

Chicago aquarium releases penguins after exhibits close due to coronavirus

By N'dea Yancey-Bragg, USA Today, adapted by Newsela staff on 03.23.20

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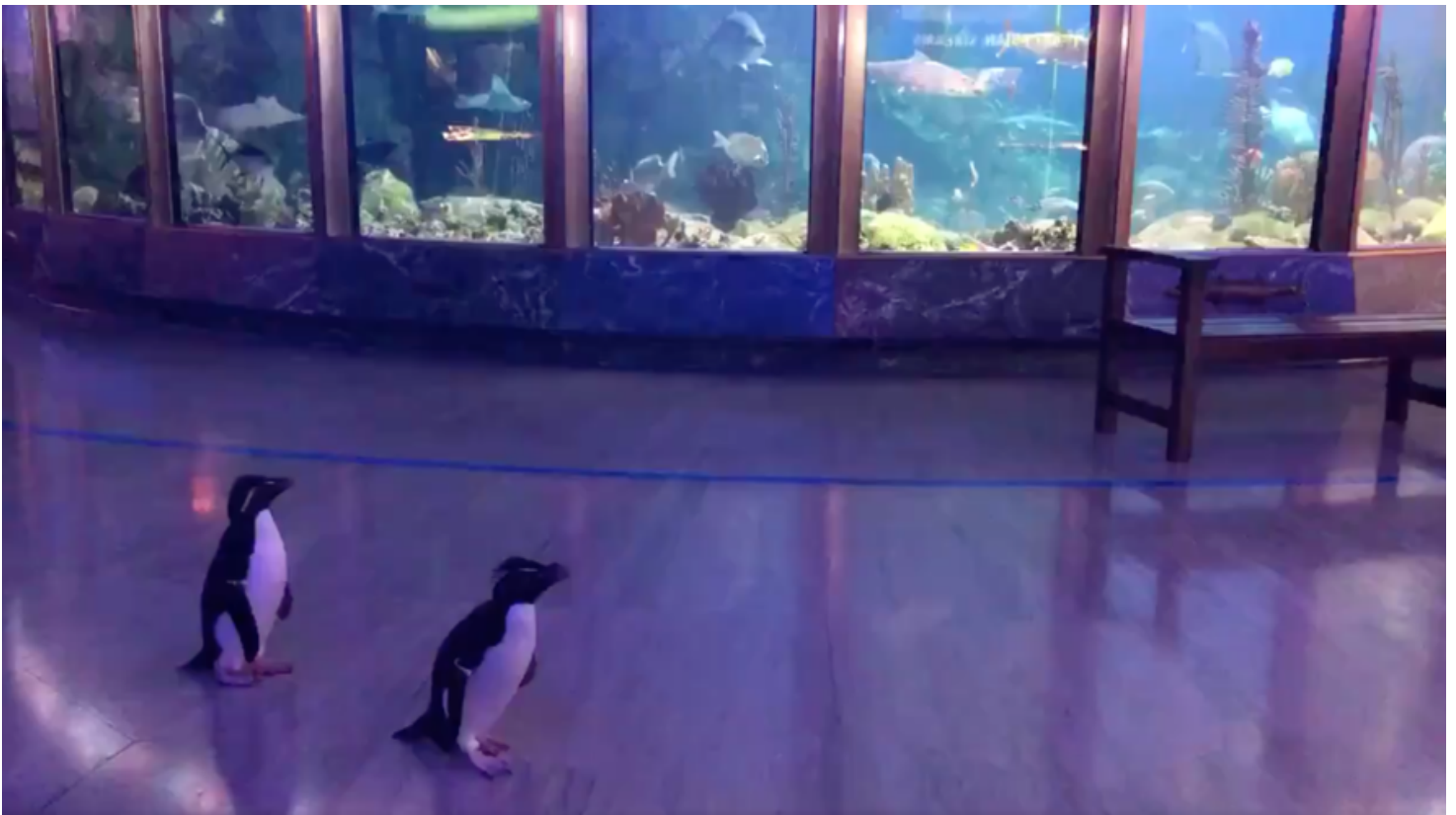


Image 1. The morning of March 15, 2020, Edward and Annie explored the main floor at Shedd Aquarium in Chicago, Illinois. They are a bonded pair of rockhopper penguins, which means they are together for nesting season. Image: Shedd Aquarium Twitter @shedd_aquarium

After Chicago, Illinois' Shedd Aquarium was forced to close amid the coronavirus pandemic, staff decided to let a few waddling residents out of their enclosures for a field trip.

The aquarium shared videos on Twitter on March 15 of three penguins checking out exhibits from the other side of the glass.

"Without guests in the building, caretakers are getting creative in how they provide enrichment to animals," the aquarium said in a statement. "Introducing new experiences, activities, foods and more to keep them active, encourage them to explore, problem-solve and express natural behaviors."

In one video, a rockhopper penguin named Wellington visits the aquarium's Amazon Rising exhibit. The exhibit features creatures from the Amazon River basin. The Amazon River basin is the largest river system and rain forest on Earth. At 30 years old, Wellington is the oldest penguin at the aquarium. He has lived there since it opened in 1991.

Some of the penguins went on a field trip to meet other animals at Shedd. Wellington seemed most interested in the fish in Amazon Rising! The black-barred silver dollars also seemed interested in their unusual visitors.

In another video, a pair of bonded rockhopper penguins named Edward and Annie waddle past a tank full of sharks and rays. Eventually, they wander all the way toward the information desk.

Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker shut down all restaurants. He also closed schools and banned public gatherings over 50 people. President Donald Trump on March 16 issued guidelines. The guidelines called for Americans to avoid social gatherings of more than 10 people and to limit discretionary travel.



Trump said the call for social distancing could last until August. It has led to the closure of many of Chicago's popular attractions. Among those are the Navy Pier and Cloud Gate Plaza. Cloud Gate Plaza is a section of Millennium Park. It features the famous Cloud Gate sculpture nicknamed "The Bean."

Zoos are also closed due to coronavirus concerns. Some have stayed connected with the public by live-streaming shows with popular animals. The Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden has live-streamed a show with Fiona the hippo. The El Paso Zoo has "zoo cams." They let viewers sneak a peek at the daily life of meerkats, sea lions, giraffes, orangutans and more.

Hector is a Patagonian mara at the Fort Worth Zoo. He has also stepped out for some fresh air while the zoo is closed. Hector got to meet three excited otters during his trek: Benji, Hudson and Makita.

Shedd will remain closed until March 29. It has invited the public to follow along digitally as Edward and Annie begin to build their nests. They will begin building them starting the week of March 23.

"And yes, Wellington will return!" the aquarium tweeted.