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AUSTRALIS
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THE MAGELLANIC PENGUIN (*Spheniscus magellanicus*)

The first mention of this cute animal dates back to 1520, when Antonio Pigafetta, the man that chronicled the voyages of Ferdinand Magellan, described it as a wild goose!

It is believed that the penguin was a flying land bird in a faraway past. It was supposedly related to the petrel and began getting closer and closer to the sea in order to look for food. Therefore, it stopped flying and adapted to an aquatic life, evolving into its wedge-shaped body (spheniscus), webbed feet and wings that serve as fins, just like a fish.

There are 17 species of penguins in the world, all of which live in the southern hemisphere. The northernmost species is the Galapagos penguin and the southernmost one is the Emperor penguin, which lives in the Antarctic continent.

The Magellanic penguin can be found from Tierra del Fuego up to Brazil (along the Atlantic Ocean) and Peru (in the Pacific). These faraway destinations are reached after a migration to warmer waters that lasts over 6000 kilometers (3.720 miles).

Our penguin measures between 50 cm to 70 cm (20 to 28 inches) tall; it weighs up to 5 kilos (11 pounds) and lives until the age of twenty. The male penguin is slightly larger than the female and its beak is also a little longer. They lead a pelagic life and spend most of it in the water, even when they're sleeping. They are fantastic swimmers and can reach speeds of up to 8 km/h (5 mph) underwater. Their plumage is similar to a duvet; it is very dense and is coated with waterproofing oil secreted from a gland called the uropigial gland. A thick layer of fat helps insulate their body from the cold.



Penguin Head



Penguin chick shedding its feathers

They have a peculiar call which sounds like a donkey's bray. They sneeze out a salty fluid produced by a gland that concentrates excess salt in their body.

Penguins shed their feathers every year. During this period (January – February), they avoid going into the water to eat. They attain their final colors only during their third year of life, which includes eye-catching rings around their eyes and neck. In addition, they shed their grey feathers for a basically black plumage.

Their diet consists of small fish, such as anchovies, sardines or sea silversides. The penguin's main enemies are sea lions, fishing nets and ocean pollution. They can dive up to 80 meters (262 feet) deep.

REPRODUCTION

Between August and September the first males arrive in the area to rebuild their nests, normally in the same spot they used the previous season, which can be outdoors or beneath a bush.

Then, the females arrive and couples are formed. They lay two eggs (3 on rare occasions), which are hatched and cared for by both penguins for 30 to 40 days. They take turns to get food. At birth, hatchlings weigh no more than 150 grams (5,3 ounces) and they do not head out to the ocean until they bulk up to 250 grams (8,8 ounces). After the first egg is laid, males go out to sea to feed and also bring back more vegetation to fill out the nest. The second-born chicks are usually smaller and have less chances of survival (30% survival rate). This is normally due to lack of food, as commercial fishing is making it harder for parents to find sustenance.

Baby penguins depend on their parents for at least two-and-a-half months, until their new feathers become waterproof and they are strong enough to head out into the ocean to feed on fish. From birth up to that moment, they are fed by both parents through regurgitation. Between the age of 3 and 4, juvenile penguins are ready for reproduction.

At the end of January – February, groups of juveniles born in prior seasons return to their place of birth. They spend nearly two weeks on land, near the coast. Here, they shed their juvenile plumage. All penguins shed their feathers once a year. During this period they do not eat because they avoid the water, since they momentarily lack the ability to regulate their body temperature until they complete their molting cycle.

From March onward, they abandon land and remain at sea. A significant portion of the population, especially the juveniles, migrate north, as far away as Peru and Brazil. Many penguins disappear during the northern migration due to oil pollution or because they become entangled in fishing nets. There are numerous colonies of Magellanic penguins in the region. The most accessible ones are the Seno Otway Penguin Colony, which congregates approximately 5,000 individuals, along with the colonies located in the Strait of Magellan and Magdalena Island, where over 130,000 penguins come together. As a matter of fact, Magdalena Island is protected and managed by CONAF, the National Forestry Corporation, under the name “Los Pingüinos National Monument”.



Juvenile Penguin

Adult Penguin

EXPEDITION TEAM



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