always ending with his signature salute to the crowd—especially to our veterans and armed forces.

Sea lions typically live to around 23 years old, making L.B.’s 25 years a true testament to the exceptional care provided by his keepers throughout his life.

For over 25 years, the El Paso Zoo has worked in partnership with the Monterey Bay Aquarium to support the conservation of California sea lions through education and research. L.B.’s legacy will live on through the lives he touched and the awareness he raised for his species.

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About the El Paso Zoo and Botanical Gardens

The El Paso Zoo and Botanical Gardens stretch across 35-acres and house animals representing over 220 species, including critically endangered species. Accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), the El Paso Zoo celebrates the value of animals and natural resources. It creates opportunities for people to rediscover their connection to nature. To learn more, visit www.ElPasoZoo.org.



Promoting **Transparent & Consistent Communication**
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