

Photos courtesy of NOAA



The Emperor penguin (the tallest species of penguin) keeps its chick warm until its big enough to fend for itself.

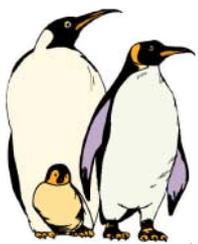
The Penguin

English: Emperor penguin

Scientific Name: *Aptenodytes forsteri*

Irish Name: Piongain impireach

A penguin is typically black and white - its back, head and narrow wings are black and its front is white. Some species, such as the Emperor and King penguins, also have coloration around their neck. The penguin has a plump body on top of short legs, webbed feet and a short tail. It has to stand very upright to keep balanced and so walks with a waddle. The penguin does not fly as its narrow wings could not support its body in flight. In the water however it is very streamlined and its flipper-like wings help to guide and propel it. Capable of moving at great speed in search of fish, it catches them with its sharp pointed beak. It has few enemies but one of its most feared is the leopard seal.



Penguins and their young

Depending on the species, penguins lay one or two eggs. The Emperor penguin lays one egg that the female then leaves with the male to hatch while she goes off in search of food. The male places the egg on a fold of skin

above its feet, which protects it from the cold and waits, often for weeks, until the chick hatches and the female returns to relieve him.

Keeping warm

As most penguins live in places where temperatures are low, their bodies have adapted to keeping the cold out. They have three layers that help to do this: short feathers on the outside, a thick layer of blubber on the inside and a layer of insulating warm air trapped in between.

Penguins live together in groups called rookeries. In the harsh weather of Antarctica, they benefit from having others around as they can huddle together for warmth. They take turns to go on the outside, where the worst of the weather is felt.



Other birds that do not fly

Besides the penguin, there are a few other birds that do not fly. Some of the most well-known are the ostrich, emu, rhea and kiwi. Many flightless birds evolved on islands where they did not have many predators to worry about. Flight has often been replaced by alternative skills, such as fast, powerful legs in the ostrich and powerful swimming ability in the penguin.



Where are they found in the wild?

There are approximately 17 species of penguin and though there are captive penguins in zoos and aquaria around the world, you will only find penguins in the wild in the southern hemisphere. The one exception is the Galapagos penguin, which lives on the Galapagos Islands at the equator. There are no penguins at the North Pole.

Many penguins live on and around Antarctica, with only two species spending the winter there - the Emperor Penguin and the Adélie Penguin.

Some species live further north such as the Rockhopper Penguin, which can be found from Patagonia in South America to the edge of Antarctica and the Little Blue penguin, which can be found in South Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand. One penguin that has acclimatised to living in a warmer climate is the African Penguin, also known as the Jackass Penguin due to the donkey-like bray it uses to communicate. This penguin can be found in coastal waters and on islands from Namibia to South Africa.



Adélie penguins have distinctive white circles around their eyes.



The Chinstrap penguins (another species) get their name from strap-like colouring under their chin.