

# New Sea Lion Exhibit Opens at Riverbanks Zoo

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[Kimberlei Davis](#)



Matt Perron

COLUMBIA, S.C. (WOLO) – Riverbank Zoo’s newest group of marine mammals have made their public debut.

The California sea lions and harbor seals made their return to Riverbanks Zoo and Garden with the grand opening of Sea Lion Landing ahead on the original June 9 date.

The public debut of Sea Lion Landing marks the final phase of Destination Riverbanks—the Zoo’s \$36-million expansion and development project, officials say.

Sea Lion Landing offers guests spectacular views and varying vantage points for watching these fin-footed favorites in action.

Enjoy nose-to-nose encounters through a giant 35-foot-long panoramic window or relax and observe from

amphitheater seating, check out incredible indoor sights both underwater and overhead, or get a broader look at the animals' 250,000-gallon saltwater habitat from The Wharf view on the upper deck.

The new habitat is home to four male sea lions and a male harbor seal; 14-year-old Baja, 4-year-old Ranger and 4-year-old Maverick from San Diego Zoo, 3-year-old P.J. from New York's Seneca Park Zoo and 10-year-old Gambit from Chicago's Lincoln Park Zoo.

Riverbanks previously housed South American sea lions from 1974 – 1981 and California sea lions from 1974 – 2009.

# New sea lion exhibit at Riverbanks Zoo ‘best in the country’

 [thestate.com/entertainment/local-events/article77998087.html](https://www.thestate.com/entertainment/local-events/article77998087.html)

By Erin Shaw  
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Riverbanks Zoo members arrived at the zoo Monday eager to see the newest residents: Four sea lions and one harbor seal.

The animals seemed to be enjoying their new home at Sea Lion Landing, a \$12 million exhibit that has been years in the making. On Monday, the sea lions twisted and turned as they swam inches from guests in an underwater viewing area, looking graceful and at ease in their 250,000-gallon saltwater habitat.

“We’re really excited to reveal Sea Lion Landing,” Riverbanks’ curator of mammals John Davis said. Zoo staff spent time touring some of the best zoo facilities in the country and “took all of their good ideas and put it into one facility,” he said. “It’s the best in the country, no doubt.”

## ADVERTISING

The attraction marks the final phase of Destination Riverbanks – the zoo’s \$36-million expansion and development project. The exhibit is meant to look like San Francisco’s famous Pier 39, where many sea lions live today.

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John Davis, Riverbanks Zoo curator of mammals

“We made the decision not to make this a naturalistic exhibit. It’s that urban edge where mammals and man meet,” Davis said.

The new habitat is home to four male sea lions: Baja, 14, Ranger, 4, Maverick, 4, and P.J., 3. Gambit, a male harbor seal, is 10.

Sea lions and seals are closely related, but sea lions have brown skin, can grow up to 8 feet long and weigh up to 850 pounds. Harbor seals have grayish, speckled skin, can grow up 6 feet long and weigh up to 300 pounds.

“The animals are getting along really well together,” Davis said. “The group’s interactions are amazing. It’s a real treat to watch them in the water.”

Gambit is the newest arrival and hasn’t been introduced to the pool yet, but should be part of the attraction before the public opening, Davis said.

Riverbanks previously housed South American sea lions from 1974-1981 and California sea lions from 1974-2009. The zoo tore down the 35-year-old exhibit with every intention of bringing it back bigger and better, public relations manager Susan O’Cain said.

“This is one of the animals we are consistently asked about,” she said, adding that it was one of the zoo’s most popular exhibits.

Zoo members can enjoy the new exhibit through Friday. Sea Lion Landing will open to the public June 9.

Guests can view the animals from above on The Wharf’s upper deck, from below in the underwater viewing area, and above and below simultaneously at an outdoor amphitheatre.

“From what I’m finding, anytime is a good time” to catch the animals in action, Davis said.

“It’s never a dull moment.”