

# More Antarctic protections urged on World Penguin Day

April 25 2017, by Martin Parry

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A Gentoo penguin waddling around Orne Harbour in the western Antarctic peninsula, one of a number of species that makes its home on the frozen continent

The world needs to do more to protect the Antarctic wilderness and its wildlife, scientists warned Tuesday, as they marked World Penguin Day.

The flightless seabirds—a favourite with children for their clumsy,

waddling gait—offer a useful yardstick for researchers to judge the health of their habitat.

"Penguins are great ambassadors for understanding the need to conserve Southern Ocean resources," Christian Reiss, an Antarctic fisheries biologist at the US-based National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, told AFP.

"They are the iconic species of this ecosystem and the fate of their populations will depend on effective ecosystem-based management, including understanding the role of [climate change](#) and human impacts."

A Pew study in 2015 showed two thirds of the world's 18 penguin species, which range from the volcanic Galapagos Islands on the equator to the frozen sea ice of Antarctica, were in decline.

Antarctic penguins in particular are vulnerable to climate change, with shifting ice reducing habitat while warming seas affect their prey.

Scientists blame intense fishing pressure on forage species such as krill, as well as pollution, degradation of breeding grounds, and climate change.

## Know your penguins

Introducing nine of the world's 18 species



**Magellanic**  
*Spheniscus magellanicus*  
**Native of:** Argentina, Brazil,  
Chile, Peru, Uruguay  
**Spotted in:** Antarctica,  
Australia, New Zealand  
**Status:** **Near threatened**



**Humboldt**  
*Spheniscus humboldti*  
Chile, Peru  
Colombia, Ecuador  
**Vulnerable**



**Emperor**  
*Aptenodytes forsteri*  
Antarctica  
Argentina, Chile,  
New Zealand  
**Near threatened**



**Adelle**  
*Pygoscelis adelle*  
Antarctica  
Argentina, Australia,  
New Zealand  
**Least concern**



**Gentoo**  
*Pygoscelis papua*  
Antarctica, Argentina, Australia  
(Macquarie Is.), Chile  
New Zealand  
**Least concern**



**Northern rockhopper**  
*Eudyptes nasale*  
Islands in South Atlantic  
and Indian Ocean  
Falkland Islands (Malvinas),  
South Africa  
**Endangered**



**African**  
*Spheniscus demersus*  
Angola, Namibia, South Africa  
Congo, Gabon  
**Endangered**



**Chinstrap**  
*Pygoscelis antarcticus*  
Antarctica, Argentina, Chile  
Australia, New Zealand,  
South Africa  
**Least concern**



**King**  
*Aptenodytes patagonicus*  
Argentina, Chile, South Africa  
Antarctica, Australia, Brazil,  
New Zealand, Uruguay  
**Least concern**

Source: AFP Photo/NOV

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Know your penguins - nine of the world's 18 species of penguins

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species, only two types of penguin—Adelle and King—are increasing in numbers.

## Struggling to adapt

Penguins live most of their lives at sea but return to land to breed and

molt, making them important gauges of marine health that are easily accessible to researchers, who can then develop realistic and effective conservation ocean strategies.

Stanford University marine scientist Cassandra Brooks, who specialises in the Antarctic, said penguin populations on the frozen continent were both increasing (Adelies in the Ross Sea) and decreasing (Chinstraps in the Antarctic Peninsula area).



Climate change is a particular threat to penguins, with melting and shifting sea ice reducing habitats and warming seas affecting their prey

"In short, we know climate change is dramatically changing the Antarctic environment and that the animals that comprise the Southern Ocean ecosystem are struggling to adapt," she told AFP.

"Scientists need to continue working to untangle the complex

interactions between climate change and [penguin populations](#)."

A deal sealed last year by the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR)—an international grouping tasked with overseeing conservation and sustainable exploitation of the Antarctic Ocean—will see a massive US and New Zealand-backed marine protected area established in the Ross Sea.

The sea is one of the last intact marine ecosystems in the world, home to penguins, seals, Antarctic toothfish, whales and huge numbers of krill, a staple food for many species.



Chinstrap penguins are one of the species whose populations are decreasing

It is considered critical for scientists to study how such ecosystems

function and to understand the impact of climate change on the ocean.

But two other proposals—the Australia and France-led East Antarctica sanctuary and a German plan to protect huge tracts of the Weddell Sea—are still under negotiation.

The East Antarctica sanctuary proposal spans one million square kilometres (386,000 square miles) while the Weddell Sea plan would extend from the southeast of South America over an area of some 2.8 million square kilometres.

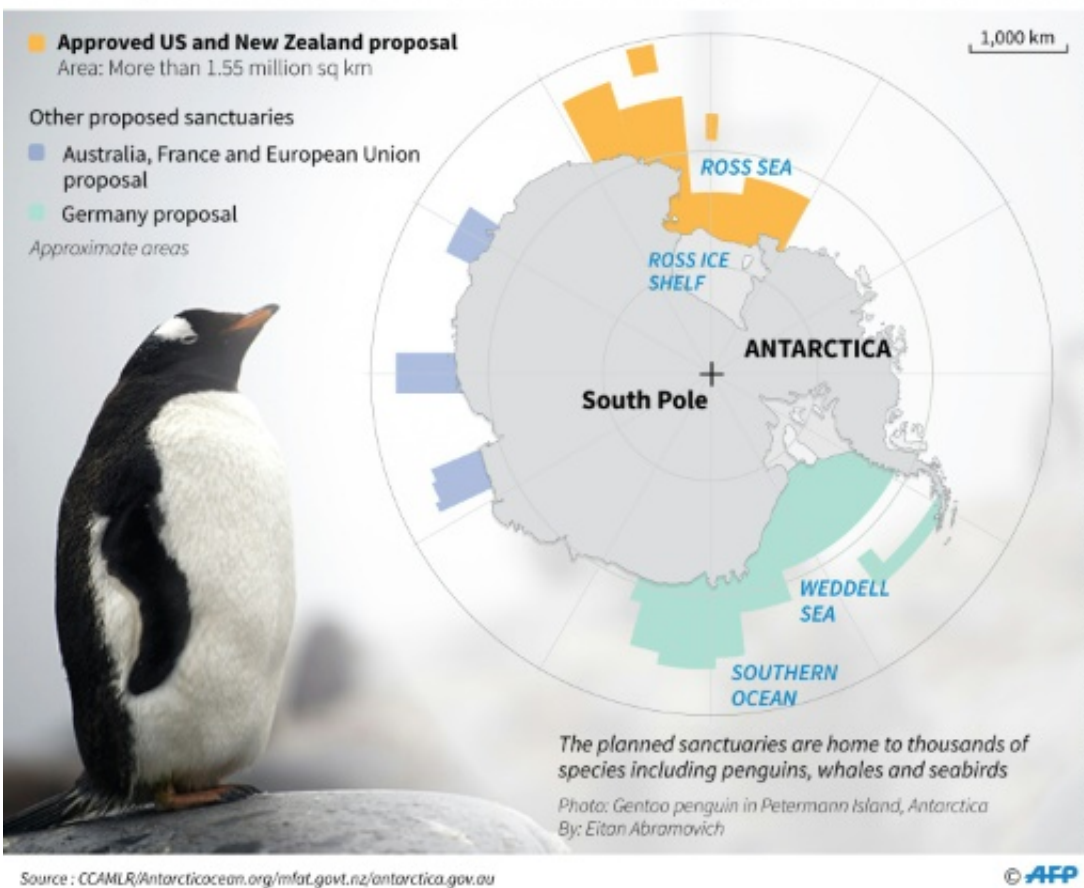
"A network of Southern Ocean MPAs (marine protected areas), which include no-take zones in areas important to penguin life history, may help ensure their survival in an uncertain future," said Brooks.

The CCAMLR holds its annual meeting in Hobart, Australia, in October.



## Antarctic sanctuaries

Landmark agreement reached in October 2016 to build the world's largest marine reserve in the Ross Sea



Scientists say sanctuaries are vital to protect penguins and other Antarctic animals from the effects of over-fishing, pollution and climate change

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