

UC lab gets dolphins on loan

Scientists to study Navy-trained animals

Mercury News Staff and Wire Reports

Two U.S. Navy dolphins are the newest exchange students at UC-Santa Cruz's Long Marine Lab.

The Navy has loaned the two male bottlenose dolphins for at least a year as part of a cooperative program in which civilian researchers can study some of the Navy's dolphins.

Primo, 14, and Puka, 9, arrived at Long Marine Lab Thursday after being flown on a C-130 military transport to Moffett National Airfield in Mountain View and then driven to Santa Cruz on a flatbed truck.

The dolphins, each about eight feet long and weighing approximately 400 pounds, traveled in specially designed slings inside fi-

berglass tanks. Their bodies were supported by foam and partially covered by sea water as trainers and veterinarians attended to their every need, university spokesman Rob Irion said.

The dolphins, from the Navy's San Diego facility, are getting accustomed to the lab's 50-foot tank, he said. They were captured by the Navy in the Gulf of

Mexico in the mid-1980s.

The Navy trained the dolphins for acoustic research, mostly to detect, find, mark and recover objects in the ocean such as mines and items that fall overboard. Neither Primo nor Puka was active in Navy operations.

Scientists at the university will study the dolphins to learn how their bodies work, how they survive in the ocean, and how they are affected by people and natu-

ral phenomena such as El Niño.

One project, supervised by Terrie Williams, an assistant professor of biology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, will be to feed the dolphins fish at different temperatures and study how their bodies and digestive systems respond. She will do this by monitoring their temperatures, heart rates and oxygen consumption while the dolphins lie still inside a metabolic chamber.

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■ DOLPHINS

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Billy Hurley, Long Marine Lab's head dolphin trainer, said research will be non-invasive and cause no distress to the animals.

Future research projects may

include measuring the force of their swimming motions, studying how eating various types of fish affects blubber layers, and studying how dolphins regulate body temperature with heat flow through their flukes and fins.