



EMPEROR PENGUIN
Aptenodytes forsteri





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Order : *Sphenisciformes* — Family : *Spheniscidae*

GEOGRAPHIC RANGE :

The species has a circumpolar range and is restricted to Antarctica.

HABITAT :

Emperor penguin colonies breed almost exclusively on coastal land-fast sea ice, sometimes tens of kilometers from ocean access. They are pelagic foragers outside the breeding season.

DIET :

Emperor penguins feed on fish, cephalopods, krill and crustaceans. They fish both in open waters and underneath the pack ice.

BEHAVIOR :

They usually dive to depths of 50 meters, but this species has been recorded between 265 and 500 meters beneath the surface. Emperor penguins can stay underwater for 15 minutes and travel 150 to 1,000 km in a single foraging trip. They are gregarious, non-territorial, and reproduce in large colonies. They endure very low temperatures, strong winds, and the dark months of the southern winter. They have developed a particular behavior to resist these harsh conditions: males remaining in the rookery huddle together in tightly packed groups. Penguins rotate positions constantly within the huddle to temporarily benefit from the warmer central zone. During courtship, males stretch their heads up to the sky, outstretch their flippers and bray for a few seconds. This display is repeated while walking around the colony. When a female joins a male, they stand face to face while stretching their heads towards the sky. Chicks fall prey to Petrels and adults are attacked by Leopard Seals.

REPRODUCTION :

Emperor Penguins arrive at their colonies in late March to April, and lay eggs in May to June. They live in colonies but are not territorial. They do not build nests. Females lay a single egg which they pass to the males while they go to sea to feed for two months. Males incubate their egg for 65 days, keeping it on their feet, against their warm brood patch. This is when males huddle together. Females return mid-July or early August, usually in time for hatching. They then feed their chick regurgitated food. When the females return, the males go to sea to feed. The chicks stay warm on the feet of the adults during the first 45 to 50 days of their life. After this period, they enter a crèche with other chicks, but do not feed by themselves until December or January.

- Size : 112-115 cm
- Weight : 28-45 kg



THREATS :

The species is categorized as "Near Threatened" (IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, August 2019). Climate change is causing a decrease in ice concentration, which in turn is causing a decrease in food resources. Phytoplankton, microscopic plant-like organisms that are the base of the marine food web, develop under this layer of ice. Human disturbances in certain areas, near scientific bases, are also a threat to the colonies.