



Penguins

Penguin Family:

Spheniscidae



Habitat:

Rocky islands/ pack ice and open ocean/ sandy islands.

Distribution:

Ranges from the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic as far north as the Equator at the Galapagos Islands.

Diet:

Mainly fish.

Number of Different Species:

17.

The name penguin originally belonged to the now extinct bird we call the great auk. If you happen to be Welsh or Welsh-speaking, the name has a definite meaning, as pen-guin sounds like the Welsh pen-gwyn, or white head.

The fact that most species of penguin have a black head just goes to prove how misleading the world of

Natural History can become at times. However, the great auk did look a little like a penguin although it was in no way related, so perhaps the transfer of the name is understandable after all.

Penguins are flightless sea - birds with short tails and paddle-like wings. The plumage is very dense and covers the whole of the body. The legs are short and set well back, with the front three toes webbed for swimming.

The penguin has two main predators, the killer whale and the leopard seal. Man hunted penguins up until the early 20th century. We used to capture and kill millions of penguins to make oil from their fat.

Today many penguin populations are increasing. This is probably a result of the declining whale population which reduces the competition for food. However, sea pollution is seriously threatening the bird's long term survival.

Many people believe that all penguins live deep in the frozen world of the Antarctic, but this is far from being the case, as only three species (Emperor, Adelie and Chinstrap) actually live in that barren region of snow and ice. The others are distributed throughout the oceans of the southern hemisphere ranging from the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic as far north as the Equator at the Galapagos Islands (Galapagos penguin).

There are seventeen species of penguin:

1. **Emperor**
2. **Rockhopper**
3. **Macaroni**
4. **Snares Island**

5. **Yellow-eyed**
6. **Chinstrap**
7. **Humboldt**
8. **Galapagos**
9. **Black-footed (Jackass)**
10. **King**
11. **Erect - crested**
12. **Royal**
13. **Fiordland Crested**
14. **Gentoo**
15. **Adelie**
16. **Magellanic**

17. Little Blue (Fairy)

The oldest fossil remains of a penguin come from New Zealand and date back about 50 million years. Apart from the fact that it was much taller (it measured about 1.6m) than modern penguins and had longer wings, it was similar in general appearance.

There were, in fact, ancestors of this fossilized penguin on earth millions of years earlier. The ancestors of today's species of penguins were able to fly - just as the great auk and the dodo originally had the power of flight.

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