



media release

Thursday 22 August 2013

VETS SAVE PENGUIN'S SIGHT

A 19 year-old Humboldt penguin from Colchester Zoo has had her sight saved after being treated at the Animal Health Trust (AHT).

The penguin, Wellamy, was referred to the AHT after her keepers noticed that her sight was deteriorating. Claudia Hartley, Head of Ophthalmology at the AHT, took a small team of AHT vets out to the zoo to assess Wellamy's eye sight.

Wellamy was diagnosed with severe cataracts in both eyes. Surgery was the only option for this poor penguin in order to restore her vision, so that she could continue to live happily at Colchester Zoo with her colony.

Claudia Hartley said: "Upon examining Wellamy we found that she had cataracts in both eyes which meant her vision was extremely impaired, especially under water. She also had severe inflammation called uveitis due to the cataracts which was causing her discomfort. It was in her best interest that we operate as quickly as possible to relieve the pain and restore her sight."

Cataracts are typically an age related condition, and at 19 years of age, it is not unsurprising that Wellamy developed cataracts. Cataract surgery is an extremely delicate procedure on any animal, but all birds are notoriously tricky to anaesthetise. A specialist in anaesthetising zoo animals, Steven Philp, from the International Zoo Veterinary Group (IZVG) was called in to assist the AHT team.

For this reason, both eyes were operated on during the same procedure, so that Wellamy need only endure one anaesthetic and could get back to the zoo as soon as possible.

Wellamy was kept in isolation for several weeks under the watchful eye of Colchester Zoo's IZVG Vet John Lewis, and keeper Kate Broad, who monitored how her eyes were healing and administered regular eye drops.

Kate Broad, Wellamy's keeper, said: "We noticed that Wellamy was having difficulties mixing with the other penguins due to the problems with her sight, so we got in touch with Animal Health Trust straight away and were really pleased that they could help her.

"Wellamy was hatched here at the zoo so we've grown very close to her. She is a real character. We're extremely pleased that thanks to the treatment she's received, she will be able to live a much happier life.

"The AHT team were absolutely fantastic. Operating on a penguin is no easy task but the AHT team are experts in this kind of procedure and took every precaution to ensure that Wellamy received the very best care."

Claudia Hartley and her team returned to the zoo several times in the first few weeks after the procedure to monitor how Wellamy's eyes were healing, and then a month later to see how Wellamy was getting on back with her friends in the enclosure.

Claudia added: "Wellamy's eyes have healed really well. I was delighted to see that she looked fantastic. Really full of herself, crowing with her mates and back to her gobby normal self! The transformation was really quite incredible from my first visit where she was very subdued and wasn't mixing with the other penguins.

"Restoring vision in animals is really like nothing else. It makes you feel like a hero! I'm very lucky to work at the Animal Health Trust where we have an amazing team and amazing facilities, where we can help treat animals and improve their vision every day of the week!

"We have a history of working with exotic animals, including: sealions, seals, bears, a dolphin, tiger, lioness, wallaby, golden eagle and an elephant, amongst others, but

never before has my team treated a penguin. This was an amazing experience for us as vets, and it was great news for Wellamy and for Colchester Zoo that the operation was a success.”

To see a video of Wellamy’s story please visit www.youtube.com/ahttv.

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For further information, please contact:

Katherine Lawson, AHT press office, 01638 751000 ext 1572.

Please credit the image of Wellamy to Colchester Zoo.

Additional notes:

- The **Animal Health Trust** is an independent charity, employing over 200 scientists, vets and support workers. It aims to improve the health and welfare of horses, dogs and cats through research. It also provides specialist referral services and continuous education to vets. Visit our website at www.aht.org.uk
- Colchester Zoo is a member of BIAZA. BIAZA is the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums. They are the professional body representing the best zoos and aquariums in Britain and Ireland. Member Collections pride themselves on their excellent animal welfare, education and conservation work. BIAZA supports them in their work and helps promote the work of good zoos and aquariums.