



## African Penguins On Track For Extinction If Extra Measures Aren't Taken: A Call to Action

At the current rate of decline over 500 breeding pairs of the iconic African penguins in the wild may be obliterated this year and every year for the next decade, according to scientific research. By 2035, there probably won't be enough breeding pairs left for the species to survive in the wild.

While the South African government maintained already existing fishing closures around some of the African penguin colonies on August 4, it's far from enough to make a significant impact and stop the plunge toward extinction. The #NotOnOurWatch campaign ([#NOOW](#)), created by the Cape Town-based Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation and its South African and global partners, including [The Florida Aquarium](#), [Georgia Aquarium](#) and Australia's [Zoos Victoria](#), are taking action.

"Not on our watch will the African penguin go extinct in the wild," says Dr Judy Mann, Executive of Strategic Projects at Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation and President of the International Zoo Educators Association. "If fisheries, the South African government, oil and shipping companies, management agencies, scientists, conservationists, international allies and the public work together, we can stop African penguin numbers from declining every year."

The African penguin, found in the wild only in South Africa and Namibia, is one of the few penguin species that can be visited in urban coastal areas. It's labelled as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature ([IUCN](#)) on its Red List of Threatened Species. Without these special birds the Boulders Beach colony alone, which is found south of Cape Town, will miss out on the 6.87 billion rand of future expenditure that was estimated in a report by Dr Hugo van Zyl and James Kinghorn. About a thousand jobs in Cape Town are also at stake, according to the report. This excludes the revenue and jobs generated by colonies elsewhere in Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces.

The #NOOW campaign's strategy is to raise worldwide public awareness about the plight of the African penguin, to encourage the South African government to enact stricter policies and laws that will ensure this species continues to exist in the wild, and to support the conservation community.

"One of the biggest challenges is food availability. With fish stocks collapsing and fewer sardines available, African penguins are struggling to get enough food," according to Dr Mann. "Colony management, habitat for breeding, disease, predation by seals and gulls and the impact of storms and flooding are added challenges for the African penguin."

Other threats include oil pollution near African penguin colonies and increased noise pollution, which is detrimental to penguins and other marine species. But gloom is for the naysayers and giving up isn't an option.

"The Florida Aquarium is committed to safeguarding imperilled wildlife around the world and our African Penguin Conservation Program is one of our priorities. We know that this important indicator species is already endangered and extinction in the wild is almost guaranteed in our lifetimes if significant changes aren't made," Dr Debborah Luke, Senior Vice President of

Conservation at The Florida Aquarium said. ``The African penguins in our care are one of the aquarium's most popular species ambassadors. By backing the #NotOnOurWatch campaign and reaching out to a global audience for their help, we aim to be on the winning side of history and prevent the disappearance of this unique species."`

Instead of the public watching helplessly as extinction beckons, the #NOOW campaign is planning a Worldwide Waddle on October 14, which is International African Penguin Awareness Day. The campaign wants nature-loving children, adults, sports clubs, businesses, conservation groups, communities, radio stations, television outlets, newspapers, suburbs, towns, villages and cities, both inland and in coastal areas around the world, to join or arrange waddles and post their support, starting today, to social media, tagging #NOOW.

The campaign also wants penguin-lovers everywhere to email their encouragement to South Africa's Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Barbara Creecy, who has also vowed that not on her watch will these penguins disappear. Go to [www.africanpenguins.org](http://www.africanpenguins.org) to hit a button and send the letter and to find out more about the waddles.

Since 1979, when official counting began, the breeding population of the African penguin has declined to less than 11,000 breeding pairs. Look back 100 years and it's an estimated 99% drop.

The task ahead is daunting, but it's not impossible. #NOOW is a call to action and much will be done.

END

**Please see below for more information about #NOOW, links to photographs and contact details**

### **More information about #NOOW**

#NOOW started in March, 2023 as an initiative supported by the Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation, The Florida Aquarium, Georgia Aquarium and Zoos Victoria. The campaign's goal is to create a movement and raise awareness about the need for urgent action to reverse the decline of the African penguin population in the wild. The campaign plans to raise support to ensure that wise decisions concerning the future of the African penguin are made by the relevant authorities. The campaign also wants to create a movement to build pride in African penguins as part of South Africa's unique biodiversity.

To follow the #NotOnOurWatch campaign and access extra resources, click on this link: <https://www.africanpenguins.org/>

#NOOW is also on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

For more information on the campaign's launch earlier this year, go to: <https://www.aquarium.co.za/news/notonourwatch-a-campaign-to-save-the-african-penguin>

**Here is a link to a selection of images and infographics:** <https://we.tl/t-g35w1IRR6o>

**Please credit images to the relevant photographer – name in file name – Steve Benjamin.**

Steve Benjamin Penguin 9w (1): A close up of two African penguins on the South African coastline, a species declared critically endangered and under risk of extinction.

Steve Benjamin Penguin 16w (2): A pair of African penguins waddling along a beach on the South African coastline.

Steve Benjamin Penguin 19w (3): African penguins from a colony situated on a South African beach welcome the day under the soft light of a sunrise.

Steve Benjamin Penguin 22w (4): An African penguin, endemic to the Southern African coast explores the shallows.

Steve Benjamin Penguin 28w (6): A nesting pair of African penguins. Since 1979, the current breeding population has declined from ~55 200 pairs to a mere ~10 000 breeding pairs in 2021.

Cherry Kearton (1): A comparison photograph of the African penguin population and landscape of Dassen Island in the 1900s.

Christina Hagen (1): A comparison photograph of the African penguin population and landscape of Dassen Island in 2014.

Eberlanz Museum (1): A comparison photograph of the African penguin population and landscape of Halifax Island in the 1930s.

Jessica Kemper (1): A comparison photograph of the African penguin population and landscape of Halifax Island in 2004.

**For media queries, please contact:**

Renée Bonorchis, the African penguin #NotOnOurWatch campaign coordinator, on +27 82 896 1872 or [info@africanpenguins.org](mailto:info@africanpenguins.org)

or

Heather Wares, communication manager at the Two Oceans Aquarium, on +27 21 814 4539 or [hwares@aquarium.co.za](mailto:hwares@aquarium.co.za)

