

For Immediate Release

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AFRICAN PENGUIN CHICK BORN

Update on the penguin breeding program



First chick born to Gozi and Puff at Toronto Zoo. Photos: Ken Ardill, Toronto Zoo Volunteer

March 9, 2012 Toronto, Ontario: The Toronto Zoo announced today that the African penguin breeding program initiated in November 2011 has been successful. The Zoo's first chick hatched on January, 28, 2012, to penguin pair 'Gozi' and 'Puff'. The chick has been hand-raised by staff as the pair rejected the egg as it was hatching. Two other eggs have been laid by 'Colby' and 'Greenbird'. It is expected that they will hatch later in March with the first three weeks being the most critical for their growth and survival.

The baby penguin will be known as either 'Eldon' or 'Ellie' once the gender has been determined. (A determination can be made when the penguin is older and a small blood sample can be taken) The chick can be observed by the general public in the penguin house at the exhibit at scheduled times throughout the day as of March 10.

All six breeding pairs including 'Buddy' and 'Pedro' who were each matched with female partners, have been actively nesting and breeding over the past few months. In early February, 'Buddy' and female 'Farai' were also successful in incubating and hatching two chicks, however sadly they didn't survive beyond a few days. Mortality of chicks is high within the first three weeks after hatching with both wild and captive-bred penguins from any one of several factors such as predation, competition from other pairs, weather and the experience of the parents. 'Pedro', the Zoo's other international ambassador for this endangered species, and his female partner 'Thandiwe' have not as yet produced eggs but continue to be actively engaged in courtship and nesting behaviour.

"The hatching and survival of the first chick helps to secure a genetically healthy population," says Tom Mason, Curator of Birds and Invertebrates, Toronto Zoo. "African penguins are a high priority species, and these recent additions to our Zoo family are a step in the right direction for the species as a whole," says Mason, "This is our first breeding season with this group and we are very proud of our success.

Penguin pairings were first made in November. Typically eggs can be laid up until April. African penguins may lay their eggs anytime from a few days to up to one month after the female has ovulated. The Zoo's penguins have been paired based on their strongest genetic compatibility. The breeding pairs are:

- Buddy & Farai – high priority as designated by the SSP
- Pedro & Thandiwe – high priority as designated by the SSP
- Gozi & Puff – high priority as designated by the SSP
- DJ & Ziggy
- Greenbird & Colby
- Flip & Shaker

Male and female penguins share joint responsibility for incubating the eggs and taking care of the chicks once hatched. In the wild, they will continue to feed and care for their chicks for up to six weeks, at which time the 'parents' cease all parenting of their offspring and walk away.

The breeding program will continue until the end of April at which time the penguins will be reintroduced as a group in the outdoor exhibit. Species Survival Program breeding recommendations will be continued again in late November 2012.

Protecting the future of endangered African penguins:

The Toronto Zoo's African penguin breeding program is a part of the Association of Zoo's and Aquarium's (AZA) Species Survival Plan (SSP). While natural predators such as seals, sharks and mongoose take their toll on the endangered African penguin population, humans are by far the greatest threat to these endangered birds. Loss of suitable breeding ground, competition from commercial fishing, egg collection and the other environmental factors such as oil spills have all contributed to a rapid decline in population. The wild population has dropped 95% in 100 years. Recent estimates have been as low as 50,000 birds in the wild.

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About Toronto Zoo:

The Toronto Zoo is Canada's premier zoo and a leader in wildlife preservation and environmental protection. More than a tourist attraction, the Toronto Zoo boasts a number of leading programs for helping wildlife and their natural habitats – from species reintroduction to reproductive research. A world-class educational centre for people of all ages, the Toronto Zoo is open every day except December 25 and attracts approximately 1.3 million visitors each year.

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