

Ludwig Fessler

Rockhopper penguins at Schönbrunn Zoo



35 years of experience in keeping and breeding

Experience is not what happens to you;
it's what you do with what happens to you.

Aldous Huxley

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Foreword

Keeping penguins has a very long tradition at Schönbrunn Zoo. After WWII, the efforts initially concentrated on Humboldt and Jackass penguins. It wasn't until 1975, upon completion of the Seal House with its integrated facility for penguins, that more demanding species such as King and Rockhopper penguins could be held.

My career as an animal keeper began in October 1977. My first contact with penguins took place in my second year of training. Towards the end of my training period I was already spending most of my time in the Seal House and therefore assigned to the Rockhopper penguins as well. Upon completing my apprenticeship exams I worked in various enclosures, but my true passion always remained the Seal House. My interest in these comical, upright-walking birds continued to grow during this period. In spring 1982 I was permanently assigned to the seal and penguin facility. At this time, none of the three penguin species had ever produced offspring. I enthusiastically accepted this challenge. The time of experiments and setbacks began. At that time, information on penguin keeping was generally very incomplete – only minimal documentation was available from other zoos as well. Even the scientific literature offered little useful material. In the first 15 years I undertook one or two tours to the various zoos almost every year. Initially, I mainly visited German zoos in order to gain information about the animals under my care. Around 1990, these trips also took me to Berlin, where my colleague and newly won friend Dieter Petersen had collected the first useful and more detailed tips about hand-raising