



Living In Harmony: Parrots and Penguins

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It is becoming more popular in zoological gardens to show animal communities with different animal families, in order to approach more closely the habitats of these animals. Recently, Loro Parque also carried out a new experiment in this kind of animal socialisation. In the biggest penguinarium worldwide of Loro Parque, four different penguin species are exhibited in habitats which imitate the natural climatic conditions. In the antarctic exhibition are King, Gentoos and Rockhopper penguins, in an air temperature of zero degrees and with snow machines producing daily up to 12 tons of fresh snow.

Humboldt penguins, which live on the Pacific coast of South America from north Peru to Chile in warmer regions and even in subtropical areas, are kept in another exhibition. Nowadays, the Humboldt penguin has a total population of 15,000 to 18,000 birds and overall is the rarest penguin species. At the end of 2002 its own exhibition "El Pacifico" was created for this endangered penguin species, which includes a big and deep pool and a real rock area with over eighty rock cavities used as nesting sites by the penguins. The group has increased to over 50 birds due to regular new blood. Greater Amberjacks were added to the aquarium part, and can be seen by the visitors through a big viewing window. As these fish can reach the dimensions of a penguin, they will not be attacked by them and therefore a harmonious existence between the fish and the diving penguins can be observed.

In order to revive the part of the enclosure above water, an attempt was made to add Burrowing Parrots (*Cyanoliseus patagonus bloxami*). Two birds of one and two years respectively born in Loro Parque were chosen for this socialisation experiment. Burrowing Parrots originate from the coastal areas of central Chile and this subspecies is critically endangered. The population is estimated below 4,000 birds. These parrots live predominantly in rocky areas and therefore are suitable for this socialisation attempt in the penguinarium due to their habitat requirement.

A combination of new animal species must be implemented carefully as they do not know each other. Thus, during the first days, the two Burrowing Parrots stayed under survey in the penguin exhibition only for some hours. It was very interesting to observe how the penguins reacted to these new cohabitants. They were standing in a group, looking at the flying birds the whole time, and the heads of the whole group moved synchronously with the movements of the "unidentified flying objects".

First of all, the Burrowing parrots needed to learn how to use and to explore the extensive flying space. Especially the fact that, suddenly, rocks could be used for perching was something the birds needed to get used to.

Thus, it happened that the parrots were landing amongst the penguins. The puzzled penguins came closer, but the parrots had already flown away in view of the possible danger. Also landing trials on

the water surface of the enclosure came to a quick stop as soon as they had contact with the water. Both birds learned very fast to recognize the danger and to find food. Now the parrots are no longer transferred any more to the aviary but stay the whole night in the exhibition.

The visitors of Loro Parque reacted with surprise, but also with great delight to see the parrots together with the penguins. The group of Burrowing Parrots will be extended gradually after a further positive trial period of several weeks. For the first time in the whole world, parrots and penguins are exhibited in the same enclosure. ■

