



AFRICAN PENGUIN *Spheniscus demersus*

Conservation Status: IUCN Red List - **ENDANGERED**

USFWS Endangered Species Act - **ENDANGERED**

BASIC BIOLOGY

- Range: Coastlines and islands in South Africa and Namibia
- Males and females similar in coloring, size, and weight (Avg. wt. 7.5 lbs.)
- Monogamous; lay 2 eggs per clutch; both parents incubate eggs (36-42 days) and feed chicks
- Diving predators with excellent eyesight; require cold ocean currents to hunt for their fish prey
- Penguins are highly social and live in colonies. They hunt for fish more efficiently when in groups
- Adapted to warm climate; eliminate heat through pink patch above eye and open mouth breathing



THREATS TO WILD AFRICAN PENGUINS

HISTORICAL

- Egg Harvest
- Guano harvest
- Habitat alteration
- Human encroachment
- Introduction of domestic animals (cats, dogs and rabbits)



CURRENT

- Deterioration of breeding habitat leading to diminished breeding success
- Poor availability of food (anchovies and sardines): driven by climate change (warming oceans, poor spawning, and changing currents and fish distribution) and unsustainable fisheries
- Human disturbance including traffic, pets, and unregulated tourism
- Predator incursion (Cape fur seals, land predators like gulls, leopards, caracal, feral and domestic cats/dogs)



CATASTROPHIC EVENTS

- Oil spills including ship-to-ship bunkering (the transfer of oil to another vessel while at sea)
- Disease outbreaks
- Climate-change-driven periods of high temperatures or flooding leading to nest abandonment (excessive heat kills chicks, excessive rain floods nests killing eggs and chicks)





Photo: K Graham, Dallas Zoo

WILD POPULATION

African penguins are experiencing an alarming and continuing decline in the wild — **some scientists predict that they could be functionally extinct in southwestern South Africa in 2035!** The AZA SAFE African Penguin program is working with stakeholders in South Africa, Namibia, and other AZA institutions to help mitigate the threats and slow the rate of decline.

Between 2019 and 2021 in South Africa, the population of breeding birds declined by 23%! In Namibia, the population of African penguins is small and has been somewhat stable; however, recently the most importation colony there has declined drastically. Because the SA population continues to decline, Namibia now holds 1/3 of the total global population.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?



- Recycle, reuse, and reduce plastics, aluminum, and other materials in your daily activities.
- Help with beach, shore, and creek clean-up: the ocean starts here.
- Learn about and support efforts to reduce climate change.
- When ordering or buying seafood, select products certified as sustainable. Ask your grocer so they know it is important to you!
- Engage in positive SAFE efforts, such as engaging in disaster response program, adopt-a-penguin-ranger, or help provide penguins with artificial nests.

WHAT IS
SAFE[®]
SAVING ANIMALS
FROM EXTINCTION
AFRICAN PENGUIN



AZA SAFE: Saving Animals From Extinction focuses the collective expertise within the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA)-accredited zoos and aquariums and leverages their massive audiences to help save species. The SAFE framework protects threatened animals, builds upon established recovery plans and history of commitment, prioritizes collaboration among AZA member institutions, implements strategic conservation and stakeholder engagement activities, and measures conservation progress.

The overall goal of the AZA SAFE African Penguin Program is to secure the future of a healthy African penguin population in the wild through collaborative, science-based conservation programs; secure funding; and engage appropriate audiences through AZA and other partner institutions and organizations.