



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
14 November 2011

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**MARYLAND ZOO IN BALTIMORE ANNOUNCES FIRST
PENGUIN CHICK HATCHINGS OF THE SEASON**

BALTIMORE, MD -- The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore is happy to announce that two African penguin chicks hatched on October 12 and 16, 2011. These are the first chicks to hatch this season. They were born weighing 106 grams and 94 grams respectively, and they are thriving, gaining weight and growing substantially at each vet check. Using a blood test, it has been determined that both of the chicks are male.

African penguins are native to the shores and islands of South Africa. “In the penguin colony, breeding season runs August through November, which is springtime in the Southern Hemisphere,” said Mike McClure, general curator at the Zoo. “Contrary to popular belief, not all penguins are cold weather birds. This species of penguin is from a climate similar to what we have in Maryland, and that has proven to be a one factor in the success of our breeding program at Rock Island.”

The Maryland Zoo has been a leader in breeding African penguins for over 30 years, winning the prestigious Edward H. Bean Award for the “African Penguin Long-term Propagation Program” from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) in 1996. The Zoo has one of the two largest colonies of the birds in North America, ranging from 55-65 birds at any given time. The penguins are bred according to the AZA Species Survival Plan (SSP) which helps maintain genetic diversity among endangered species in zoos and aquariums in North America. Many of the African penguins bred at the Zoo now inhabit zoo and aquarium exhibits around the world.

Penguin chicks take 38-42 days to hatch out of their eggs after they 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. “Both the male and the female take turns sitting on the eggs,” continued McClure. “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 Rock Island, chicks stay with their parents for about 3 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 the chicks are 3-weeks-old, the keepers remove the chicks from the nest, and start to teach the chick that they are the source of food. “We even need to give them baths and swimming lessons to get them used to life in the water,” concluded McClure.

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“Although they may initially balk at going in the water, we have to get them in and mimic the training the parents would do in the wild to get their chicks used to swimming. They are quick learners, and are very soon swimming around on their own.”

While the fuzzy grey chicks will not be on public view, visitors to the Zoo can see the both juvenile and adult penguins year round. “You can tell the difference between the juveniles and adults, as the juveniles do not have the stark black-and-white coloring that adults do; they are a bit more grey until they molt into their adult coloration,” said McClure. “And weather-wise, even though it does get cold here, our penguins have been known to hang outside and chase snowflakes at times. However their door is always open should they choose to come inside and stay warm.”

The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore is located in Druid Hill Park. For more information, please visit the Zoo’s Web site, www.marylandzoo.org, or call 410-366-LION (5466). Stay up to date on Zoo events and information by becoming a Maryland Zoo fan on Facebook www.facebook.com/marylandzoo or following us on Twitter @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 in areas such as 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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