AFRICAN PENGUIN  
*Spheniscus demersus*

**Location:** The African penguin has been seen from Angola to northern Mozambique, but it normally ranges from central Namibia to Durban, South Africa. Breeding sites are restricted to some islands and the coast of South Africa. As with other penguin species, the African spends most of its life at sea. This species rarely goes beyond 30 miles of the shore.

**Diet:** African penguins consume a variety of marine prey, including squid, octopus, fish, krill and other crustaceans. Feeding occurs at sea. Typically, foraging begins around dawn and the penguins return before nightfall. Individuals often hunt alone, but sometimes groups of 10-20 birds herd and feed on schools of fish. Most food items inhabit the upper water layers, so penguins rely primarily on their vision to hunt prey. While swimming, the birds catch prey with their bills and swallow it whole.

**Life Cycle:** African penguins are gregarious, living in colonies referred to as rookeries. Penguins communicate with others by vocalizing and performing physical behaviors or displays. These displays help establish and maintain nesting territories, as well as mate acquisition and recognition behavior.

African penguins may breed at any time of the year, depending on food abundance. Both parents share in nest building, incubation, brooding and guard duties. Nests are built in randomly spaced burrows. There is generally little or no lining of the nest. Each female usually produces a clutch of 2 white eggs with an interval of approximately 2-4 days between laying. Incubation may start soon after the first egg is laid, but typically, it begins after the second egg is deposited. Incubation lasts about 38-42 days (roughly 5-6 weeks).

Newly hatched chicks are brooded and guarded for a little over 1 month. Unlike most other penguin species, African penguin chicks do not normally form crèches (groups) but stay in the nest until they are almost ready to molt. Chicks may molt and go to sea when they are roughly 2-3 months of age; if there is little food, it may take up to 4 months for a young bird to fledge. Sexual maturity is reached between 3-8 years of age. Adult African penguins stand over 1.5 feet high and weigh around 7.5 pounds. Some individuals live longer than 22 years.

**Remarks:** Penguins are adapted for swimming. The insulating feathers are highly specialized; they are short, broad and closely spaced (about 70 feathers per square inch) which provides waterproofing critical to penguins’ survival. Tufts of down trap a layer of air, this provides up to 84% of the thermal insulation. The teardrop-shaped body is superbly streamlined; the contours are smooth and continuously curved. A penguin’s greatest thickness comes at a point about a third of the way back from the head, a shape used by naval architects when speed is of particular importance.

The paddle-like wings, sometimes called flippers, have been compared to the appendages of seals and walruses. The penguin’s wings are designed to fly through the water. The powerful, rigid wings propel the streamlined body at speeds up to 11 miles per hour; the feet trail behind and steer, directing the bird’s course with easy precision.