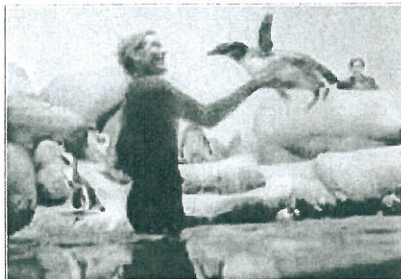


Penguins feeling right at home in museum digs

By **BETSY MASON/MediaNews Group**

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Biologist Pamela Schaller feeds a colony of African Penguins at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. (Karl Mondon/MediaNews Group)

SAN FRANCISCO - Twenty African penguins are settling in to spacious new digs at the California Academy of Science's newly built museum in Golden Gate Park, and they are visibly pleased.

The San Francisco museum will open to the public Sept. 27, but the penguins held their debut for the media Wednesday happily mugging for cameras and flirting with reporters.

"I really think we went and did everything right for this group of birds," said aquatic biologist Pamela Schaller, who has cared for the penguins for eight years. "I can't believe how comfortable they are already."

Comfortable, indeed. Not only were the birds nesting, frolicking, diving and happily accepting fish from Schaller's bucket Wednesday, they are also getting busy, ahem, copulating.

The birds' new home, which includes a 25,000-gallon tank with a surge system to simulate wave action, can be seen through a 26-by-16-foot acrylic window.

"These penguins really like to interact with people," Schaller said. "You'll be able to walk right up and feel like you're part of this penguin colony."

The penguin exhibit is at the end of the Academy's African Hall, which is still being put together.

African Hall is the only hall being recreated from the original museum. The two dozen 17-foot-tall dioramas will house the same 80-year-old animal specimens, with backgrounds painted to look like the originals.