

ZOO

Swans and Foxes

Zoo announces swan hatchlings and fennec fox births.

Photo by Tad Motoyama/L.A. Zoo

On Aug. 2, the Zoo announced the hatching of two black-necked swans and the birth of three fennec foxes.

Hatched on July 18, the black-necked swans are being reared by their parents in their habitat across from the flamingos and meerkats. Covered with a faint grayish-white down, the precocial cygnets (young swans) get help from both parents in obtaining food while they're still young. Cygnets often ride on their parents' backs for both warmth and protection in their first two to three weeks.

Native to the southern portion of South America and the Falkland Islands, black-necked swans prefer to live in swamps, fresh water marshes, brackish water lagoons and sheltered coastal sites. They primarily eat aquatic vegetation, but will occasionally eat aquatic insects, invertebrates and fish spawn.

As with other swans, usually lifetime pair bonds are formed between mates. Prior to breeding, black-necked swans perform a mutual display of neck dipping and stretching accompanied by a soft, musical call. If one male swan drives off a rival, a triumph ceremony is performed.

The three fennec fox kits, born on May 24, are being raised by their parents in the Winnick Family Children's Zoo. It takes patience and a keen eye to spot the littermates as they are great hiders.

Fennec foxes, the smallest wild canine, weigh just less than three-and-a-half pounds when they are fully grown. In contrast to their small stature,



A male black neck swan with a signet on its back.

fennec foxes have distinctively large ears that can reach a length of up to six inches; about one-third of their body length. Their ears serve as "radiators" that dissipate heat enabling the foxes to stay cool. They also enhance the fox's acute sense of hearing, helping them detect prey.

Fennec foxes are nocturnal animals that hunt small rodents, birds, eggs, lizards and insects. Native to the deserts of North Africa, fennec foxes live in burrows. Their cream-colored coats allow them to blend in with their desert surroundings.

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