



## AFRICAN PENGUIN *Spheniscus demersus* – Eddie Cassani, Agulhas Honorary Rangers

The only penguin species to breed in Africa, the African Penguin is largely confined to the cold waters of the extreme southwest, breeding on scattered islands along the South African and southern Namibian coasts from Bird Island in Algoa Bay westwards.

From roughly 4 million African Penguins in existence at the beginning of the last century, the population fell to 200 000 in 2000. In September 2010 with only approximately 55 000 left, they were listed in the Red Data Book as endangered. If the decline is not halted the African Penguin is expected to be extinct within 15 years.

The African Penguin's distribution coincides roughly with the Benguela Current, a cool, northern flowing, nutrient-rich body of water that is forced to the surface by strong wind, especially in summer - a process known as upwelling. The distribution of the birds is further determined by the availability of offshore islands as breeding sites. Two mainland breeding sites have been established in the south-western Cape since the mid '80s – at Stony Point near Betty's Bay and at Boulders Beach near Simonstown. They feed mainly on shoaling fish (sardines and anchovies) with young birds targeting the slower-moving fish.

The main threats to the penguin are man-made: historically by hunting, guano scraping and egg collecting, and currently by over-fishing and oil pollution. Many organisations including SANCCOB, Dyer Island Conservation Trust, and the government are working tirelessly to halt the decline of the African Penguin by various measures such as monitoring population trends, hand-rearing and releasing abandoned chicks, setting up artificial nests and proclaiming marine reserves where fishing is prohibited.

The SANParks Honorary Rangers Agulhas have recently donated three artificial nests to the Dyer Island Trust.

### Bibliography

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