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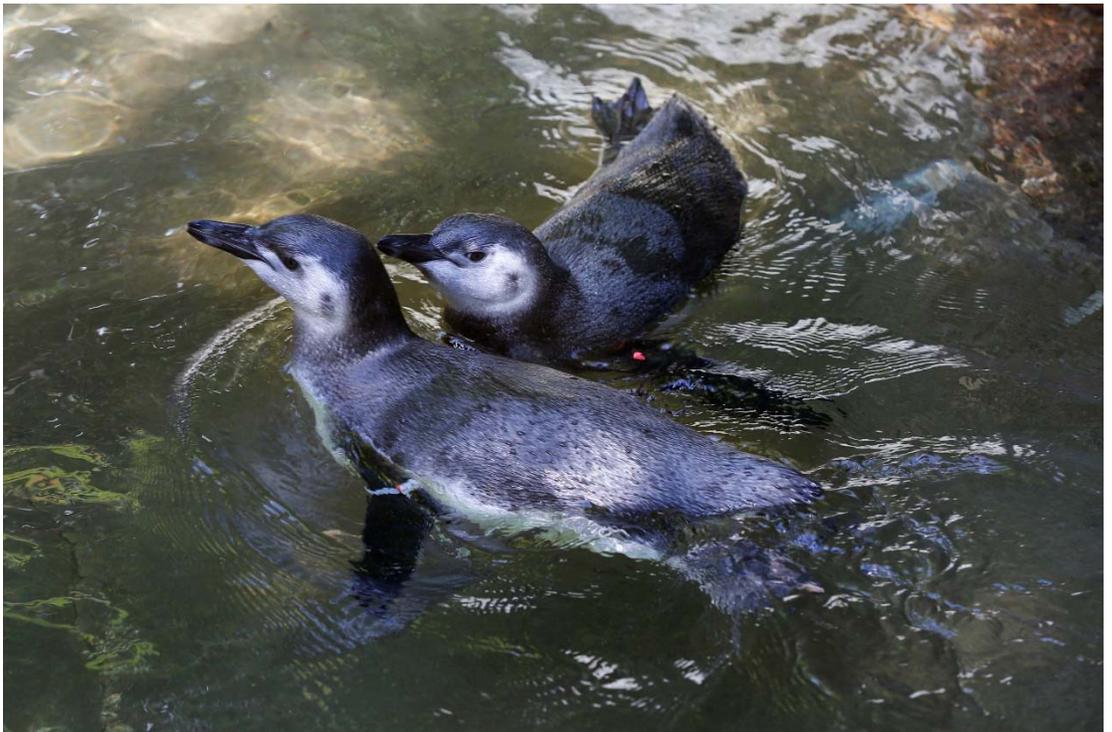
MY, HOW THEY'VE GROWN! AT 12 WEEKS, MAGELLANIC PENGUIN CHICKS ARE NEARLY AS LARGE AS ADULTS, ARE CONFIDENTLY SWIMMING, AND ARE BACK ON EXHIBIT AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM DAILY

TACOMA, Wash. – Two juvenile Magellanic penguin chicks slipped into the water at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium Tuesday morning and quickly darted from end to end and all around their on-exhibit pool.

The adult penguin colony stood watch on the rocks above, squawking loudly, black-and-white sentries warily guarding their turf from these upstart juveniles. That's normal behavior, staff biologist Amanda Shaffer said. Eventually, the adults will welcome the younger penguins into their midst.

In just 12 weeks, the chicks have grown from fuzzy balls weighing under 6 ounces to recognizable penguins almost as large as the adults from whose eggs they hatched.

They've been off exhibit for a few weeks, gaining strength, getting accustomed to feeding schedules and growing the coarse feathers and stiff wings needed for swimming. Zookeepers kept careful watch over the brother-and-sister pair as they learned to swim.

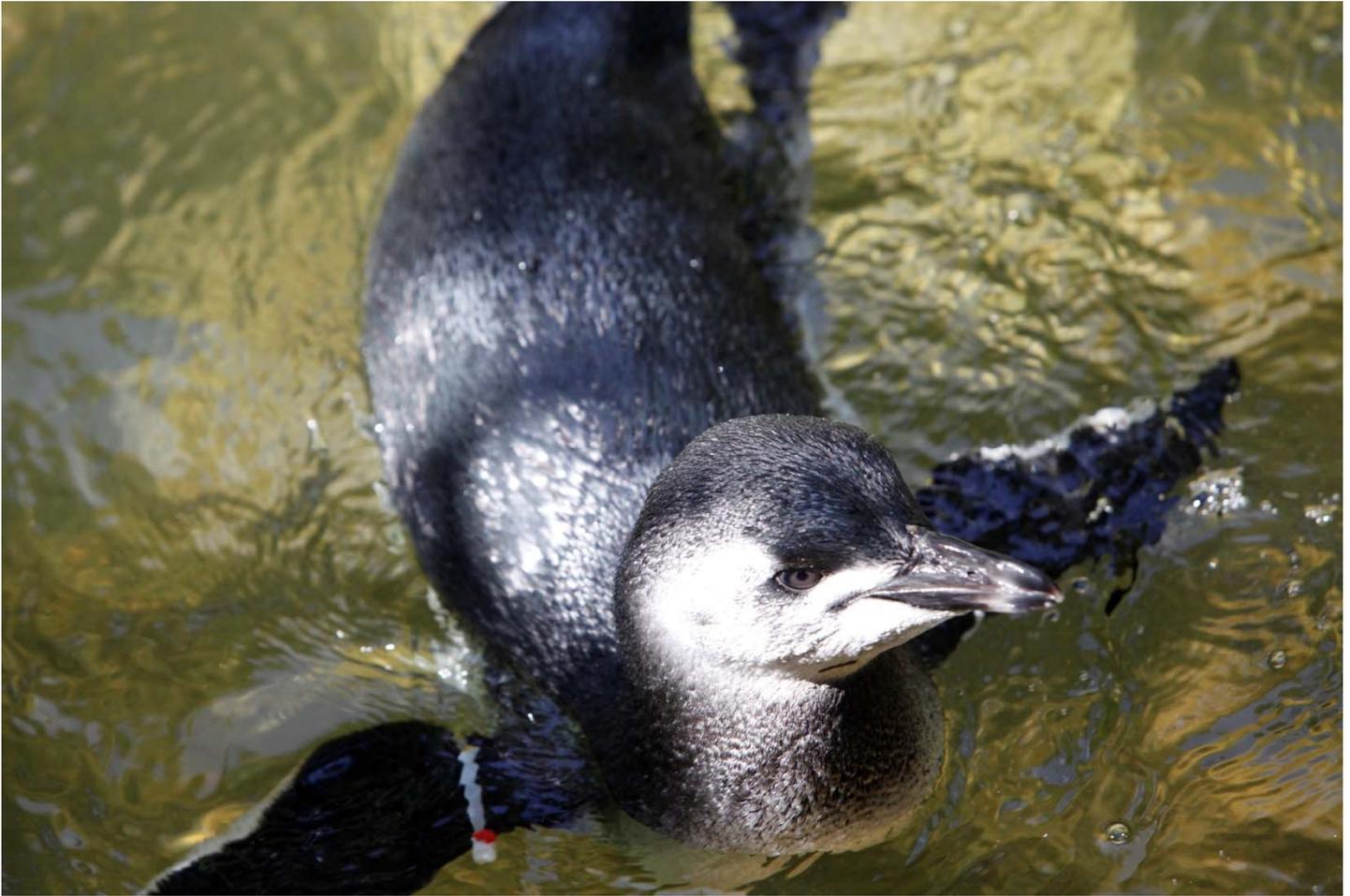


Now, they're on exhibit daily in the Penguin Point habitat at the zoo. Zoo summer hours are 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The chicks, who broke out of their shells on May 23 and May 25, are the first Magellanic penguins hatched at the zoo since 2006.

The zoo's penguins aren't named, but rather are known by the colors of the bands on their wings. These two are the offspring of mother "Pink" and father "Red." The male chick is banded as "Red/White" and the female is "Pink/Black."

The zoo's penguin colony now numbers 10, five males and five females.



“I’m pleased with their progress,” said Shaffer, the zoo’s lead penguin keeper. “They are healthy and they did great while learning to dive into the off-exhibit pool, swim and then pull themselves out.”

Several adult penguins joined the two juveniles in the Penguin Point pool in late morning Tuesday. But by afternoon, the adults were all back on their rocks, getting some sun, while the chicks swam placidly in the water, occasionally chasing one another, dipping quickly underwater and then surfacing, sometimes playfully rolling over, exposing their creamy bellies.

Though now close to the size of the adults, they are easy to differentiate from their parents and the rest of the colony. The adults bodies are midnight black, and they have distinctive white markings around their heads, on their chests and down their sides. The juveniles are still more grayish than black, and their “white” feathers are not as bright as their elders, so there’s no stark contrast between what will eventually be their “tuxedo” features.

The chicks are the result of a breeding recommendation through the Species Survival Plan® (SSP) for Magellanic penguins. Their parents were part of a rescue program several years ago.

The medium-sized penguins, native to the South American shores of Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Brazil, are listed as near-threatened on the IUCN Red List, which the International Union for Conservation of Nature compiles to indicate the status of various species whose numbers are drastically dwindling in the wild.



Two 12-week-old penguin chicks stand at the edge of the Magellanic penguin pool at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium as adults watch from the rocks and burrows above.

Penguins are threatened in the wild by a number of factors, including the proliferation of plastics in the ocean, spills of oil and other hazardous materials, and overfishing.

They also are threatened by the growing amount of plastic in the world's ocean. Scientists estimate that some 8 million tons of plastic – the equivalent of a truckload every minute – finds its way into the seas, most of it washed there from rivers and stormwater runoff.

Gertrude the Penguin, an 8-foot, 6-inch tall, 1,500 sculpture built entirely from plastic that washed up on Northwest beaches, is a testament to that fact. She stands near the entry to the zoo, one of 10 larger-than-life sculptures of sea creatures that are part of the Washed Ashore: Art to Save the Sea exhibit now on display. The sculptures dot zoo grounds and will be on exhibit through Oct. 21.

Oregon artist Angela Haseltine Pozzi creates them and sends them as traveling exhibits around the United States to graphically illustrate the growing problem of plastics in the ocean. The plastic threatens all sea life, with some animals becoming entangled in it. Others, particularly sea birds and fish, ingest the colorful, tiny pieces of microplastic that are ground up by ocean currents. Plastic becomes part of the food chain.

Among the improbable items used to create Gertrude are a cell phone, brush, tire parts, a car bumper and Styrofoam – all human creations that found their way into the sea and then washed up on a beach.

To learn more about plastics in the ocean and Washed Ashore, go to www.pdza.org/washedashore.

To learn more about penguins, go to www.pdza.org/magellanic-penguin.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo and aquarium, practices and promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).

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