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Hannah Shirley Crowned World's Oldest Living Pygmy Hippopotamus in Managed Care

San Diego Humane Society's Ramona Wildlife Center celebrates a new world record

RAMONA, CA — San Diego Humane Society is thrilled to announce that its **beloved pygmy hippopotamus, Hannah Shirley, is officially the oldest living pygmy hippo ever in managed care in the world.** On May 25, 2025, Hannah surpassed the previous record of 51 years, 6 months and 2 days — an extraordinary milestone for a species that typically lives 30 to 50 years in the wild.

Hannah was born on Nov. 22, 1973, and is recognized in the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Regional Studbook as animal #365, which tracks all pygmy hippos living in managed care around the globe. Her record-setting longevity is a powerful reflection of the dedicated care she receives at San Diego Humane Society's Ramona Wildlife Center, where she has lived since 2002.



“Every day with Hannah Shirley is a gift,” said Autumn Welch, Wildlife Operations Manager at the Ramona Wildlife Center. “Her playful spirit, resilience and sweet personality make her a truly special ambassador for her species — and a symbol of how excellent care can help animals thrive far beyond what’s expected.”

“Anyone who meets Hannah falls in love with her,” said Angela Hernandez-Cusick, Wildlife Rehabilitation Supervisor at the Ramona Wildlife Center. “Her free spirit captures the joy of working with wildlife—we’re lucky to care for such a special species.”

Hannah Shirley was rescued in 2002 after being found in a private backyard in Escondido. Since then, she has enjoyed a peaceful and enriched life in a spacious 13,000-square-foot paddock, complete with a natural pond and pool. Her daily routine includes spa-like back rubs, sprinkler showers and her favorite food-based enrichment, which keeps this senior hippo happy and healthy.

Hannah’s care is managed by the organization’s Project Wildlife team, which ensures she receives the individualized attention and specialized nutrition needed to support her advanced age. As one of just a few dozen pygmy hippos in managed care in North America, Hannah serves as a beloved ambassador for her vulnerable species.

Photos/video Hannah Shirley for media use can be downloaded here:

<https://spaces.hightail.com/space/IriE1BtkHh>

Photo/video credit: San Diego Humane Society

About San Diego Humane Society

San Diego Humane Society’s scope of social responsibility goes beyond adopting animals. We offer programs that strengthen the human-animal bond, prevent cruelty and neglect, provide medical care, educate the community and serve as a safety net for all pet families. Serving San Diego County since 1880, San Diego Humane Society has campuses in El Cajon, Escondido, Oceanside, Ramona and San Diego. For more information, please visit sdhumane.org.