



species factsheet

| species introduction |

Common name: Gentoo penguin

Scientific name: *Pygoscelis papua*

Gentoos are the third largest penguin. They have a distinctive white stripe over the top of their heads, a bright orange beak and orange-ish feet. Once the breeding season is over, the birds go through an annual moult, during which they do not go out to sea and therefore do not feed. By comparison to the closely related chinstrap and Adelie penguins, gentoos have a calmer, gentler disposition. Gentoos have a circumpolar distribution and are found on various sub-Antarctic islands, but are most numerous on the Antarctic peninsula and on the Falkland Islands and South Georgia.



Breeding Gentoo colony at Isla Martillo in Tierra del Fuego, Argentina

By Liam Quinn from Canada (*Gentoo Penguins* Uploaded by russavia) [CC-BY-SA-2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons

| status in the wild |

Gentoos are listed as 'Near Threatened' on the IUCN red list. The populations, particularly those on sub-Antarctic islands, are believed to be declining, although not yet at a rate which would place them in a threatened category. Determining population trends is challenging for this species as large annual fluctuations in the breeding population are normal.

| species reproduction |

They are colonial nesters, like all penguins, but colonies can be relatively small compared to other species, often with only a few hundred birds. The birds usually collect pebbles to create a roughly circular raised nest on which they lay their two eggs. Nests are spaced so that

neighbours are unable to physically reach each other. Both parents participate in incubating the eggs over the approximately 34 day incubation period. Both then assist with rearing the chicks, taking turns to forage for food and brood the chicks. After about 30 days the chicks leave the nest and form a crèche, allowing both parents to forage at the same time so as to meet the demands of the growing chicks. Chicks fledge at about 14 weeks. The parents will stop feeding them in the weeks after this in time so they can return to the sea and feed themselves back up prior to the moult.

| species habitat |

Gentoos nest on flat beaches or further inland on dry moraines. Terrain is stony or grass tussocks. Gentoos generally forage close to the shore near their nesting colonies.

| species food |

Gentoos are fairly opportunistic feeders, taking a range of fish, crustaceans and cephalopods. Exact prey species and proportions appear to be dependent on geographical location, season and prey availability.

| threats |

Egg collection was historically a real threat; it is still legal in parts of the range but is limited and controlled by law. Increasing oil exploration in parts of the range may create problems. Tourism has been shown to impact on breeding success. Interaction with fisheries may also be a problem. The effects of climate change have not been studied for this species, but penguins and the prey they rely upon are sensitive to extreme fluctuations in temperature. A reduction in breeding performance as a result of climate change is a risk. Conversely though, as gentoos will not nest on snowbound land, a decrease in snow cover on the Antarctic peninsula may provide new opportunities for the species.

| conservation |

Long-term monitoring of the breeding areas is considered important to long-term conservation. Minimising disturbance to breeding colonies and reducing the risk of pollution events is also indicated.

| find out more |

BirdLife International gentoo penguin fact sheet:

<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/speciesfactsheet.php?id=3850>

IUCN Red List gentoo penguin fact sheet: <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/full/106003850/0>

International Penguin Conservation Work Group gentoo penguin fact sheet:

<http://www.penguins.cl/gentoo-penguins.htm>

Falklands Conservation: <http://www.falklandsconservation.com/wildlife/penguins/history>

<http://www.photovolcanica.com/PenguinSpecies/Gentoo/GentooPenguinPhotos.html>

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