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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Sea Lion Trained in Kaliningrad to Gargle for Health

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A sea lion in the Kaliningrad Zoo has been taught to gargle his medicinal solution.

Apparently even sea lions can get a sore throat — but at least they can be taught how to take their medicine.

A 24-year-old sea lion recovering from tonsillitis in the Kaliningrad Zoo has been taught to gargle his medicinal solution, the zoo in Russia's western exclave said on its website.

Kim, the 700-kilogram Steller sea lion, acquired a sore throat and an ear infection after visitors fed him frozen fish last year, the zoo said.

His health problems have persisted because visitors continue plying him with fish despite stern warnings not to do so, it said.

But treatment of the ailments is proving successful because Kim has learned to gargle his medication, like a person, his keeper Lolita Sidorenko said.

The animal, a retired veteran of the Moscow Dolphinarium, has been trained to hold his

breath and stay still while a medicinal solution is poured down his throat, Sidorenko was cited as saying.

A video on social networking site VKontakte uploaded on Wednesday shows the sea lion repeatedly pull off the stint and then gratefully consume his reward of — unfrozen — raw fish.

Twenty-four is a venerable age for Steller sea lions, whose lifespan rarely tops 30 years for females, which tend to outlive males.

The pinnipeds, found in the Russian Far East, Alaska and western Canada, are not classified as an endangered species, but their population is on the decline.

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