

Aquarium to debut rare baby penguins

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Two baby gentoo penguins, about the size of softballs, were to make their debut Thursday at the Newport Aquarium, The Cincinnati Enquirer reports.

One was set to appear in the main Kingdom of Penguins exhibit with its parents, while the other will be hand-raised in the nursery. The penguins were born Dec. 19 and 20.

Gentoo penguins are a "threatened" species -- one step from "endangered" -- native to the southern tip of South America and the edge of Antarctica. They're the smallest of the penguin family, averaging 2 feet tall and 10-12 pounds.

Only 20 institutions in the world -- 11 in the United States -- display them, and only five successfully bred them in 2005.

The two babies, gender undetermined, are the first issue of the Newport Aquarium's flock of 14 gentoo and nine king penguins.

"Breeding in captivity isn't unheard of, but it's difficult," said Ric Urban, aquarium biologist and curator of birds. "All the factors have to be right, and then there's always the danger of the parents accidentally cracking the egg early."

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