

Cayenne's Story

On March 3, 2004, the IMMS staff received a call regarding a very young dolphin that was in need of our help. In the remote, bayou town of DuLarge, Louisiana, a dolphin calf had been separated from her mother when a levee was built. Local people noticed her swimming alone in a channel for several days before she eventually beached herself on the levee for an unknown period of time. Government authorities were notified of her stranding. Unfortunately, the baby dolphin's mother was nowhere to be found and we could only assume that she had died.

IMMS received the call to be on stand-by in case we were needed to help rescue the very young and injured dolphin. The Audubon Aquarium of the Americas from New Orleans was asked to step in, since they were closer in proximity to the animal. When Aquarium staff reached the stranding site, they realized that the stranded dolphin would need more attention than originally planned. With this in mind, they transported the animal back to their temporary holding facility in New Orleans, where she was triaged, stabilized, quarantined, and tested for infectious diseases.



On April 14, 2004, under the supervision and care of IMMS staff, she made the voyage to the IMMS facility and Marine Life Oceanarium for long-term rehabilitation. At her new home, according to IMMS protocol, the small dolphin remained isolated and under strict quarantine until she received a clean bill of health. While under quarantine, she was monitored 24 hours a day and received continuous biomedical, nutritional, psychological and nurturing care from the veterinary, training and animal care staff.



Cayenne's medical exam was extremely meticulous, as to ensure that the calf was on her way to good health, and that she would not impose a health risk to the other animals at the Oceanarium. Her health evaluation included specialized blood tests for infectious diseases such as morbillivirus and brucella. Routine tests, including a blood cell count, a chemistry profile, and bacterial and fungal cultures were also done. In addition since she was a wild dolphin, she was preventatively treated for the possibility of a parasite infection. Within a couple of weeks all of the test results returned within normal limits.

After her quarantine period, Cayenne was cleared to meet the other dolphins. She was moved to the Bay Pool at Marine Life Oceanarium, which later became her permanent home. Because the calf was so young when she was rescued, she was completely dependent on her mother prior to stranding. As a result, the staff recognized that she needed to receive not only biomedical attention, but also the nurturing care she would have received from her mother. It is a well-known fact that dolphins are very social animals. Therefore, their social environment is just as important in their total care and well-being as their nutrition and medical care. The Bay Pool provided an exceptional social structure for her because four other female Atlantic Bottlenose dolphins lived there too.



One task that proved to be very difficult was finding a name suitable to her personality. It was challenging only because the staff wanted to give her a name that reflected her spirit and will to live. After several weeks of observing her character, (and then a couple more weeks of debate!), it was decided to brand her feisty and fiery little personality with the name Cayenne, after the red-hot cayenne pepper.