

Celebrating 100 years of penguins at Edinburgh Zoo



Gentoo Chick Being Hand Fed By Head Penguin Keeper
Victor Scott credit Elizabeth Balneaves

100 years of penguins!

Only recently relegated to minor rock star status due to the arrival of the pandas, the penguins are perhaps the best loved animals at Edinburgh Zoo.

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland is celebrating an auspicious milestone, with Saturday 25 January 2014 marking a century since the arrival of penguins at Edinburgh Zoo – the first ever penguins to be seen in Europe. Penguins have since become iconic for the Zoo, with a king penguin chick being the first to hatch in the Northern Hemisphere, and the species was incorporated into the Zoo's logo.

In 1914, six months after its grand opening, Edinburgh Zoo accepted a donation of six penguins from Salvesen Co. The four king penguins, one gentoo and one macaroni had made the momentous journey from South Georgia all the way to Leith Docks aboard the Salvesen ship 'Coronda'. They were the first of many donations from Salvesen and would become the Zoo's most iconic species.

Only five years later, Edinburgh Zoo successfully hatched a king penguin chick, the first ever penguin to be successfully bred in the Northern Hemisphere. This hatching was the first of many landmark successes for the Zoo, establishing RZSS's global reputation and animal husbandry expertise. In 1935, the first macaroni chick in an animal collection hatched at the Zoo, followed two years later by the first gentoo chick.



Colin Oulton, Team Leader for Birds at Edinburgh Zoo, said: “To celebrate 100 years of caring for this inquisitive and curious species is a very special occasion. Historically, penguins have always been an important species for Edinburgh Zoo and RZSS. We were the first zoo in the Northern Hemisphere to successfully breed king penguins, and the first in the world to breed macaroni and gentoo penguins. Our knowledge and expertise also led to Edinburgh Zoo establishing the European breeding studbook for king and gentoo penguins in 1998 – both of which we still hold.

“Our daily penguin parade, started in 1951, is now world famous and one of the only opportunities people have to get up close to penguins outside of the Southern Hemisphere. The world may have changed a lot over the past century, but penguins have always remained a firm favourite with our visitors.

“Sir Nils Olav, the king penguin, is also world-renowned as the highest-ranking penguin in the world. The mascot for the Norwegian Guard, he has risen through the ranks from Lance Corporal all the way to Colonel-in-Chief. In 2008, he received a knighthood which was approved by the King of Norway and the Norwegian Guard visits him regularly.

“Last year, our penguins received a visit from BBC’s Spy in the Huddle. Several spy cams including a rockhopper cam and an egg cam were placed into Penguins Rock, and the penguins loved it! Naturally inquisitive, they were immediately interested in the new additions to their colony. One rockhopper even tried to groom rockhopper cam!”

The 100th anniversary of penguins ties in with Penguin Awareness Week at Edinburgh Zoo, which runs from Monday 20th January until Sunday 26th January. As part of the celebrations,

an extra penguin talk will be occurring each day at 11am, along with the regular talk and feed after the penguin parade at 2:15pm. Exclusive footage from when BBC's Spy in the Huddle spy cams visited Edinburgh Zoo's penguins will also be screened in the Penguins Rock Habitat Hut.

