

Penguins: Up Close and Personal

by ReadWorks



A penguin is a type of bird that lives in water and on land. The black-and-white appearance of penguins is known as countershading, which is a form of camouflage that helps keep them safe in the water. Wild penguins are found only in the Southern Hemisphere. Most live within the polar region in very cold climates around Antarctica; however, some species of penguins live in warmer climates in South Africa, New Zealand, and some countries in South America. While there are over 17 different types of penguins, this passage will focus on only three: the emperor penguin, the king penguin, and the little blue penguin.

The biggest of all penguins, the emperor penguin, is almost three-and-a-half feet tall—that is almost as tall as the average first grader! And they can weigh up to 88 pounds. Incredibly, emperor penguins breed on the ice in Antarctica during winter. They face temperatures of -22

degrees Fahrenheit and below. After the female lays an egg, the male keeps the egg warm and protects it for a period of two months-during which time he doesn't eat at all! The female makes a hunting trip for those two months, sometimes traveling up to 50 miles to reach the ocean. When she returns, she regurgitates food for the chick, and then the male goes and finds food for himself. In the wild, emperor penguins live 15 to 20 years. Also, they have the deepest dive of all birds: up to 1,850 feet!

The second-largest penguin is called the king penguin. A king penguin can weigh up to 30 pounds. During breeding, like the emperor penguin, a king penguin keeps its egg warm on its feet under a pouch of loose skin. However, king penguins tend to live in slightly warmer climates than emperor penguins; they choose beaches without snow or ice to lay their eggs. The king penguin has a very distinctive coloring, with orange highlights on its head, beak, neck, and upper breast.

A third type of penguin is called the little blue penguin, also known as the fairy penguin. These penguins get their name from both their small size and the color of their feathers, which are a light blue instead of black and white like many other types of penguins. Little blue penguins are the smallest of all penguin types, only growing up to a little over one foot tall. They weigh only two or three pounds! They like to live on sandy or rocky beaches, and they can only be found in Australia and New Zealand. They face threats from natural predators such as seagulls, seals, and sharks, and also from introduced predators such as cats, dogs, and foxes. Unlike emperor penguins and king penguins, little blue penguins build nests for their eggs. And while emperor penguin parents take two-month-long shifts protecting their young, little blue penguins take turns more often, switching every few days. Their eggs hatch after only 36 days, and their average lifespan is 6.5 years.

Penguins have evolved so that they can spend time both in water and on land-although they are much more graceful in the water than they are on land! (Look at how they waddle awkwardly on land and how they glide smoothly through the water.) While penguins cannot fly, they do have small wings called flippers that help them swim underwater. An interesting fact about penguins is that they can remain underwater for as long as 20 minutes at a time before coming up for air. They also get their food from the seas. Small fish and squid make up the bulk of their average diet. Penguins seem to have mastered the art of hunting-they catch their prey with their beaks and swallow them whole! Some penguins spend much of their lives in water, only coming to land to mate and rear their chicks.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Which penguin is the largest?

- A. the king penguin
- B. the emperor penguin
- C. the rockhopper penguin
- D. the little blue penguin

2. What does the author describe in the passage?

- A. types of penguins and their habitats
- B. why most penguins are found in Antarctica
- C. the reason why penguins cannot fly
- D. how to protect penguins from extinction

3. Not all penguins are black and white. What evidence from the passage supports this conclusion?

- A. Countershading keeps penguins safe in water.
- B. Little blue penguins are the smallest type of penguin.
- C. Little blue penguins have blue feathers.
- D. Penguins mostly eat small fish and squid.

4. Which of the following conclusions about penguin habitats is supported by the passage?

- A. Penguins live only in Antarctica.
- B. Penguins cannot live in warm climates.
- C. Penguins live only in the Northern Hemisphere.
- D. Penguins can live in warm and cold climates.

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A. facts about penguins
- B. how penguins evolved
- C. what penguins eat
- D. where penguins live

6. Read the following sentences from the paragraph about king penguins.

"The second-largest penguin is called the king penguin. A king penguin can weigh up to 30 pounds. During breeding, like the emperor penguin, a king penguin keeps its egg warm on its feet under a pouch of loose skin. However, king penguins tend to live in slightly warmer climates than emperor penguins; they choose beaches without snow or ice to lay their eggs."

Why might the author mention emperor penguins in this paragraph about king penguins?

- A. to distract the reader from the important information
- B. to hint that the emperor penguin is better than the king penguin
- C. to show how these two kinds of penguins are alike and different
- D. to indicate that emperor penguins and king penguins are the same

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

_____ penguins have small wings called flippers, they cannot fly.

- A. Especially
- B. Therefore
- C. After
- D. Although

8. Emperor penguins breed in colder climates than king penguins. What evidence from the passage supports this statement?

9. According to the passage, what do little blue penguins build that emperor penguins and king penguins do not?

10. Compare and contrast two of the penguins described in the passage. Use information from the passage to support your answer.