Without drastic and decisive action, South Africa is on the brink of losing a species that is only found along the African coast and recognised worldwide.

The decline to extinction needs to be stopped and reversed as a matter of urgency.

A failure to act now could lead to irreversible results.
Let’s meet the African Penguin

- The African penguin (Spheniscus demersus) is the only species of penguin found on the African continent.
- It is endemic to the southern African coastline, found from Namibia to the Eastern Cape in South Africa.
- This bird is known for its black and white plumage, black spots on their chests and their characteristic “bray” resembling the sound of a donkey. In fact, you may know the bird by its old name – the Jackass penguin.
- Penguins are sentinels of ecosystem health and play an important role in the functioning of marine ecosystems. African penguin colonies provide an indication of the status of other marine top predators that target the same prey (sardines and anchovies) and, critically, the status of the marine ecosystem.
- The African penguin is a valuable part of South Africa’s natural heritage.
- They are arguably one of the most accessible penguins in the world. The African penguin colonies at Boulders Beach and Betty’s Bay are an important drawcard for eco-tourism in South Africa.
- **50 facts about African penguins**

What is happening to the African Penguin?

- In the early 1900s, it is estimated there were between 1.5 and 3 million individual African penguins across the species’ range along the Namibian and South African coast.
- It is estimated that there were close to 1 million pairs on the West Coast’s Dassen Island alone. However, by the mid-1950s, only about 300 000 were left due to egg harvesting and guano removal.
- Since 1979, when the first full count of the major South African colonies was conducted, the breeding population has declined from ~55 200 pairs to a mere ~10 000 breeding pairs in 2021.
- In fact, if every wild breeding penguin in South Africa had a seat in the Ellis Park Stadium in Gauteng, South Africa, the stadium would only be one third full!
- The current African penguin population is only about 10 000 breeding pairs in South Africa and 4 000 breeding pairs in Namibia, the lowest
numbers ever recorded. With such a small number of individual birds in the wild, the population will be functionally extinct by 2035. This means that the population will be so small that it will no longer be able to breed enough to increase numbers again.

- The species has been classified as Endangered on the Red List by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) since 2013. The time for action is NOW. If we wait, it will be too late. We need healthy oceans to support marine life now and into the future, especially if we want our children to see African penguins in the wild.

Figure 1. Trends in the number of African penguin breeding pairs in South-Africa from 1999 – 2021 (taken from African Penguin Biodiversity Management Plan, (APBMP) South African Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment.)

The APBMP is the South African government’s plan to ensure that African penguin populations are correctly managed to ensure a harmonious balance between the penguins’ survival and the needs of humans who are reliant on fisheries for food and jobs, and on the penguins’ habitat for recreation and development.
Why is this happening?
African Penguins are faced with multiple pressures that are cumulatively contributing to their decline. These include:

Reduced availability of forage fish (food)
The recent population decline of African penguins has been attributed to food shortages caused by shifts in the distributions of their prey species; namely declining small pelagic fish stocks and competition with commercial purse-seine fisheries for food. The island closure experiment, which was undertaken over 10 years ago, revealed the value of closing some of the areas in proximity to breeding African Penguin colonies to fishing. However, despite many years of negotiation, no long-term decisions have been implemented.

Oil and noise pollution
Many African penguin colonies occur in areas that are near existing or planned major shipping routes or ports. A growing threat is the expansion of harbours and an increase in ship traffic. Another emerging threat for the African penguin, is ship-to-ship bunkering, which started in Algoa Bay and is planned to expand to the West Coast. A large oil spill could destroy the remaining population. For example, four oil spills have already occurred in Algoa Bay since 2016, when bunkering started. In some areas, marine noise pollution is an emerging threat to African penguins, with evidence suggesting the scale of this impact could be large. The maritime industry, including exploration for oil and gas reserves using seismic surveys is a further looming threat.

Changes in breeding habitat
In the past, penguins made their nests in the burrows of guano. Harvesting guano removed the penguin nest material. Although guano harvesting is no longer allowed, a lack of nesting habitat is a concern. This is being addressed through revegetation efforts at some colonies and deployment of artificial nests is currently being tested at several colonies. Other threats include disease, extreme weather events, localised predation, and human disturbance at breeding colonies. All these threats require carefully implemented management plans for each penguin colony.

For more information on current threats to penguins: [African Penguin Biodiversity Management Plan](#)
It’s not just about the African Penguin

Ecosystem importance
• Penguins are sentinels of ecosystem health playing an important role in the functioning of marine ecosystems.
• They transfer nutrients from the sea to their colonies on land, which in turn act as key sources of nutrients to adjacent terrestrial and marine ecosystems.
• They facilitate healthy prey fish populations by selecting fish that are in poor body condition.
• They herd shoals of fish to the surface making them available to other seabirds such as gannets that are restricted to surface feeding.

Economic importance
• The loss of this charismatic species will have far-reaching economic impacts through job losses for tourism and conservation. Areas like Boulders Beach in Simon’s Town and Stony Point in Betty’s Bay on the Cape coast will lose this iconic species that attracts many people to visit these areas.
• Visitor numbers to the SANParks Boulders / Simon’s Town Penguin Colony have grown from approximately 580,000 in 2006 to 930,000 in 2017. The majority being international tourists. This translates to an expenditure of approximately R311 million per annum. Approximately 885 jobs were found to be associated with penguin-related visitor expenditure in all parts of Cape Town, with approximately 250 jobs being directly associated with the Boulders Colony.

KEY MESSAGES OF THE CAMPAIGN:
1. African penguins face possible extinction in the wild by 2035.
2. We may lose Africa’s only penguins. We have the responsibility to care for this species. It is a part of South Africa’s heritage.
3. A lack of food for penguins is one of the main factors contributing to the decline of African penguins.
4. The potential for oil spills near to breeding colonies is high, as these colonies are close to active harbours.
5. If we lose this species many people will lose jobs in tourism.
6. Penguins are an indicator species. The loss of this species tells us that something is seriously wrong in the ocean ecosystem. We need to protect penguins and their habitat.
7. Penguins are a vital part of healthy ocean ecosystems. The loss of penguins will impact other ocean species and ecosystems.
8. The loss of the African penguin will impact tourism in the Western Cape, with associated loss of jobs and financial impacts.
9. Residents who live near to African penguin colonies can help through their actions.
10. The behaviour of visitors to African penguin colonies needs to be better managed.
   • Don’t let penguins go the way of the Dodo.
   • Do we want our children to be the first generation to never see an African penguin in the wild?
   • If African Penguin goes extinct – it will be the first penguin species to go extinct because of human impacts.

Our Partners
• AZA African Penguin SAFE
• African Penguin and Seabird Sanctuary
• Birdlife SA
• Florida Aquarium
• Georgia Aquarium
• HomeBrew
• Nelson Mandela University
• OMS-Online Marketing Solutions
• SAAMBR (South African Association for Marine Biological Research)
• SANCCOB
• The Armoury
• Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation
• Wildlife and Environment Society (EC)
• WWF South Africa
• Zoos Victoria
Goals:
1. **Raise awareness** about the urgent need for action to reverse the decline of African penguins locally and internationally. *Phase 1*
2. To call for **support** to ensure that wise decisions concerning the future of the African Penguin are made by the relevant authorities. *Phase 1 & 2*
3. Encourage and support appropriate **behaviour** of local residents and visitors to mainland penguin colonies. *Phase 2*
4. **Research** the efficacy of this campaign in building awareness and taking action. *Ongoing*
5. To create **ongoing media** over the plight of the African penguin. *Ongoing*
6. **Build pride** in African penguins as a part of South Africa’s unique biodiversity. *Ongoing*

Target Audiences:
1. Residents near African Penguin colonies. *(South Africa)*
2. Tour operators and tourists to African Penguin colonies. *(South Africa and International)*
3. The zoo, aquarium, rescue & rehabilitation community. *(South Africa and International)*
4. The wider public – people who care about the African penguin *(South Africa and International)*
5. Minister Barbara Creecy, the South African Minister of Forestry and Fisheries and Environmental Affairs. *(South Africa)*

World Penguin Day – 25 April 2023 (celebrated on weekend of 22 - 23 April)

- We request local and international zoos and aquaria housing African penguins, or supportive of our campaign, to amplify #NOOW by **hosting an event at your respective facilities on the 22 or 23 April.**
- There are no rules for the event other than doing what works best for your facility and your timeline, **using the facts from our #NOOW campaign.** All facts have been checked by the scientists working with the penguins in situ.
- You are welcome to **use & share all the images and resources** on our website and social media pages. If you require a specific design
from us, please let us know and we will do our best to accommodate the request.

- Please use **all your own media streams** at your disposal – **print, radio, social**. We would like this to be a truly international campaign.
- You are welcome to share all the information that we share on social media.
- It is vital that you use words **Not On Our watch** and use the hashtag **#NOOW** as we will be tracking media via Newsclip.
- It is important to remember that this campaign is **not against fisheries**. It is an **awareness and action campaign** and the tone is positive, hopeful and supportive with a sense of urgency.

**Website:** [www.africanpenguinnnotonourwatch.org](http://www.africanpenguinnnotonourwatch.org)

**Facebook:** African Penguin NOOW

**Instagram:** African Penguin NOOW

Please use **#NOOW #AfricanPenguin**

**Email:** info@africanpenguinnnotonourwatch.org

**Resources**

All resources will be made available on our website, or contact us should you need something specific. **We will roll out a content plan on social media from 1 March 2023.**