

# Penguins



## **Introduction**

Penguins are a family of 17 to 19 species of birds that live primarily in the Southern Hemisphere. They include the tiny blue penguins of Australia and New Zealand, the majestic emperor penguins of Antarctica and king penguins found on many sub- Antarctic islands, the endangered African penguin and the Galápagos penguin—the only penguin to be found north of the equator

## **Facts**

Though they are birds, penguins have flippers instead of wings. They cannot fly and on land they waddle walking upright—though when snow conditions are right they will slide on their bellies. In the water they are expert swimmers and divers, and some species can reach speeds of up to 15 miles per hour. The penguin's distinctive coloring—black body with white belly—helps camouflage the bird in the water as it searches for meals of small shrimp, fish, crabs and squid. Some other facts include:

- **Scientific Name** : *Spheniscidae*
- **Height** : 15 inches to 3 ½ feet
- **Weight** : 2 pounds to 80 pounds
- **Habitats** : Oceans, Coasts

## **Breeding**

Penguins for the most part breed in large colonies, the exceptions being the yellow-eyed and Fiordland species; these colonies may range in size from as

few as 100 pairs for gentoo penguins to several hundred thousand in the case of king, macaroni and chinstrap penguins.<sup>[60]</sup> Living in colonies results in a high level of social interaction between birds, which has led to a large repertoire of visual as well as vocal displays in all penguin species.<sup>[61]</sup> *Agonistic* displays are those intended to confront or drive off, or alternately appease and avoid conflict with, other individuals

Penguins form monogamous pairs for a breeding season, though the rate the same pair recouples varies drastically. Most penguins lay two eggs in a clutch, although the two largest species, the emperor and the [king penguins](#), lay only one.<sup>[62]</sup> With the exception of the emperor penguin, where the male does it all, all penguins share the [incubation](#) duties.<sup>[63]</sup> These incubation shifts can last days and even weeks as one member of the pair feeds at sea.

Penguins generally only lay one brood; the exception is the little penguin, which can raise two or three broods in a season.<sup>[64]</sup>

## **Penguins and Humans**

Penguins have no special fear of humans and will often approach groups of people. This is probably because penguins have no land predators in [Antarctica](#) or the nearby offshore islands.

## **Where did the name ‘penguin’ come from?**

No one knows for sure. It could come from the Welsh ‘pen gwyn’, which means ‘white head’, or from the Latin ‘pinguis’, referring to the fat or blubber of the bird. The name penguin was first given to another type of bird, the auk (also a large, flightless, black and white bird).

## **Keeping warm**

Penguins cope well in the cold — some breed in the coldest conditions in the world. Their short outer feathers overlap, like tiles on a roof, to form a thick waterproof layer, and underneath are fluffier feathers for warmth.

Like seals and whales, a thick layer of fat under the skin provides insulation (and extra reserves for when food is scarce). As a rule, the larger the penguin,

the easier it is to conserve heat. In fact, many penguins are so good at keeping warm that they have a problem with overheating during the summer months.