

THE GAYS IN TUXEDOS

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Is homosexuality natural? The question has always raised debate, but there may be a definitive answer after all. It lies among a group of stylish, tuxedo wearing birds. Studies show that homosexual behaviour in penguins is actually incredibly common, especially amongst males.

Homosexuality in penguins has been reported since as early as 1910, when scientist George Murray Levick wrote a paper on the sexual habits of the Adelie penguin. At the time, the penguin's behaviour was described as "depraved", and the paper was hidden, with the English text being written in Greek letters to make it inaccessible to the average reader. It wasn't until the late 1990s that homosexual behaviour amongst penguins became a well-known topic. Same-sex chinstrap penguin couple, Roy and Silo, of the Central Park Zoo, rose to international fame in 1998, when staff at the zoo noticed the pair performing mating rituals, and in 1999, one of the pair appeared to be incubating a rock, as if it were an egg. In 2005, a children's picture book titled "And Tango Makes Three" was released. The book tells the true story of Roy and Silo, and their successful quest to hatch and raise a chick.

Roy and Silo are not the only same-sex penguin pair to successfully raise a chick either. In fact, a pair of female king penguins at Auckland's Kelly Tarlton's had fostered three chicks as of February 2019. The pair, Thelma and Louise, had been together for eight years at the time of Stuff's article. Australia is also known for a queer penguin couple. Spheer and Magic were a pair of male gentoo penguins living at Sea Life Aquarium in Sydney. Spheer and Magic stayed together for five years, and in that time they adopted two chicks, Lara, and Clancy.

Some argue that queer and non-traditional relationships do not last, and are not as committed or loving as traditional, heterosexual partnerships. Penguins like Spheer and Magic make it clear, however, that this is not the case. Spheer and Magic were together until the end, and when Spheer died in August of 2024, Magic sang for him. Penguin keepers at Sea Life Sydney allowed Magic to view Spheer's body, in order to help him understand the loss.

When Magic saw Spheer, and realised he was gone, he began to sing, and his voice was joined by a chorus of other penguins at the aquarium. This not only proves the true love shared between the penguin pair, but it shows that penguins do not suffer from bigotry as we humans do, because Spheer was loved dearly by all who knew him, penguin and human alike.



Other same-sex penguin couples prove the fact that queer couples can last as well, even when the odds are against them. King penguins typically only mate for one season, but the previously mentioned king penguin couple from Auckland's Kelly Tarlton's, Thelma and Louise, have stayed together for eight years. There are also several female/female little penguin couples at Te Nukua o Wellington Zoo that have lasted multiple mating seasons, despite little penguins not typically staying together for long.

All of this goes to say: These birds ultimately prove that homosexuality is natural. After all, what could be more natural than nature itself? Even though they may not always mate for life, penguins have happy, fruitful, relationships, regardless of the pair's difference in sexes, or lack thereof. There is no hatred or bigotry amongst them, even when some may be different. Penguins set a standard for us all; they live happy, hate free lives, doing as they please, and loving who they love. We should all take a page from the books of these gays in tuxedos.

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