

“Chester”

NY3688-07

Gray Seal – *Halichoerus Grypus*

Pup- Male

The Riverhead Foundation for Marine Research and Preservation is the only organization in New York State that is authorized to rescue and rehabilitate “stranded” marine mammals and sea turtles. A “stranded” animal is an animal that is either sick or injured and as a result, has come to shore. The Riverhead Foundation’s Marine Mammal & Sea Turtle Rescue Program nurses these animals back to health in hopes of returning them to their natural environment.

On May 4, 2007 a local beach walker found a seal on the beach near Old Beach Lane in East Hampton, New York and immediately called the Riverhead Foundation’s Rescue Hotline, (631) 369-9829. The Riverhead Foundation rescue team responded to the call to assess the seal. Chester, a 42-pound male gray seal, had cuts and abrasions on his body. Chester was rushed back to the Riverhead Foundation’s hospital facility for a complete physical examination.

A physical examination conducted by staff biologists and veterinarians working with the Riverhead Foundation revealed that Chester was very underweight and had a deep cut on his shoulder. He was given antibiotics to counteract any possible infection. Upon arrival, Chester was reluctant to eat. He was initially tube fed a liquid that is high in nutrients and electrolytes very similar to Pedialyte. Then, he was tube fed a fish slurry for two days. Next, he was hand fed for six days. On the eighth day, he began to eat herring by himself. Chester was eagerly eating two pounds of fish four times per day by the end of his second week in the Riverhead Foundation’s hospital facility.

Early in Chester’s rehabilitation, the Riverhead Foundation biologists introduced various EED’s to his tank. EED’s are Environmental Enrichment Devices. The objects, such as balls, lids from pails, and foam mats keep the animals stimulated and active. Enrichment is an important and necessary part of the rehabilitation process.

Chester continued to eat well and gain weight while staying at the Riverhead Foundation’s hospital facility. The cut on his shoulder healed well. Biologists monitored his behavior and analyzed blood tests to determine a release date. The Riverhead Foundation’s hospital facility, housed within Atlantis Marine World, offers special behind-the-scenes tours by appointment during normal operating hours, 10 am to 5 pm, seven days a week. During a Behind-the-Scenes tour, visitors get a chance to view stranded seals, dolphins, and sea turtles undergoing rehabilitation just like Chester. For more information about or to schedule a behind-the-scenes tour, call the Riverhead Foundation Office at (631) 369-9840.

On July 14, 2007, biologists prepared Chester, who now weighed over 70 pounds, for his release back into the ocean. Prior to release, a yellow, plastic flipper tag, marked with a unique identification number, was placed on his hind flipper, between the 2nd and 3rd digits. This tag can be used to identify her after release in the ocean, or on land. Chester was met with enthusiastic cheers from the patrons of the Swordfish Beach Club in Westhampton, New York.

The staff and volunteers at the Riverhead Foundation wish to thank you for your much needed and continued support. The average cost to rehabilitate a seal is \$6,500 for six weeks. The average stay for each animal is between six and eight weeks. Your adoption donation helps defray the cost of food, medication and treatment expenses incurred by each animal during its stay at the Riverhead Foundation’s facility.

If you suspect that a marine mammal or sea turtle is in need of care, please call the 24-hour hotline number at **(631) 369-9829**. Don’t forget to visit our website at www.riverheadfoundation.org

For animals that are spotted in the water or “hailed out” on rocks or a beach, the Riverhead Foundation operates a Sighting Program. The Sighting Program is for any sightings of dolphins, whales, seals, and sea turtles in their natural environment. The sighting program allows biologists to monitor population dynamics and gives them the ability to document habitats and migratory routes of marine mammal populations. If you spot a marine mammal or sea turtle, regardless of its location, please report it to our **Sighting Hotline at: (631) 369-9840 ext. 15** or send an email to sightings@riverheadfoundation.org.