

Press Release

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We Have Big News and It's Little!

Birch Aquarium will open *Beyster Family Little Blue Penguins* next summer.



La Jolla, CA (Sept. 14, 2021)—The biggest news in the history of Birch Aquarium at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, UC San Diego is little ... Little Blue Penguins, that is. The aquarium today announced the addition of the *Beyster Family Little Blue Penguins* habitat, which will open in summer 2022.

Little Blues are the smallest species of penguin — less than 12 inches tall, and weighing just 2-3 pounds — and are known for their unique blue color, and their big personalities. Birch Aquarium will be the only aquarium in the Western U.S. to house these gregarious sea birds.

“We are so very excited to be adding the *Beyster Family Little Blue Penguins* to Birch Aquarium at Scripps. The new facility will allow us to contribute to an international Species Survival Plan and create an interesting new guest experience,” said Executive Director, Harry Helling. “Little Blue Penguins will be

wonderful ambassadors that can help us to engage our community more deeply and further our mission to connect understanding to protecting our ocean planet.”

Ground-breaking for this exciting project will begin on Sept. 27 with completion expected by spring. Birch Aquarium will be closed Sept. 27-30 to avoid negatively impacting the guest experience. *Beyster Little Blue Penguins* will be installed in the Nigella Hillgarth Education Courtyard.

Beyster Family Little Blue Penguins is named in honor of a \$1 million gift from the Beyster Family, who are long-time supporters of Scripps Institution of Oceanography and Birch Aquarium.

“Their graceful swimming and diving abilities and awkwardness on land have endeared these little Southern Australian marine animal ambassadors to the Beyster Family. We are proud to support Birch Aquarium’s mission to shed light on the survival challenges that Little Blue Penguins face along with other seabird species,” said James Beyster.

In *Beyster Family Little Blue Penguins*, guests will be immersed in the world of Little Blue Penguins, learning about some of the challenges facing these birds in the wild, and how our future is tied directly to theirs. The 2,900-square-foot exhibit will include rocky and sandy shore habitat and an 18,000-gallon pool where guests will observe the penguins socializing, interacting, and nest building. The exhibit also includes a small amphitheater for guests to observe birds swimming, and a discovery cave for children to closely observe Little Blue Penguins on land and inside nesting burrows.

“Little Blue Penguins and other seabirds are sentinel species for our ocean’s health and help us understand how we can be better stewards for our planet,” said Jenn Nero Moffatt, Senior Director of Animal Care, Science and Conservation. “Penguins, by their unique nature, are adored by our community and in this way help to serve as great animal ambassadors. We hope that one look at their awkward waddling, their pint-sized bodies, torpedo swimming and social nature will leave our guests enchanted, and wanting to learn how to aid in conservation efforts.”

Little Blue Penguins are native to the coastal dunes and rocky shores of Southern Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand and are part of the [Association of Zoos and Aquariums’ \(AZA\)](#) collaborative international conservation program called Species Survival Plans (SSP). Each SSP Program coordinates the individual activities of participating member institutions through a variety of species conservation, research, husbandry, management, and educational initiatives

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

Six Little Blue Penguins from Dallas World Aquarium are currently behind-the-scenes at Birch Aquarium, in an aviary built especially for them. Ten additional birds are expected to arrive from Australian zoos ahead of the opening.

In addition to the naming gift made by the Beyster Family, generous gifts have also been received by Julia R. Brown to name the aquatic animal life support system, Miranda Ko and Jared Cui to name one of the penguins, and a gift from an anonymous donor to name the amphitheater. These gifts also contribute to the Campaign for UC San Diego.

There are still many opportunities for the community to support the Little Blue Penguins habitat including the naming of individual birds, the children’s discovery cave and the VIP Observation and Conservation suite, as well as several others. Those interested in making a gift or learning more, may contact Adeline Duke at amduke@ucsd.edu or (858) 822-5803.

Once open, the *Beyster Family Little Blue Penguins* habitat will be included in the cost of Birch Aquarium admission. For more information, visit aquarium.ucsd.edu.

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. Birch Aquarium also offers a variety of [virtual events and activities](#). Visit aquarium.ucsd.edu for more information.

About the Campaign for UC San Diego

At the University of California San Diego, challenging convention is our most cherished tradition. Through the Campaign for UC San Diego —our university-wide comprehensive fundraising effort concluding in 2022—we are enhancing student support, ensuring student success, transforming our campus, connecting our community, and redefining medicine and health care on a global scale. Together with our philanthropic partners, we will continue our nontraditional path toward revolutionary ideas, unexpected answers, lifesaving discoveries, and planet-changing impact.

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