

Press Release

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Little Blue Penguins Make San Diego Debut at Birch Aquarium

Made possible with philanthropic support from the Beyster Family, the new exhibit brings the world's smallest penguins to the West Coast for the first time.



From left, Vice Chancellor for Marine Sciences and Director of Scripps Institution of Oceanography, Margaret Leinen, Assemblymember Tasha Boerner Horvath (District 76), Mayor Todd Gloria, National City Mayor Alejandra Sotelo-Solis, San Diego City Councilmember Joe LaCava (District 1), Birch Aquarium's Executive Director Harry Helling and Senior Director of Animal Care, Science and Conservation, Jenn Moffatt.

La Jolla, CA (July 12, 2022) — Excitement filled the air at Birch Aquarium at Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego today as the first official guests gathered to experience *Beyster Family Little Blue Penguins*, the newest and most anticipated exhibit in the aquarium's history.

Harry Helling, Executive Director of Birch Aquarium; Margaret Leinen, Vice Chancellor for Marine Sciences and Director of Scripps Institution of Oceanography; San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria; National City Mayor Alejandra Sotelo-Solis; along with other San Diego elected officials; and musicians from the San Diego Youth Symphony and Conservatory, joined in a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the official opening of this immersive habitat — the only one of its kind on the West Coast.

During the ceremony, Gloria officially declared July 12, 2022 as “Little Blue Penguins Day” in the City of San Diego in honor of these charismatic seabirds.

“San Diego residents, including myself, have enjoyed many memorable moments at Birch Aquarium, and I am certain that there will be many more in store after today's opening,” said Gloria. “This extraordinary new space will allow the aquarium to attract even more guests from across the county and beyond, and inspire them to protect the wonders of our ocean.”

In *Beyster Family Little Blue Penguins*, guests come face-to-face with Little Blue Penguins as they waddle, swim and glide about their new home. The 2,900-square-foot habitat features an 18,000-gallon pool, multiple cozy burrows, a sandy beach and native plants that mimic the coast of Australia and New Zealand, where these penguins can be found in the wild. As guests step into the exhibit, they're immersed in the world of Little Blues; learning from interpretative signs how they can help protect penguins and our ocean.

In addition, the habitat further explores the interdisciplinary penguin research of Scripps Oceanography scientists Jerry Kooyman, Paul Ponganis and Tammy Russell. Their discoveries on penguin physiology have provided Scripps with a better understanding of the biology of these aquatic seabirds, and the impact of climate change on penguins.

“We are delighted to introduce the new *Beyster Family Little Blue Penguins* to San Diego. Our team has worked diligently to design and develop a new state-of-the-art facility for this amazing species of seabird,” said Executive Director, Harry Helling. “Penguins are great indicators of environmental changes in the ocean and will help Birch Aquarium to better connect understanding to protecting our ocean planet.”

Not every penguin lives in snow and ice — Little Blue Penguins reside in the coastal dunes and rocky shores of Southern Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand in a climate similar to San Diego. Little Blues are about a foot tall and weigh 2 to 3 pounds; they're known for their unique blue color and their big personalities.

"We're thrilled to welcome this colony of 15 penguins to our Birch family," said Kayla Strate, Lead Penguin Aquarist. "The birds are happy, thriving and adapting nicely to their new surroundings. Eventually, we're hoping the penguins will form a successful breeding colony."

Each penguin in the exhibit wears a colorful wing band, which helps staff and guests quickly distinguish one bird from another. Azulito, who got his name after an online naming campaign in June, wears a blue band. Six other penguins in the exhibit received names through philanthropic gifts: Magic, Nero, Persimmon, Reka, Cornelius and Katie.

Little Blue Penguins are part of the [Association of Zoos and Aquariums' \(AZA\)](#) collaborative international program called Species Survival Plans (SSP). Each SSP Program coordinates the individual activities of participating member institutions through a variety of species, research, husbandry, management and educational initiatives.

Though penguins are common in zoos and aquariums, only a handful of AZA institutions have Little Blue Penguins including Dallas World Aquarium, the Bronx Zoo, Adventure Aquarium, Louisville Zoo and the Cincinnati Zoo.

"It may be their waddling, or graceful swimming. Whatever the reason, penguins have a knack for capturing our hearts," said Jim Beyster. "We are proud to support Birch Aquarium's mission to shed light on the survival challenges that Little Blue Penguins face in the wild along with other seabird species."

In addition to a \$1 million naming gift made by the Beyster Family, generous gifts have also been received by Stephen M. Strachan to name the pool habitat, Wendy W. Kwok to name the amphitheater and one of our penguins, Julia R. Brown to name the penguin life support system, and Katherine and Mathew McGee to name the children's discovery portal.

Other philanthropic supporters toward our penguin naming campaign include John and Gail Eyer, Colin and Ellen Kennedy, Miranda Ko and Jared Cui, and the Phillips Widroe Family. Birch Aquarium also acknowledges the following exhibit supporters: Gisela Hill, Las Patronas, Qualcomm, Sonos and Laurette Verbinski. These gifts contributed to the Campaign for UC San

Diego, which concluded on June 30, 2022 raising a total of \$3 billion. KPBS is the official media sponsor of *Beyster Family Little Blue Penguins*.

For those who are unable to visit the aquarium in person, they can still see Little Blue Penguins through a new [live penguin webcam](#) launched today. *Beyster Family Little Blue Penguins* is included in the cost of general admission to Birch Aquarium which is \$24.95 for adults and \$19.95 for children ages 3-17. [Annual memberships are also available](#). Advanced reservations are required for all guests, including members. Visit aquarium.ucsd.edu for more information or to make a reservation.

About Birch Aquarium at Scripps

Birch Aquarium at Scripps is the public exploration center for Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego. Perched on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, Birch Aquarium features the groundbreaking work of Scripps Oceanography and UC San Diego scientists as well as conservation breeding programs, and interactive exhibits. Birch Aquarium's mission is to connect understanding to protecting our ocean planet, which the aquarium achieves by engaging, hands-on learning opportunities for nearly 500,000 guests as well as more than 50,000 pre-K-12 students each year. Visit aquarium.ucsd.edu for more information.

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