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## Protecting King Penguins

King penguins (*Aptenodytes patagonicus*) are the second-largest species of penguin, after emperors. They can be found primarily on the Falkland/Malvinas and South Georgia islands in the South Atlantic Ocean. Despite declines in their numbers in the 19th and 20th centuries, when king penguins were killed for their oil,<sup>2</sup> their colonies are now thriving, and they are among the strongest of all penguin populations.

### About king penguins

About 1.6 million breeding pairs of king penguins inhabit sub-Antarctic islands in the South Atlantic, the southern Indian, and southwestern Pacific oceans.<sup>3</sup> While their appearance is similar to that of emperor penguins, they are generally thinner with large black flippers and bright orange patches around their necks.<sup>4</sup>

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists king penguins as a species of Least Concern.<sup>5</sup> Because of their sizable range and increasing populations, these birds are not considered Vulnerable to extinction. However, protections are still warranted to keep king penguins from facing the depletions already seen in other penguin species.

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## Did You Know?

- King penguins can be almost 1 meter (3 feet) tall and weigh as much as 13 kilograms (29 pounds).<sup>6</sup>
- King penguins feed primarily on small fish, although they also will eat krill. They swim up to 12 kilometers (7.4 miles) per hour<sup>7</sup> and can dive up to 440 meters (1,443 feet) deep,<sup>8</sup> traits that help them catch their prey.

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## Habitat and threats

One of the biggest differences between king penguins and their emperor cousins is habitat location. Despite the similarities between the two species, king penguins are not found in Antarctica. They reside only on sub-Antarctic islands, although they are widely distributed throughout their range.

In the past century, king penguins were particularly vulnerable to human interference, often being killed by seal hunters.<sup>9</sup> Today, climate change is the most significant threat facing these penguins. Warming seas affect the proximity of prey to their colonies and can contribute to breeding failure.<sup>10</sup>

## What we can do

Although king penguin populations are strong, they depend on many ocean resources that may be at risk because of climate change and overfishing. As the sea temperature and fishing activities increase, the establishment of protections now could make a substantial difference in the species' long-term survival. The Pew Charitable Trusts recommends:

- Creation of marine reserves to protect the food sources and foraging grounds of king penguins.
- Precautionary management of the Antarctic krill fishery.

The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) is an international body of 24 countries and the European Union with the authority to create large-scale, fully protected marine reserves in the waters surrounding Antarctica. Action by CCAMLR is needed to help alleviate pressure on these penguins and protect them for the future.



# Where King Penguins Live



**Threats:**

Fisheries pressure

**Population:**

1.6 million breeding pairs

**IUCN status:**

Least Concern

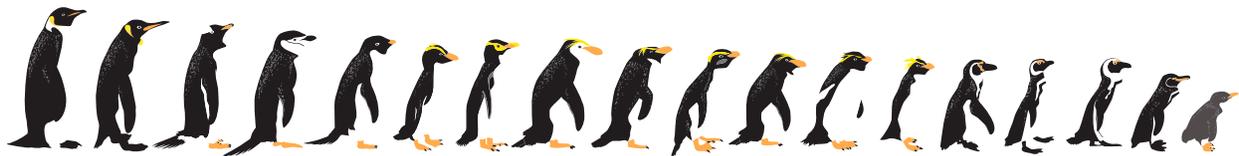
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King penguins inhabit sub-Antarctic islands in the South Atlantic, the Southern Indian, and Southwestern Pacific Oceans.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Charles-André Bost et al., "King Penguin (*Aptenodytes patagonicus*)" in *Penguins: Natural History and Conservation*, eds. Pablo Garcia Borboroglu and P. Dee Boersma (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 12.
- 2 J.W.H. Conroy and M.G. White, "The Breeding Status of the King Penguin (*Aptenodytes patagonica*)," *British Antarctic Survey Bulletin* 32 (1973) 31-40, [http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/documents/bas\\_bulletins/bulletin32\\_05.pdf](http://www.antarctica.ac.uk/documents/bas_bulletins/bulletin32_05.pdf).
- 3 Bost et al., "King Penguin," 9.
- 4 Bost et al., "King Penguin," 7.
- 5 "Aptenodytes patagonicus," International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species, accessed July 28, 2014, <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/22697748/0>.
- 6 Stefano Unterthiner, "Every Bird a King," *National Geographic*, accessed July 28, 2014, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2009/09/king-penguins/unterthiner-photography>.
- 7 "King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus*," BirdLife International, accessed July 28, 2014, <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/speciesfactsheet.php?id=3848>.
- 8 Bost et al., "King Penguin," 12.
- 9 Ibid., 4.
- 10 Céline Le Bohec et al., "King Penguin Population Threatened by Southern Ocean Warming," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 105, no. 7 (2008): 2493-97, doi:10.1073/pnas.0712031105.



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## Find out how you can help king penguins:

[pewtrusts.org/penguins](http://pewtrusts.org/penguins)

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