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SCRIPPS INSTITUTION OF OCEANOGRAPHY

Press Release

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Birch Aquarium and Cincinnati Zoo Join Forces to Bolster the Little Blue Penguins Population in the United States



La Jolla, CA (November 15, 2022) — Five Little Blue Penguins from Birch Aquarium at Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego embarked on a 2,000-mile cross-country move to [Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden](#). The move is part of an international Species Survival Plan (SSP) that works to maintain the genetic diversity of certain species in zoos and aquariums.

This year, SSP coordinators for Little Blue Penguins recommended that our penguins — Sheldon, Squid, Craig, Odette and Bo — become part of new breeding colonies at Cincinnati Zoo. Over the years, Birch Aquarium has exchanged a variety of marine animals with other [AZA-accredited institutions](#) as part of SSPs, including Potbellied and Lined Seahorses.

“Collaboration with other institutions is essential to maintaining a healthy and thriving penguin population across the U.S.,” said Jenn Nero Moffatt, Senior Director of Animal Care, Science and Conservation at Birch Aquarium. “And now, for the first time, we will transfer five of our Little Blues to another institution. We have been fortunate to provide a temporary home to these seabirds throughout our exhibit opening and busy summer months.”

The *Beyster Family Little Blue Penguins* habitat opened in July 2022 bringing the world’s smallest penguins to the West Coast for the first time. The habitat is also the first seabird exhibit in the history of the aquarium. The 2,900-square-foot exhibit provides the highest standard in penguin care while also offering a fun and educational guest experience. Birch Aquarium is committed to protecting Little Blue Penguins as they face habitat loss and a dropping population due to climate change.

Beyster Family Little Blue Penguins explores the interdisciplinary penguin research of Scripps Oceanography scientists Jerry Kooyman, Paul Ponganis and Tammy Russell. Their discoveries provided Scripps with a better understanding of the biology of these aquatic seabirds, and the impact of climate change on penguins.

Birch Aquarium opened its exhibit with a colony of 15 penguins that came from facilities in Australia and Dallas, Texas. Ten of those seabirds will remain in San Diego including Magic, Cornelius, Reka, Nero, Katie, Persimmon and Azulito.

Cincinnati Zoo is home to the largest and most successful breeding colonies of Little Blue Penguins in North America. Their new habitat, *Roo Valley*, which houses Little Blues and two species of kangaroo, opened in 2020. The Zoo started with six Little Blues in 1999 and has hatched over 100 chicks since then. The current habitat is home to 34 Little Blue Penguins.

“All of us in Team Bird are excited to add these new penguins to our *Roo Valley* colony,” said Cody Sowers, Team Leader in the Bird Department at Cincinnati Zoo. “Anytime we can collaborate with other facilities to help out the North American population is a no brainer, and personally I am excited to watch them acclimate to their new home here in Cincinnati. Thanks to the entire Birch Aquarium team for taking such great care of these penguins!”

In preparation for the journey, the aquarium’s veterinary team examined each seabird to ensure they were in tiptop health before getting on a flight to their final destination. Veterinary staff members go through a full workup that includes physical exams, taking X-rays, blood samples and a variety of tests.

Kayla Strate, Assistant Curator of Birds at Birch Aquarium, knows every penguin by name and personality. Some are shy while others are gregarious. She knows their temperament, how they walk, and what each one likes to eat.

“We will all miss these penguins very much,” Strate said. “You get quite attached to the animals in your care, but it is so important to the health of the population to participate in these transfers. We are proud to play a role in making this program successful. It will be fun to hear updates about their new colony and whether they pair with others and raise their own chicks one day.”

With the exhibit opening, the aquarium has seen visitation numbers rebound to near pre-pandemic levels, having welcomed 146,000 guests in the first three months alone.

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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