

# MARIN

MAGAZINE

## **Pam Schaller of Sausalito**

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To the 38,000 creatures at the **California Academy of Sciences**, the fact that Pam Schaller has been riding a mini publicity wave after being written about in the book *Pierre the Penguin: a True Story* is not important. Nor is the fact that she saved Pierre's life by tailoring the world's first penguin wetsuit. What is important is that every day she shows up to work and monitors the temperatures, salinity and humidity of their habitats to make sure they stay alive. Recently Schaller agreed to share some details about her life, her work and how she came to make her home with her husband on a boat in Sausalito.

**How long have you lived in Marin?** Six years. I have lived in tourist towns throughout my adult life, and I find the carefree nature of tourists is inspiring.

**How did you find your floating home?** I was lucky enough to meet an academy employee named Daryl who gave me a copy of Latitude 38. He mentioned it was the best local sailing rag around. I found my sailboat and eventually even found the slip where I live through it.

**Where did you grow up?** I'd say I started to grow up post-college. Three places that taught me about beauty, love, life and true happiness: Idyllwild, Catalina Island and Oahu. Still growing up in Sausalito.

**What influenced you to become a marine biologist?** Some internal drive—the sound and smell of water is what wakes me up in the morning. Also, I spent a summer at a desk job as a financial intern.

**You worked with reticulated giraffes and zebras at the Honolulu Zoo. What do you miss most about Hawaii?** The zoo experience was interesting and challenging, especially hand-raising a giraffe calf. About Hawaii, I miss warm water, warm rain and the locals the most. They taught me so much about reading the ocean, especially knowing how the ocean floor determines

the break of the waves.

**Do you have a favorite lunch item at the academy cafe?** Chicken tacos. They are simple, fast and satisfying. Also red and yellow beet salad when it's available.

**Did you like the movie *Happy Feet*?** The concept of the movie was to teach the importance of learning to be true to yourself. This lesson is easy to teach to young viewers through animated penguins. As important, it brought penguins before an interested audience.

**What do you think people don't realize when watching Pierre with his buddies?** The penguin communicates through body positioning, head movements and vocalizations. It can be a subtle difference between penguins courting each other and demonstrating dominance over each other (just as it can be between humans).

**Do the penguins realize we are there when we wave to them from the other side of the glass?** Yes, many of our younger penguins seem to seek out interaction with guests. Whether they are swimming and chasing running children or guests have something bright and shiny that catches the penguins' eyes, penguins are essentially hardwired to be stimulated by action or shiny, flashy objects. That replicates the fish that is the most important element to their survival.

**What is the easiest thing we can do to help wild penguins?** Find out about the groups researching, rehabilitating or managing the wild populations, such as SANCCOB (Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds).

**Favorite restaurant(s) in Marin?** Caffe Divino, Feng Nian, Thai Terrace, Poggio.

**What is your favorite drink, and where do you like to enjoy it?** Kettle soda at Paradise Bay. When I texted a good friend "In Paradise for happy hour," I realized, that is an excellent epitaph.