ANIMAL LEARNING CENTER · NOT CURRENTLY AT THE ZOO

AFRICAN PENGUIN

Spheniscus demersus

Teacher & Student Fact Sheet · © **2026 Plumpton Park Zoological Gardens Inc.**
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Fast facts

ANIMAL GROUP	Bird — penguin family (Spheniscidae)
NATIVE REGION	South Africa and Namibia
HABITAT	Coastal islands, shores and nearby ocean
DIET	Mainly anchovy and pilchard; also squid
SIZE	22–26 in tall
WEIGHT	Males about 7.6 lb; females about 6.6 lb
LIFESPAN	About 10–11 years on average in the wild
STATUS	Critically Endangered (IUCN)



An African penguin on the beach. Photo: Hongbin on Unsplash.

Did you know?

- The African penguin is the only penguin native to Africa.
- African penguins make loud, donkey-like calls.
- Both parents take turns keeping the eggs warm for 38 to 41 days.
- An African penguin routinely dives about 100 feet deep.
- Fewer than 20,000 mature African penguins remained in the wild in 2023.

Words to know

Native: found naturally in a place. The African penguin is native only to Africa.
Incubate: to keep eggs warm until they hatch.
Colony: a large group of animals, like penguins, that live and nest together.
Critically Endangered: the highest risk category before a species dies out in the wild.

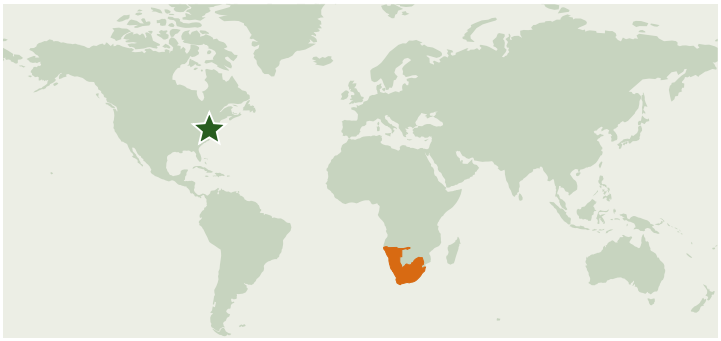
Think about it

1. How does an African penguin use its wings in the water?
2. How do the two parents share the job of raising their chicks?
3. How can you tell an adult African penguin from a chick?
4. What are two threats to African penguins today?
5. Where do African penguins live, and what is their habitat like?

Draw it

In the box below, draw an African penguin colony on a rocky island. Show a parent on its nest, a grey chick, and a penguin diving for fish. Label each part.

Where it lives in the wild



Lives in the wild ★ Plumpton Park Zoo, Rising Sun, MD

STANDARDS · GRADES 1–4 **WRITTEN FOR GRADES 3–5**

Maryland and Delaware (NGSS): **4-LS1-1 · 1-LS1-2 · 1-LS3-1**
Pennsylvania (STEELS): **3.1.4.A · 3.1.1.B · 3.1.1.C**

Draw here

Learn more: plumptonparkzoo.org/birds/african-penguin/ · **Sources:** IUCN Red List; BirdLife International; BirdLife South Africa; South African government; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Wilson (1985); Animal Diversity Web.
Supports Maryland and Delaware (NGSS) and Pennsylvania (STEELS) standards: 4-LS1-1 (3.1.4.A) · 1-LS1-2 (3.1.1.B) · 1-LS3-1 (3.1.1.C)
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ANIMAL LEARNING CENTER · RESEARCH WORKSHEET

AFRICAN PENGUIN

Before and after your research

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Before you research · 5 minutes

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Predict: where in the wild does the African penguin live?

Circle one (or more if it lives on more than one):

Africa | Asia | Australia | Europe | North America | South America

2. Predict: what does it eat?

☐ plants ☐ other animals ☐ both

3. Word hunt: find these words on page 1. Put a check by each one you already know.

☐ Native ☐ Incubate ☐ Colony ☐ Critically Endangered

Pick one word and write what it means in your own words:

4. My question: one thing I want to find out about the African penguin.

While you research

Read the animal page:
plumptonparkzoo.org/birds/african-penguin/

Write two facts you did not know before.

Draw or describe one body part that helps it survive, and say how it helps.

Draw here

After your research · talk it over

1. Check your prediction. Native region: South Africa and Namibia. Was your guess right?

☐ yes ☐ no ☐ partly

2. Diet check. The fact sheet says: Mainly anchovy and pilchard; also squid. What did you learn about how it finds or eats food?

3. Discuss with a partner, then write your best answer.

- How do the two parents share the job of raising their chicks?
- How can you tell an adult African penguin from a chick?

4. Exit ticket.

One thing I learned: _____

One thing I still wonder: _____

ADJUST IT

Grades K–2: talk and draw instead of writing; read the questions aloud. **Grades 6–8:** add evidence from the fact sheet and the animal page to every answer.

Learn more: plumptonparkzoo.org/birds/african-penguin/ · Fact sheet page 1 has the fast facts, map and vocabulary this page refers to.

Grades 1–4 · Maryland and Delaware (NGSS): **4-LS1-1 · 1-LS1-2 · 1-LS3-1** · Pennsylvania (STEELS): **3.1.4.A · 3.1.1.B · 3.1.1.C**