

A rare treat for Bronx Zoo: the littlest of penguins makes its debut

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.09.16

Word Count **620**



Little penguin (*Eudyptula minor*) family exiting burrow at night on Bruny Island in the Pacific Ocean. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

For the first time in its 120-year history, the Bronx Zoo in New York hatched a fairy penguin. In May, the world-famous zoo welcomed the little fuzzball bird. When the fairy penguin hatched, it weighed just 25 grams. This is about as heavy as a AA battery.

The bird is still too young to identify whether it is a male or female. But by late July, it was big enough to be added to the colony of fairy penguins on display at the zoo.

Fairy penguins are also known as little penguins or blue penguins. Even though they are small, they grow rapidly. When the penguin was weighed a few days after hatching, one of the zoo staff members exclaimed, "You're huge!" The bird has already almost doubled its weight.

The Smallest Of Its Species

Still, "little penguin" is a good moniker for these birds. This type of penguin is the smallest of the 18 penguin species. They grow to only about 13 inches tall and are no heavier than 3 pounds as adults. These penguins are chatty, social animals that eat squid, fish and other small sea life. The birds dig holes in the sand to lay their eggs.

The other fairy penguins living in the Bronx Zoo arrived from Australia as part of an international breeding program. All of those birds that now live in New York were born at the Taronga Zoo in the city of Sydney. The goal of breeding programs like this one is to help conserve groups of animals that are in danger in some way.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature says fairy penguins aren't in as much danger as some other species. But the population of fairy penguins is declining. Coastal oil spills, damage to their land in nature and hungry wild cats are all threats to the fairy penguin population. There are even reports of crayfish hunters who poached the penguins to use the bird meat as bait in the 1980s and 1990s. It is not known the lasting effect these hunters had on fairy penguin populations.

There are other programs helping the fairy penguins.

Released From A Breeding Colony

In addition to the penguins in the Bronx Zoo, another breeding colony lives at an aquarium in Boston, Massachusetts. In Australia, two dozen penguins that were born in a protected setting were released into the wild in 2007.

In some places, help for the penguins has taken unusual forms.

About 10 years ago, foxes appeared on an island near Victoria in Australia. This hurt the penguin population there. "We went from a point where we had around 800 penguins down to where we could only find four," Peter Abbott, of the Penguin Preservation Project, told the BBC media group in late 2015. The group trained a handful of guard dogs to protect the penguins from the foxes.

Program Inspires A Movie

The program was a success, according to Abbott. The fairy penguin population rebounded to about 200 birds. It even inspired a movie named *Oddball*, after one of the guard dogs.

Meanwhile, in the Flea Bay of New Zealand, a blind fairy penguin named Blindy has found a pair of caretakers named Shireen and Francis Helps. The Helpses have been caring for penguins since 1974 and were subjects of a recent story by the Associated Press. Blindy needs special attention. Shireen Helps tosses the penguin into a pond so it can learn to swim safely.

"If it gets dizzy going around one way, it changes direction and goes around the other way," she said in the story to the Associated Press. "So it's really learning very well."

Perhaps Blindy or the Bronx Zoo penguin will inspire a movie, too.

Quiz

- 1 Which excerpt includes information that would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) When the penguin was weighed a few days after hatching, one of the zoo staff members exclaimed, "You're huge!"
 - (B) The goal of breeding programs like this one is to help conserve groups of animals that are in danger in some way.
 - (C) The International Union for the Conservation of Nature says fairy penguins aren't in as much danger as some other species.
 - (D) There are even reports of crayfish hunters who poached the penguins to use the bird meat as bait in the 1980s and 1990s.
- 2 What is the BEST summary of the section "Released From A Breeding Colony"?
- (A) Guard dogs protect fairy penguins in Australia.
 - (B) Foxes hurt the fairy penguin population in Australia.
 - (C) Currently, fairy penguins are being bred at the Bronx Zoo and the aquarium in Boston.
 - (D) Various organizations are taking action to increase the population of fairy penguins in the wild.
- 3 Read the sentence from the introduction [paragraphs 1-3].

In May, the world-famous zoo welcomed the little fuzzball bird.

How does using the phrase "little fuzzball" affect the tone of the sentence above?

- (A) It creates a scientific tone.
- (B) It creates an affectionate tone.
- (C) It creates an objective tone.
- (D) It creates a questioning tone.

4 Read the sentence from the section "The Smallest Of Its Species."

Still, "little penguin" is a good moniker for these birds. This type of penguin is the smallest of the 18 penguin species.

Which option is the BEST definition of the word "moniker" as used in the sentence?

- (A) a species
- (B) a name
- (C) a brand
- (D) a style

Answer Key

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