

A baby boom of African penguin chicks hatches at a San Francisco science museum

February 8 2024



African penguin chick Lazola, foreground, and his brother, Ignatz, both born in February 2023, stand on rocks in the penguin exhibit at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, Thursday, Feb. 8, 2024. The science museum in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park has a bounty of African penguin chicks after 10 hatched in just over a year as part of an effort to conserve the endangered bird. Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu

A bounty of 10 African penguin chicks has hatched in just over a year at a San Francisco science museum as part of an effort to conserve the endangered bird.

The penguins began hatching in November 2022, ending a four year period without any new chicks, and continued through January of this year, the California Academy of Sciences announced Wednesday.

African penguins have dwindled to 9,000 breeding pairs in the wild, the academy said in a statement.

Threats such as overfishing, habitat degradation and oil spills have reduced colonies of the charismatic black-and-white birds, said Brenda Melton, director of animal care and well-being at the museum's Steinhart Aquarium.

"Every chick we welcome strengthens the genetics and overall population of the species in human care," she said.

Chicks spend their first three weeks with their penguin parents in a nest box. They then attend "fish school," where they learn to swim on their own and eat fish provided by biologists. Once ready, they are introduced to the colony.

The 21 penguins at the museum in Golden Gate Park have distinct personalities and are identifiable by their arm bands, according to the academy's website.

Opal is the oldest and, at age 36, has perfected the ability to catch fish in mid-air. Her partner, Pete, is a messy eater and a flirt.



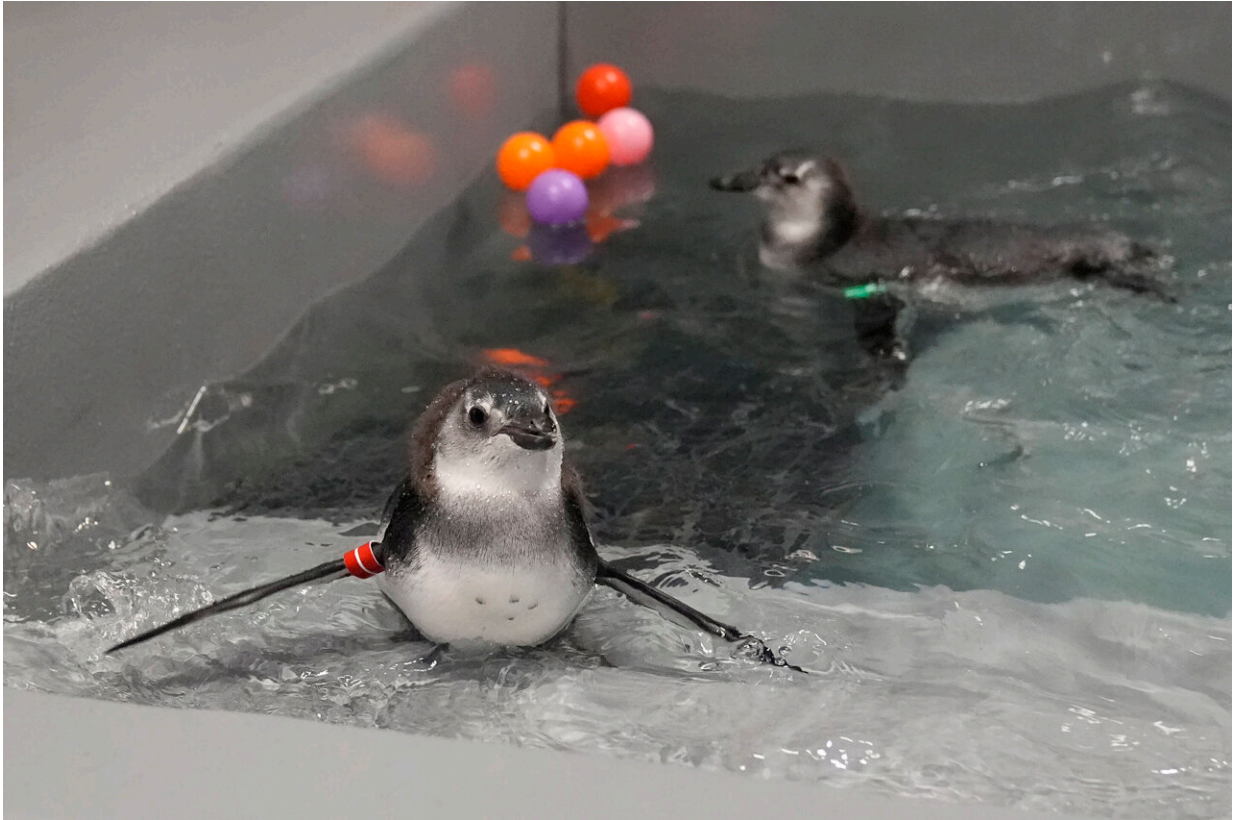
African penguin chicks Nelson, left, walks next to Alice, both born in November 2023, at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, Thursday, Feb. 8, 2024. The museum in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park has a bounty of African penguin chicks after 10 hatched in just over a year as part of an effort to conserve the endangered bird. Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu



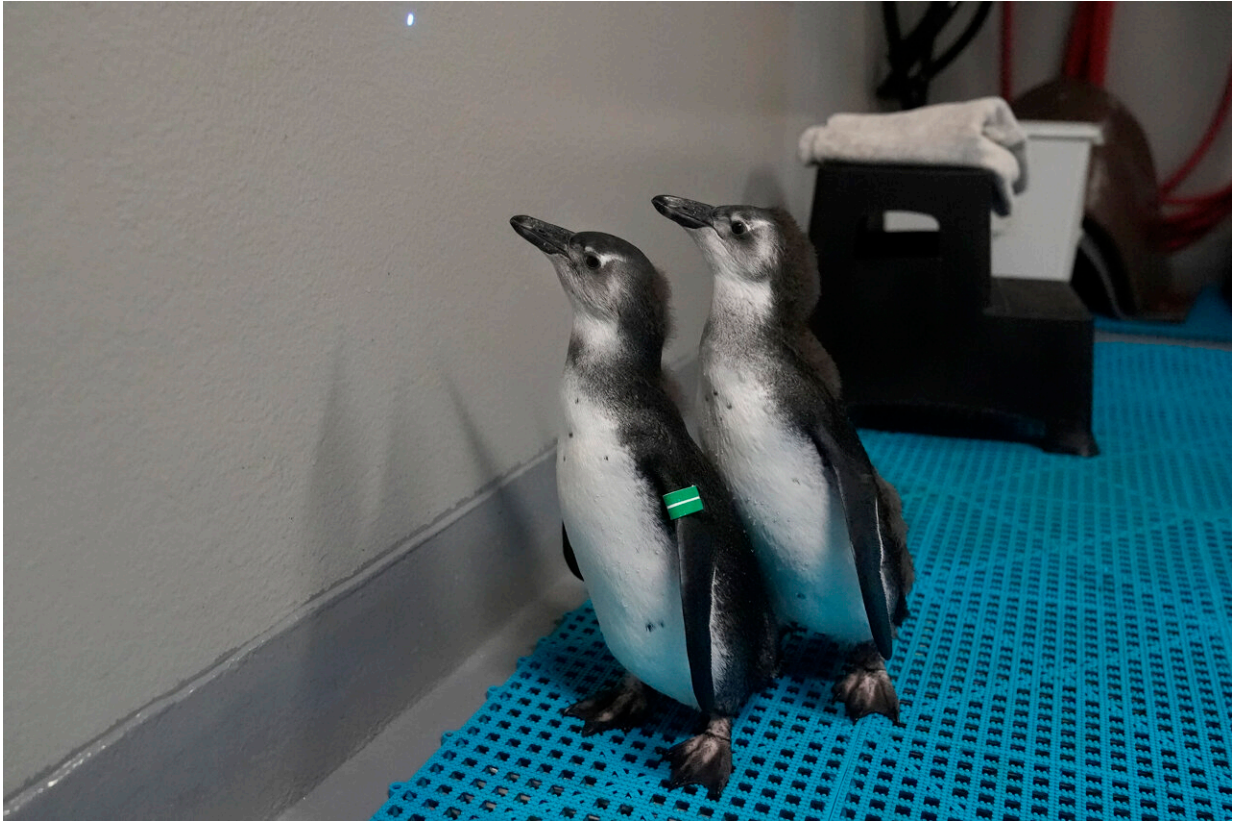
African penguin chick Fyn, born in August 2023, sits on a rock in the penguin exhibit at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, Thursday, Feb. 8, 2024. The museum in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park has a bounty of African penguin chicks after 10 hatched in just over a year as part of an effort to conserve the endangered bird. Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu



California Academy of Sciences senior biologist Holly Rosenbaum holds an unnamed African penguin chick, born in January 2024, in San Francisco, Thursday, Feb. 8, 2024. The museum in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park has a bounty of African penguin chicks after 10 hatched in just over a year as part of an effort to conserve the endangered bird. Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu



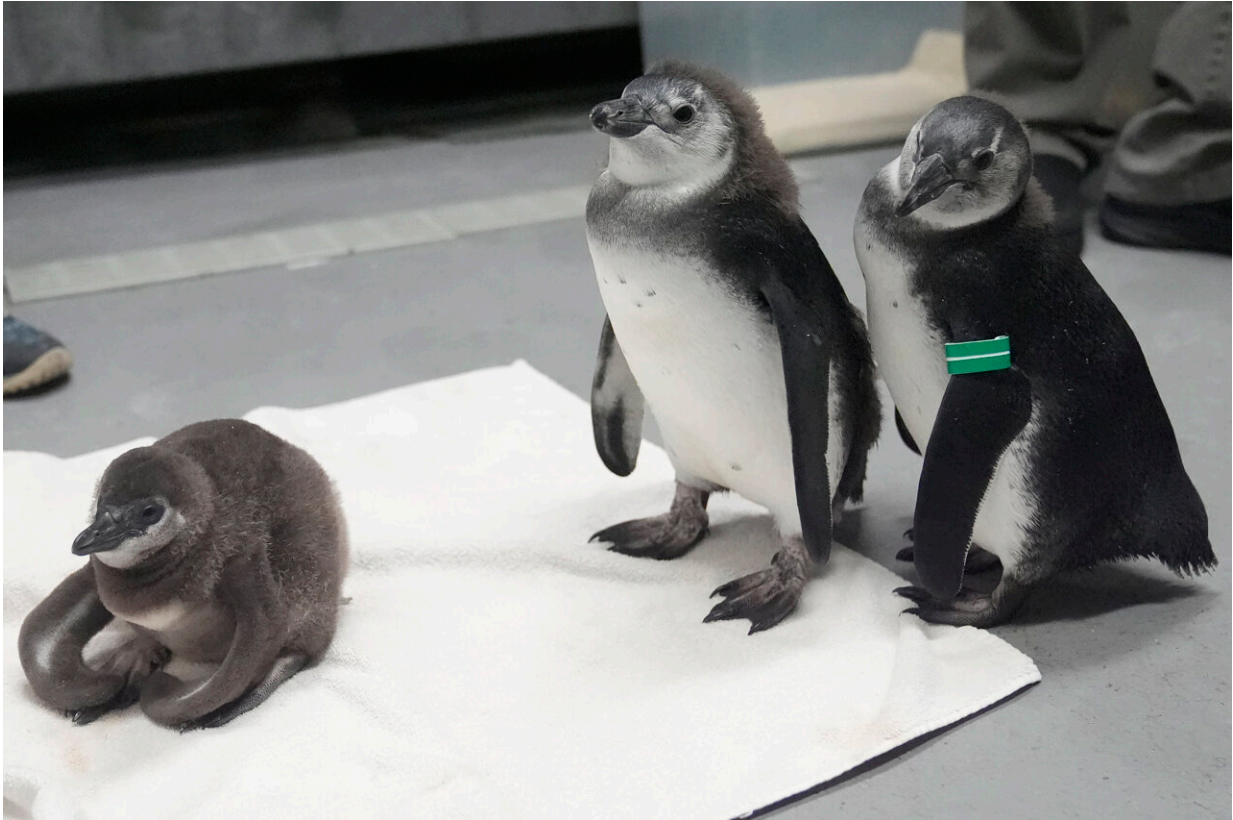
African penguin chicks Nelson, left, and Alice, both born in November 2023, swim in a pool of water at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, Thursday, Feb. 8, 2024. The museum in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park has a bounty of African penguin chicks after 10 hatched in just over a year as part of an effort to conserve the endangered bird. Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu



African penguin chicks Alice, left, and Nelson, both born in November 2023, follow a laser pointer on the wall at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, Thursday, Feb. 8, 2024. The museum in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park has a bounty of African penguin chicks after 10 hatched in just over a year as part of an effort to conserve the endangered bird. Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu



Senior biologist Holly Rosenbaum tends to penguins at the California Academy of Sciences African penguin exhibit in San Francisco, Thursday, Feb. 8, 2024. The museum in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park has a bounty of African penguin chicks after 10 hatched in just over a year as part of an effort to conserve the endangered bird. Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu



An unnamed African penguin chick, left, born in January 2024, sits on a towel next to Nelson, middle, and Alice, both born in November 2023, at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, Thursday, Feb. 8, 2024. The museum in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park has a bounty of African penguin chicks after 10 hatched in just over a year as part of an effort to conserve the endangered bird. Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu



An unnamed African penguin chick, born in January 2024, sits on a towel at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, Thursday, Feb. 8, 2024. The museum in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park has a bounty of African penguin chicks after 10 hatched in just over a year as part of an effort to conserve the endangered bird. Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu



One-year old African penguin chick Ozzie, foreground, sits in the California Academy of Sciences penguin exhibit in San Francisco, Thursday, Feb. 8, 2024. The museum in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park has a bounty of African penguin chicks after 10 hatched in just over a year as part of an effort to conserve the endangered bird. Credit: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu

Partners Stanlee and Bernie, who both like to bray, produced four of the 10 chicks, including Fyn, named for a type of vegetation found on the southern tip of Africa. Fyn is the youngest on exhibit and older sister to Nelson and Alice, both hatched in November.

Fyn often runs up to biologists when they enter the habitat and shakes her head at them—typical courtship behavior that chicks and juveniles commonly display toward people who have cared for them since

hatching.

The youngest chick hatched Jan. 12, and its sex has not yet been determined.

African penguins can live to be 27 years old in the wild, and longer in captivity.

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