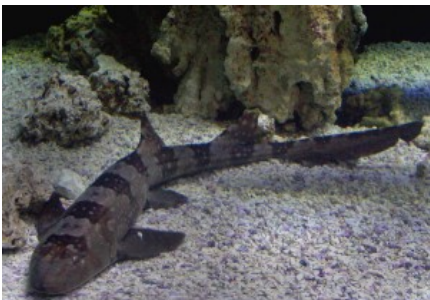


Sharks and Rays Fly into New Bedford Ocean Explorium

Only two years after it opened full-time to the public, New Bedford's Ocean Explorium is expanding—and its newest marine animal residents are about to make a resounding splash.

Some 20 stingrays and sharks arrived from Florida on June 21st—not by sea, but by air. The animals have made their new home in a large, custom-built touch tank (Read NBG's article, by Mike McCarthy, on the Explorium and its new touch tank). "We expect this will be our most exciting and popular live exhibit yet," says shark expert and Ocean Explorium director Mark Smith. "Visitors to the Explorium will be able to see these extraordinary animals up close, and they'll be able to touch them, to reach out and stroke them. This will be a rare and wonderful hands-on experience for children and adults alike."

Rays and Sharks Travel First-Class



A white spotted bamboo shark, one of the new residents at the Explorium.

The rays and sharks came to New Bedford packed in specially constructed boxes equipped with sufficient salt water and oxygen for their long plane journey from Florida. The animals

were supplied by Dynasty Marine, a specialist collector known the world over for their quality, knowledge and sustainable practices.

Before they reached the Explorium, Mr. Smith had this to say: "These animals are extremely delicate and transporting them requires carefully controlled water quality. Temperature, oxygen and pH levels must be maintained throughout their journey to the Ocean Explorium. Our role as caretakers of these beautiful animals is to ensure they are as healthy as possible, so they will be traveling first class all the way!"

Several different species of rays and sharks will be the stars of the new touch tank at the Explorium, including Cownose Rays, Atlantic Stingrays and White Spotted Bamboo Sharks. Explorium curator Warren Gibbons says they are gentle species, which will not pose a risk to visitors.

Gentle by Nature

"Despite their reputation, most rays and sharks are actually quite small and docile, and we have chosen species which are gentle by nature and comfortable with being touched," says Mr. Gibbons.



Another

addition to the Explorium: The Cownose ray.

“Cownose rays, for example, are very social and engaging animals in a touch tank like this. They’re related to eagle and manta rays and have the same familiar winged shape as the large rays. It’s mesmerizing to watch them glide through the water. All the rays have had their barbs painlessly clipped so they can be touched safely by our visitors.”

Sharks and rays’ life support system on display

Mr. Gibbons has been working for months with a team of Ocean Explorium staff and other volunteers to install the ray and shark tank, which is 18 feet long and holds 3,000 gallons of water. He’s also been building the tank’s complex water filtration system—a life support system for the rays and sharks—which will be an integral part of the new exhibit.

“Our mission at the Ocean Explorium is education, and we believe it’s important for people to understand that these animals live in a delicately balanced ecosystem, which we need to respect and preserve,” he says. “It’s an enormous challenge for us to try to replicate that environment here in the Explorium so the animals remain healthy. We’re very excited about showing people how we can do that.”

The new touch tank and life support systems are already up and running and the animals moved into the new tank immediately after arriving at the Ocean Explorium. An official opening for the tank is scheduled for July 1.

The Ocean Explorium is located at 174 Union Street in downtown New Bedford (corner of Union and Purchase Streets) and offers disabled access through the rear entrance. Call 508.994.5400 or visit the website for more information.