AFRICAN PENGUIN AWARENESS DAY
OBSERVED ON THE 2ND SATURDAY OF OCTOBER

This special day is dedicated to raising awareness of the plight of the endangered African penguin.

African penguin
*Spheniscus demersus*

Of the 18 species of penguins found worldwide, the African penguin is the only one endemic to the African Continent.

They range from Hollams Bird Island in Namibia to Algoa Bay in the Eastern Cape.

The African penguin breeds at 27 colonies in South Africa and Namibia on islands and on the mainland.

St. Croix and Bird Island in Algoa Bay are the largest colonies where there are approximately 6 100 penguins.

**WHY ARE WE CONCERNED ABOUT THE AFRICAN PENGUIN?**

The African penguin has seen a population reduction of 99% since the beginning of the 20th century, from over a million breeding pairs to less than 15 000 breeding pairs.

The current population is made up of about 30 000 birds, with numbers still steadily decreasing.

At this rate of decline, it is estimated that the African penguin will be functionally extinct in the wild by 2035.
WHY ARE WE CONCERNED ABOUT THE AFRICAN PENGUIN?

Their 2016 IUCN status is “Endangered”.

African penguins are listed on Appendix II of CITES (all international trade is subject to export control).

African penguins are sentinels of ecosystem health. A decline in the population means decreases in the availability of food and ecosystem changes.

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR (HUMAN INDUCED) THREATS TO AFRICAN PENGUINS?

Food scarcity is the primary driver of the decline.

1. Seafood demand by humans is constantly increasing and the seafood industry competes with the African penguin for food, especially sardines and anchovies.

2. Seawater temperature changes caused by climate change are suspected to have caused both the sardine and anchovy stocks to shift eastwards.

3. Oil spills have had a negative effect on penguin populations. The two largest oil spills in South Africa (Apollo Sea in 1994 and Treasure in 2000) collectively killed 30,000 African penguins despite some successful rehabilitation efforts.

1. Some of the rescued juvenile African penguins from the Treasure oil spill. These chicks were cared for by Sea World on the Durban beachfront.

Photo: Wikimedia commons

The sardine is a source of protein for many households in South Africa.

Anchovy is mainly used for fishmeal for domestic livestock such as chicken and pigs.

Cape anchovies

Sardine
Historically...

4. Seafarers harvested their eggs.
5. Guano was removed from breeding sites to use as fertilizer.

What are the major (human induced) threats to African Penguins?

4. Human disturbance at breeding colonies may impact breeding success.
5. Penguins are occasionally caught in discarded fishing nets, called “ghost nets”.

6. Historically...

Hunters killed them for oil, feathers and their skin.

Guano was removed from breeding sites to use as fertilizer.

Major (natural) threats to African Penguins

1. Cape Fur Seals (Arctocephalus pusillus) compete with penguins for food and displace them from breeding sites, imposing significant mortality at some colonies.

2. Kelp gulls (Larus dominicanus) scavenger unguarded eggs and small chicks.

3. Feral cats and dogs are a problem on mainland colonies.
MAJOR (NATURAL) THREATS TO AFRICAN PENGUINS

4. Common bird diseases such as aspergillosis, avian malaria, avian influenza and avian cholera are a potential threat.

5. Severe storms intensified by climate change can have a negative impact on nesting sites.

HOW CAN WE HELP AFRICAN PENGUINS?

Eat sustainably.
By reducing the consumption of meat we reduce the amount of seafood caught for fishmeal, keeping anchovies in the sea for penguins to eat.

Choose sustainably harvested seafood.
Consult the SASSI list and look out for the blue MSC label on seafood products to make wise choices.

Support MPAs.
Support the management of Marine Protected Areas.

Avoid single-use plastic and recycle the single-use plastic you use.

Report a stranded penguin.
www.saambr.org.za/animal-rescue/

Make a Penguin Promise.
www.saambr.org.za/penguin-promises/

Reducing your carbon footprint helps to reduce the climate change impacts on African penguins.

Support organisations working at the frontline of African penguin conservation such as SANCCOB, SAAMBR, SanParks, CapeNature, Two Oceans Aquarium, SANBI, Birdlife SA and various government agencies.
**FUN FACTS ABOUT AFRICAN PENGUINS**

- Men’s tail suits are called *“penguin suits”* because they look like the black & white colouration of penguins.
- African penguins were called *Jackass penguins* because of the braying sound they make.
- The spot pattern on an African penguin’s chest and belly is unique to each bird, like our fingerprints are unique to us. These spot patterns can be used to identify individual birds.
- African penguins can swim up to **20km/h** and can travel **30 to 70 km** during a trip.
- They can **dive** under water for up to **2.5 minutes** while trying to catch fish.
- African penguins mate for life and often share parenting duties.

Photo: Klearchos Kapoutsis
SAAMBR has been home to African penguins since the first stranded bird (named ORI) was brought to the facility over 30 years ago.

At uShaka Sea World, SAAMBR cares for a colony of over 50 penguins.

The rehabilitation programme is very successful and once rehabilitated, birds are released, unless their condition or injury prevents them from surviving in the wild.