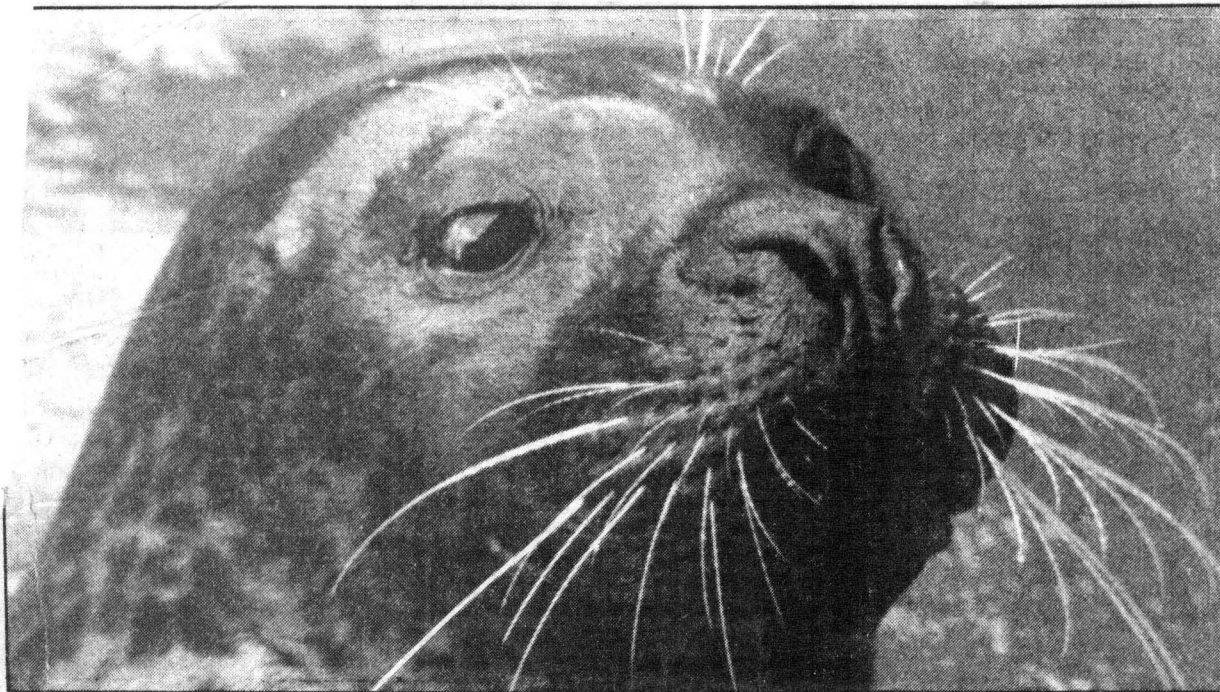


Centerpiece

Hoover will talk no more

A delight to thousands, Aquarium seal dies at age 14



By Patricia A. Currier
Contributing Reporter

Hoover, the New England Aquarium's famed talking seal, died yesterday at 1 p.m. in the aquarium's animal health care facility at the age of 14.

Renowned for his guttural voice, the middle-aged seal surprised and delighted countless visitors at the aquarium with his repertoire of "Hello there," "Get over here," "Hoover," and a falsetto laugh.

Hoover was featured in magazine and newspaper articles as well as television and radio programs worldwide.

He first began making sounds, without any training, at age 3 in 1974. About six years ago, his sounds began to resemble human speech and aquarium workers encouraged him to repeat words.

"He vocalized all year long but was more articulate during breeding season (May through August)," said Mimi Brown, an aquarium spokeswoman.

Orphaned as a pup, Hoover was found on a beach in Maine and had been a resident of the New England Aquarium's outdoor seal tank since he was

Hoover checks out the sights from his outdoor pool at the New England Aquarium.

a few months old.

He died of complications during his annual molt. Harbor seals molt, or shed, their coats annually. Although most seals molt for only two weeks, Hoover usually molted for a month.

"He had a tradition of laborious and stressful molts," said Brown, adding that the seal's death "wasn't unexpected."

Hoover had been residing in the health care facility during his molt in an attempt by staff members to "do everything possible to baby him and make him as happy as he possibly could be," said Brown.

He weighed 200 pounds at the time of his death, down from his prime weight of 260 pounds.

Hoover sired six pups who now range in age from six years to two months, including daughters Joey, Amelia and Trumpet and sons Lucifer, Cinder and Spark. All of them are residents of the aquarium's outdoor seal pool.

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year 1985

title Hoover will talk no more - a delight to thousands, aquarium
seal dies at age 14.

citation Boston Globe, Friday, July 26, 1985, p. 2.

language EN

state OR

file

keywords *PINN*PHOCID*P VIT*HUSB*00572962*

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