

(Sidebar)Environmental protection sought for penguin, murrelet

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By Michelle J. Lee

Journal Environment Writer

In addition to polar bears, environmentalists are also seeking protection for two types of birds.

A petition to get 12 penguin species threatened and endangered status was filed in November by **the Center for Biological Diversity**, a conservation group.

Among the species are the Emperor penguin, popularized by the animated film Happy Feet and the documentary March of the Penguins, and the Humboldt penguin, the variety found at the Roger Williams Park Zoo.

Penguins are found in the southern hemisphere. Melting sea ice is leaving Emperor penguins less space to breed and raise their young. Other problems include pollution and the fishing industry.

In the case of the Humboldt penguin in South America, the primary threats are fishing by humans and harvesting of guano, or bird droppings, said Tim French, the Roger Williams zoo's deputy director for animal programs. Penguins use guano for nests, while humans use it as fertilizer. Last year, the zoo donated \$500 to help sustainable guano harvesting in Peru.

The penguin petition is undergoing a 90-day review to see whether it has substantial scientific merit, said Valerie Fellows, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Washington, D.C.

The other bird is the Kittlitz's murrelet, a small diving auk found in Alaska and Russia. The center first campaigned for the bird in 2001.

The decline of the Kittlitz's murrelet population may be related to melting glaciers, fisheries and oil spills, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

A proposal to consider listing the Kittlitz's murrelet will be prepared once financing becomes available, said Bruce Woods, a spokesman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska region.

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Center of attention

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PROVIDENCE -- As sea ice in the Arctic Circle melts, the plight of the polar bear has attracted worldwide attention, turning the animal into one of the most powerful symbols of the threat of global warming.

Environmentalists are pushing to list the polar bear as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, the first animal that could be included solely because of global warming.

The Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Ariz., hopes to mate Kobe, right, and Boris. Kobe was born at the Roger Williams Park Zoo. Roger Williams' polar bear display, which closed in 2005, is expected to reopen in 2010.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LESLIE WATERS, REID PARK ZOO

At the Roger Williams Park Zoo, officials support the campaign, which comes at a time when the zoo is creating a new polar bear exhibit that will be the centerpiece of an estimated \$13.6-million renovation. The zoo expects to open the exhibit in early 2010.

Tim French, the zoo's deputy director for animal programs, said many generations of zoo visitors have loved polar bears.

The zoo's previous polar bear exhibit, which closed in 2005, lasted for 25 years -- housing eight bears at different times, including two, Triton and Kobe, who were born at the zoo. The exhibit's last bear, Trixie, the mother of both Triton and Kobe, died in May 2005 from complications after being sedated to prepare her for a move to a zoo in Indianapolis. Triton, 9, is at the Indianapolis zoo; Kobe, 6, is at the Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Ariz.; and their father, Norton, 19, is at the Detroit zoo.

French believes the zoo's planned exhibit will provide a new vehicle to talk about the bears, climate change and what individuals can do to help fight global warming.

"We historically focus more on the altruistic part of conservation, we should really do this because it's the right thing to do," French said. "But we need to do a better job helping people to see conservation is for our own benefit as much as anything else."

The new polar bear display will be nine times larger than the old one. New features will include a cub den for breeding, a digging pit to simulate Arctic tundra, and a large saltwater pool with a glass divider to let polar bears and harbor seals safely swim side by side.

Some of the polar bears' neighbors will include endangered species that have rebounded, such as bald eagles, bison and red wolves.

Digital Extra

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