



# African Penguin

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**Context:** A recent study revealed that over **60,000 African penguins** died of starvation between 2004–2011 due to the collapse of **sardine fish stocks**, highlighting the species' vulnerability to changes in marine ecosystems.

## Taxonomy & Identification

- **Scientific Name:** *Spheniscus demersus*
- **Family:** Spheniscidae
- **Distinct Features:**
  - Flightless, marine-adapted bird.
  - Black stripe across chest with **unique black spots**.
  - **Pink glands above the eyes** help regulate body temperature, becoming pinker in heat.
  - Annual moulting: Lose almost **50% of body mass** during a 21-day feather shed.

## Habitat & Distribution

- Marine and coastal environments; remains within **~40 km of the shore**.
- Breeds, moults, and rests onshore.
- **Geographical Range:** Coastal Namibia and Atlantic coast of South Africa.

## Breeding & Life Cycle

- Breeding occurs in **burrows dug into guano deposits**, which protect eggs and chicks from extreme heat.
- Average lifespan in the wild: **~20 years**.

## Threats

1. **Food Scarcity:** Collapse of sardine and anchovy stocks leads to starvation.
2. **Climate Change:** Global warming alters marine and atmospheric conditions, affecting prey availability and habitat suitability.
3. **Human Activities:** Oil spills, overfishing, and coastal development threaten breeding and foraging areas.

## Conservation Status

- **IUCN Red List: Critically Endangered.**
- Conservation efforts include:
  - Habitat protection and guano habitat restoration.
  - Fish stock management to ensure sufficient food supply.
  - Awareness and eco-tourism to support local conservation initiatives.