

Species Fact Sheets

Order: Sphenisciformes
Scientific Name: *Spheniscus demersus*

Family: Spheniscidae
Common Name: African Penguin

AZA Management: Green Yellow Red None

Photo (Male):



Photo (Female):



NATURAL HISTORY:

Geographic Range: Europe Asia North America Neotropical
 Africa Australia Other [Click here to enter text.](#)

Habitat: Forest Desert Grassland Coastal
 Riverine Montane Other [Click here to enter text.](#)

Circadian Cycle: Diurnal Crepuscular Nocturnal Other [Click here to enter text.](#)

Cold Tolerance: To 70° F To 60° F To 50° F To 40° F
 To 30° F To 20° F Other [Click here to enter text.](#)

Heat Tolerance: To 30° F To 50° F To 70° F To 90° F
 To 110° F Other For outdoor exhibits the use of shade and a sprinkler (misting) system is encouraged for cooling down an area of the exhibit when temperature rises above 85 F

Diet: Frugivore Carnivore Piscivore Insectivore
 Nectivore Omnivore Folivore Other (Add Below)

Captive Dietary Needs:

African penguins eat a variety of fish and squid in the wild. The captive diets can include capelin, sardine, anchovy, squid sp, trout, herring and other commercially available species.

Species Fact Sheets

Life Expectancy in the Wild: Males: 15 yrs Females: 15 ys

Life Expectancy in Captivity: Males: 20 – 30 yrs Females: 20 – 30 yrs

BREEDING INFORMATION:

Age at Sexual Maturity: Males: 2 yrs Females: 2 yrs

Courtship Displays: Vocalizations, mutual preening, duets, and exaggerated displays to other penguins are part of the courtship displays.

Nest Site Description: In the wild, penguins will use burrows or surface scrapes or will nest under structures such as buildings or shrubs. Artificial burrows are often used by wild penguins. Nesting material may include twigs, vegetation and other easily found beach debris. They are territorial and aggressively defend their nest.

Clutch Size, Egg Description: One or two eggs are laid per clutch. Eggs are laid 4 days apart. Egg color is off-white but becomes stained with fecal material during incubation.

Incubation Period: 38 – 42 days

Fledgling Period: The fledgling will leave the nest after 10 – 12 weeks or so.

Parental Care: Both parents will incubate, brood and feed the chicks.

Chick Development: Newly hatched chicks are altricial and require parental or human care for many weeks. Hatchling down is replaced with nestling down, which is then replaced with juvenile feathers starting at about 8 weeks old. The chicks grow very quickly and adult size and weight is attained at about 12 weeks of age. Juveniles at this stage are called “blues”.

CAPTIVE HABITAT INFORMATION:

Social Structure in the Wild: Colonial with pairs defending their nesting location

Social Structure in Captivity: Colonially held. African penguins are temperate birds and can be exhibited in indoor or outdoor displays.

Minimum Group Size: 10 individuals

Maximum Group Size: N/A

Compatible in Mixed Species Exhibits: Yes

Comments: Often waterfowl have been mixed in as well as pelecaniformes including gannets, cormorants and pelicans.

Species Fact Sheets

Optimal Habitat Size: Minimal exhibit areas for first 6 birds: Land – 8 ft. sq., Pool – 4 ft. sq., Pool Vol – 540 gal. For each additional bird: Land – 4 ft. sq., Pool – 2 ft. sq., Pool Vol – 45 gal. See Penguin Animal Care Manual

Management Challenges: Off exhibit holding space is recommended for managing sick, molting or nesting penguins. This additional space can be used to isolate individuals to establish pair bonding for newly recommended pairings. Disease and medical concerns include pododermatitis, abnormal molt, ingestion of foreign objects, Aspergillosis, West Nile Virus and Avian malaria. Chronic arthritis and cataracts are sometimes seen in older penguins. Vaccines are available for WNV, EEE and WEE. The use of a prophylaxis protocol has been effective in preventing malaria. Treatments for most other ailments are addressed in the Penguin Animal Care Manual.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- **Reproduction:** Once established, a pair of African penguins may produce 2-4 eggs during a breeding season. The African penguin Breeding and Transfer Plan identifies which pairs are recommended to produce offspring. All other eggs must be replaced with dummy eggs.

Education/Conservation: This species is often used for educational outreach and interactive programs. Close encounters with African penguins can be very effective in raising the public's awareness about the many threats facing wild penguins. However, habituation to these types of programs is recommended. The African penguin SSP works closely with SANCCOB, a rehabilitation and research facility in South Africa to support in situ conservation projects like the Chick Bolstering Project and satellite tracking juvenile penguins. The wild African penguin population continues to decline. The number of penguins has decrease by 70% since 2004 (Crawford et al. 2011).

REFERENCES:

Penguin Animal Care Manual
(http://www.aviansag.org/Husbandry/Unlocked/Care_Manuals/Penguin_ACM.pdf)

Crawford RJM, Altwegg R, Barham BJ, Barham PJ, Durant JM, Dyer BM, Makhado AB, Pichegru L, Ryan PG, Underhill LG, Upfold L, Visagie J, Waller LJ, Whittington PA (2011) Collapse of South Africa's penguins in the early 21st century: a consideration of food availability. *Afr. J. Mar. Sci.* 33: 139-156.

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