

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release | October 26, 2020
Media contact: Gigi Allanic, Meghan Sawyer
woodlandparkzoopr@zoo.org

Zoo loses its oldest penguin, Mr. Sea ***Geriatric bird was one of the oldest Humboldt penguins in North America***

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo said goodbye to Mr. Sea, a male Humboldt penguin. Due to a severe decline in health, he has been humanely euthanized. The geriatric penguin was two months shy of his 32nd birthday.

Mr. Sea was the oldest penguin at the zoo and one of the oldest of his species in North America. Forty penguins remain in the zoo's colony.

Because of his advanced age, Mr. Sea had been under close observation by the penguin keepers and animal health team. During the last several weeks, his appetite and activity level were in decline.

The median life expectancy (excluding first year mortality) for Humboldt penguins is 17.6 years for both males and females.

Mr. Sea had lived at Woodland Park Zoo for 11 years. He fathered nine offspring at his former home and at the zoo; he leaves a legacy of 12 viable grandchicks, great-grandchicks and great-great grandchicks.

"Mr. Sea was a special penguin because of his social personality and was a favorite of our staff and volunteers," said Mark Myers, bird curator at Woodland Park Zoo. He really enjoyed his daily interactions with keepers and especially liked the extra attention he received during his physical rehabilitation sessions. He will be missed."

As a standard procedure, the zoo's animal health team will perform a necropsy (an animal autopsy) to determine factors that contributed to his decline. "Results will be shared nationally among scientific colleagues to help advance the understanding of medical issues in penguins," said Dr. Darin Collins, director of animal health at Woodland Park Zoo. The cause of death is pending final pathology tests in several weeks.

In late 2015, staff began closely monitoring Mr. Sea's quality of life. "At that time, we noticed geriatric-related changes in his mobility and activity patterns. He was diagnosed with osteoarthritis and prescribed a program of pain medications and physical rehabilitation that included laser therapy, massage and acupuncture," said Collins. "Through our geriatric care program, we were able to maintain an acceptable quality of life for Mr. Sea for many years."

Many animal species are living longer in zoos largely due to the evolving field of zoo medicine. "Improved husbandry and management techniques, geriatric care, enhanced species-specific nutritional plans, medical breakthroughs, diagnostic and therapeutic techniques, and comprehensive enrichment programs have contributed to extending the life expectancies of animals in zoos," explained Collins.

As part of its exemplary animal care, Woodland Park Zoo practices physical rehabilitation to help alleviate discomfort from an injury or surgical treatment, to improve circulation or range of motion and coordination and to enhance life quality. It is particularly beneficial for treating age-related changes, such as arthritis, and can help reduce the need or amount of other medications.

In honor of Mr. Sea, adopt a penguin through Woodland Park Zoo's ZooParent Animal Adoption Program: <https://www.zoo.org/zooparent>. A portion of each adoption goes to support penguin conservation in the field.



A vulnerable species, approximately 32,000 Humboldt penguins survive in their natural range. Woodland Park Zoo has long been committed to conserving the species by supporting [The Center for Conservation of the Humboldt Penguin](#) in Punta San Juan, Peru, participating in the conservation breeding program through the Humboldt Penguin [Species Survival Plan](#), and encouraging visitors to choose sustainable seafood options as directed by Monterey Bay Aquarium's [Seafood Watch](#) program. Punta San Juan is home to approximately 5,000 Humboldt penguins, the largest colony in Peru.

Penguin Points

- Unlike their ice and snow-dwelling Antarctic cousins, Humboldt penguins inhabit hot, dry coastlines in Peru and Chile.
- Penguins are playful by nature and also noisy. Their vocalizations sound much like a donkey braying.
- These birds are built to swim. Using their strong wings, they “fly” underwater, usually just below the surface, at speeds of up to 20 miles per hour, steering with their feet and tail.
- Humboldt penguins lose all their feathers each year and systematically replace them with new feathers in a process called molting, which can take up to a few weeks.

###