

Chester Zoo endangered macaws breed for first time

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JAMES Bond and Miss Money Penny may have an enduring onscreen partnership but at Chester Zoo their companionship is helping to conserve a species. James and his partner Penny are Hyacinth Macaws, considered endangered in the wild, and the duo have bred successfully for the first time at Chester Zoo. Their striking chick hatched in May but has only now left its nest box, having spent 16 weeks tucked away inside, being cared for predominantly by Penny. The chick has not yet been named but his dad gets his name from his ring number - 007. Andrew Woolham, Team Leader with Parrots and Penguins, said: "Although the adults and chick are not on display to our visitors, the hatching of the Hyacinth Macaw still represents a significant development in our efforts to conserve these stunning birds." Both James and Penny arrived at the zoo in 1992 from America. The pair showed no interest in breeding until they moved into new accommodation. It is believed that changes to their diet – Chester Zoo is the first zoo in the UK to employ an animal nutritionist - has led to the breeding success. The pair have had a chick in the past but showed little interest in rearing it themselves and left it to the zoo's keepers to hand-rear the chick. "Hyacinth macaws are very difficult species to reproduce naturally in zoos due to their highly specialised feeding regime. "We have been making lots of changes to their diet to provide the macaws with the best nutrition possible to allow the best chance of natural reproduction. "To achieve this breeding is something really special and provides us with a fantastic foundation for the future," added Andy.

Macaws are the world's largest parrot and are found in Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay. They are considered endangered due to the illegal pet trade and habitat loss as a result of land clearance for cattle ranching. The striking birds have a naturally slow reproductive rate in the wild, which means that once a population is reduced through over trapping and habitat loss, it takes a long time to recover.