

Six African penguins now call Vancouver Aquarium home

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VANCOUVER -- The Vancouver Aquarium welcomed its newest residents Thursday — six African penguins who took to their new habitat with ease.

The penguins, which were born in captivity at the New England Aquarium in Boston, have already been acclimatized to our weather, said Vancouver Aquarium president and CEO John Nightingale.

“Contrary to popular belief, penguins don’t live with polar bears in the northern hemisphere. There’s a whole group of temperate penguins,” he said.

He said the African penguins fit right into Vancouver’s climate and will be on display to help educate the public about this endangered species. The animal’s numbers have declined from 100,000 in the early 1900s to approximately 20,000 due to overfishing and climate change, he noted.

“They are a fascinating group of animals who were part of the old Stanley Park Zoo. We’ve been waiting ever since to bring them back [after the zoo stopped its penguin exhibit and later closed]. So many people over the years have been asking us when were they coming back. They catch people’s imagination.”

Nightingale said the exhibit, called Penguin Point, recreates penguin habitat from South Africa with a 12,000-gallon water tank and a beach area.

He said the cost of the display was \$750,000 and is part of the aquarium’s two-year expansion program, expected to cost between \$75 million and \$100 million when complete.



“Penguin Point is the first real step in our expansion and one of the first visible pieces of it after the [new aquarium] entrance. It allows people to see and explore animals they don’t have contact with.”

One of the reasons why penguins are so fascinating is the fact they can’t fly, said Lauren Hartling, the marine mammal interpreter specialist.

Hartling pointed out penguins are amazingly fast swimmers, reaching speeds of up to 20 km/h with powerful flippers, and spend three-quarters of their lives in the ocean.

She said the penguins can also stay for nearly three minutes underwater and can eat fish underwater as well.

Hartling said the six penguins, four females and two males, have yet to be named and the aquarium is having a contest by sending in suggestions based on B.C. cities, towns and neighbourhoods. There will also be a seventh penguin joining the group in the near future.

The contest deadline is June 17 and the winners selected will get a one-year family membership and an opportunity to go on a VIP visit to meet the penguins. To enter, go to vanaqua.org/penguincontest.

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