



SIX PENGUIN CHICKS HATCHED AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 11, 2024

TACOMA, Wash.-- Penguin Point is chick-central! Six penguin chicks successfully hatched in late May at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium and are being closely monitored by their parents, keepers, and veterinary staff.

They hatched to parents:

- Two chicks to parents Pink and Red
- Two chicks to parents Purple and White
- Two chicks to parents Orange and Yellow

Four of the chicks are currently being reared by their parents.

“One chick from Purple and White and one chick from Orange and Yellow are receiving special attention and getting around-the-clock care from veterinary staff at the healthcare building,” said Curator Jen DeGroot.

“We noticed one chick was unusually small and had an umbilical infection, so it needed treatment and close monitoring,” explained Head Veterinarian Dr. Karen Wolf. “Keepers found the other chick outside of its nest extremely hypothermic and unresponsive and rushed it to the animal hospital, where it received emergency care. The two chicks are currently living in an incubator and are doing much better.”

Those two chicks will continue to be hand-reared at the animal hospital for the foreseeable future.

Penguin pairs mate for life; these are the seventh and eighth chicks for both Red and Pink and Orange and Yellow.

“Penguins are generally very involved parents, defending their chick against potential threats like crows that fly too close,” said DeGroot. “All of our penguin pairs are proving to be wonderful parents.”

Artificial incubation

Purple and White have laid eggs in the past but have never successfully had a chick that survived.

"This year, we decided to give them extra help and artificially incubate their eggs," explained DeGroot. "It's the first time in the zoo's history that we have incubated a bird egg."

The eggs were placed in an incubator inside the zoo's healthcare building, where they stayed at a comfortable 97.8 degrees Fahrenheit and 56% humidity. Keepers checked on the eggs daily. With the help of the veterinary staff, they also candled the eggs, illuminating the inside of an egg to see how the embryo was developing.

"It was fascinating to see the chicks' growth and progress," said DeGroot.

Once keepers noticed one of the chicks pipping (the beginning of the hatching process), they moved them from the incubator back to their nest underneath Purple and White.

"The parents instinctively knew what to do," said DeGroot.

Caring for chicks

The four chicks living at Penguin Point may be hidden for their first few weeks, keeping warm and safe beneath their parents. They will periodically emerge for feedings when their parents give them regurgitated fish they've already eaten.

"They appear healthy and are doing well," said Dr. Wolf. "We'll continue monitoring their weight to ensure they grow appropriately."

The zoo's veterinary staff will give the chicks on and off exhibit multiple health check-ups to ensure they are developing as expected. Their check-ups will include thorough inspections of the entire bird, from beak to feet, to ensure there are no emerging health concerns. The post-hatch period is a time of vulnerability for chicks, so it's important to perform regular physical exams.

The chicks' genders have yet to be discovered. In a month or so, when they start exploring the exhibit, keepers will take them behind the scenes to learn to swim in a safe, shallow pool until their waterproof feathers grow in and to bond with keepers. The veterinary team can determine the gender then via DNA from the blood samples.

Until then, zoo guests can potentially spot the chicks inside their burrows.

This is the eighth consecutive year that the zoo has hatched penguin chicks through its participation in the Association of Zoos' & Aquariums' Species Survival Plan® (SSP) managed breeding program for Magellanic penguins. Magellanic penguins are native to the South American shores of Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Brazil. Several factors threaten them in the wild, including the proliferation of plastics in the ocean, spills of oil and other hazardous materials, and overfishing.

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