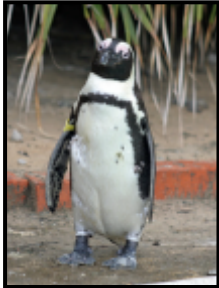


THE AFRICAN PENGUIN FACT SHEET

The African or Jackass Penguin is the only penguin species that breeds in Africa, but fossils indicate that at least four species occurred in South Africa some five million years ago. A fully grown African Penguin weigh between two and four kilograms and stand some 60 centimetres high. They breed at offshore islands and a few mainland sites from central Namibia to Port Elizabeth.



MOULT

Feathers are dead structures that have to be regularly replaced to ensure their continued functionality. Penguins need a complete new coat of feathers every year to retain their insulation. As a result they replace all their feathers at once.

For African Penguins this takes about three weeks, and as they remain ashore throughout this period, they have to accumulate enough fat reserves to survive without feeding. Pre-moulters look distinctly fat, with brown rather worn feathers. Within a few days of coming ashore, their old feathers start to be pushed out by the new feathers growing underneath.

Newly moulted birds look rather thin with fresh black & white plumage. Juveniles moult into adult plumage 12 to 18 months after leaving the nest

OIL POLLUTION

Penguins are especially prone to oiling because they are flightless, and cannot avoid slicks at sea or on breeding beaches. Every year hundreds of penguins are oiled in small spills, but major spills, such as occurred in 1994 and 2000, can affect a large proportion of the population.

Oil strips the penguins' feathers of their waterproofing, leading to hypothermia. The birds are also poisoned by swallowing oil that they try to preen off their feathers.



FOOD AND FEEDING

African Penguins are mainly fish eaters. Although they do catch the occasional squid and crustaceans. They locate their prey by sight, and feed almost exclusively during the day.

Adults usually forage in groups mostly targeting schooling fish like anchovies and sardines.

They circle the school of fish, forcing them into a tight group or 'bait ball', then take turns to shoot up through the ball, grabbing fish from below

EGGS AND CHICKS

African Penguins usually lay two eggs, which are incubated for approximately 40 days. The newly hatched chicks are helpless, and have to be brooded for the first week or so. They remain dependant on their parents for food until they are fully feathered and ready to go to sea, 10 - 11 weeks after hatching.

Raising a family is hard work and requires the efforts of both parents. The chicks are fed on regurgitated food that is stored in the parents' stomachs. Penguins breed where they can reliable obtain food for their chicks, close to the breeding site. Being flightless, they cannot roam as far as other seabirds, and have to obtain enough food for their chicks within about 20 kilometers of the colony.

Even so it may take them several hours to commute back to their chicks with the food. During this time their digestion is slowed, thereby ensuring that food isn't digested by the time the parents return home.

SWIMMING

Penguins are the most effective diving birds. Their wings are reduced to flippers designed for "flying" underwater.

Their legs are at the rear of their body to reduce drag, resulting in their endearing upright stance and shuffling gait.

African Penguins generally dive to no more than 50 meters, although they have been recorded at depths of 130 metres, remaining underwater for up to five minutes.

In short bursts they swim as fast as 20 kilometres per hour, but they routinely travel at a more efficient 8 - 10 kilometres per hour, because swimming at higher speeds uses more energy. They also porpoise, leaping out of the water to breathe and reduce drag.

