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CONTACT: Jane Ballentine
O: 443/552-5275
C: 301/332-1742

MARYLAND ZOO WELCOMES FIRST PENGUIN CHICKS OF THE BREEDING SEASON

BALTIMORE, MD – The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore is excited to announce the hatching of three African penguin chicks – the first to hatch during the 2016-2017 breeding season at *Penguin Coast*. The first chick hatched on October 20 to parents Portia and Beckham while the second chicks, offspring of Ascot and Dennis, hatched on October 22 and October 25.

“This breeding season is off to a wonderful start,” said Jen Kottyan, avian collection and conservation manager. “As soon as the nest boxes were made available to the penguins again for the start of breeding season, the birds began exhibiting breeding behaviors and claiming their nests. We are really excited about the prospects for this season, and these three are just the beginning.”

Breeding season for the African penguins at Penguin Coast begins in mid-September and lasts until the end of February, mimicking the spring/summer breeding season for these endangered birds in their native South Africa. Penguin chicks will hatch 38-42 days after the eggs are laid. Zoo keepers monitor development of the eggs by candling them about a week after they are laid to see if they are fertile and developing. The eggs are then placed back with the parents. “With African penguins both the male and the female take turns sitting on the eggs,” said Kottyan. “Once the eggs hatch, parents take turns caring for their offspring; they each protect, feed, and keep the chick warm for 2-3 days and then switch off.”

At Penguin Coast, chicks stay with their parents for about three weeks after they hatch and are fed regurgitated fish from their parents. During this time, zoo keepers and vets keep a close eye on the development of the chicks, weighing and measuring them daily for the first week to make sure that the parents are properly caring for each chick. When a chick is three-weeks-old, the keepers remove it from the nest, and start to teach the chick that they are the source of food. This step is critical as it will allow staff to provide long term care for the birds including daily feeding, regular health exams and both routine and emergency medical care.

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The Maryland Zoo has been a leader in breeding African penguins for close to 50 years, winning the prestigious Edward H. Bean Award for the “African Penguin Long-term Propagation Program” from the AZA in 1996. The Zoo has the largest colony of African penguins in North America, with now over 75 birds. “Our penguins are bred according to recommendations from the AZA African Penguin SSP which helps maintain their genetic diversity,” said Kottyan. “Many of the African penguins previously bred at the Zoo now inhabit zoo and aquarium exhibits around the world.”

In September, *Penguin Coast* was awarded Top Honors in the Exhibit Award category from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) during the AZA Annual Conference. “This has been an exciting year for us already,” stated Kottyan. “We hosted the African Penguin Species Survival Plan (SSP) meeting in July, sent two staff to South Africa to participate in penguin conservation programs in August and September, won the AZA Exhibit Award in September and now the breeding season is well underway with these successful hatchings.”

For updates on the chicks in the coming weeks, please visit www.marylandzoo.org or our www.facebook.com/marylandzoo.

[About The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore](#)

Founded in 1876, The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore is the third oldest zoo in the United States and is internationally known for its contributions in conservation and research. More than 1,500 animals are represented in the Zoo’s varied natural habitat exhibits such as the AZA-Award winning *Penguin Coast*, Polar Bear Watch, the Maryland Wilderness, African Journey and the award-winning Children’s Zoo. Situated in Druid Hill Park near downtown Baltimore, the Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums. For more information, visit www.marylandzoo.org.

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