



## Antarctica The Game - Handout 5

### PENGUINS



Penguins are birds that have adapted very well to life in the water. Their wing bones are fused to form flippers which are useless for flying, but are extremely well-suited to swimming. All penguins are "countershaded", which means that they are darkly coloured on their backs and white on their bellies. Countershading helps to camouflage penguins as they swim through the water; predators looking up from below a penguin have trouble

seeing their white bellies against the light surface of the water, while predators looking down from above have trouble seeing their black backs against the darkness of the deep water.

Penguins have oily feathers that are packed together very closely, and each feather has an extra part which they can puff up to keep them warm. Penguins also have a layer of fat under their skin which again keeps them warm.

Penguins spend up to 75% of their time in the water. Their bones don't have airspaces like other birds, so they sink more easily in the water. They catch their prey in their beaks and swallow them whole.

Penguins are social birds. Many species feed, swim and nest in groups. During the breeding season, some species form large groups, or "rookeries", that include thousands of penguins. Each penguin has a different call, allowing individuals to find their mate and their chicks even in large groups.

Emperor and King penguins have a special flap of skin over their feet. They can put their egg on their feet and cover it with the skin flap to keep the egg warm.

#### Threats

In Antarctica, home to the famous Emperor Penguin, a lot more ice is melting each year.

#### Key facts:

**Size:** The fairy penguin is the smallest of the penguin species at 16 inches tall. It weighs about 2.2 pounds. The largest penguin species is the emperor penguin, which is about 3.7 feet tall and weighs between 60 and 90 pounds.

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**Lifespan:** 15 to 20 years depending on the species.

**Diet:** Penguins eat krill, fish and squid.



Less ice means fewer habitats and the loss of critical food, such as shrimp-like krill, which depend on polar ice to reproduce.

Penguin populations have decreased by nearly 80 percent in some areas, and the majority of scientists agree that rising temperature due to climate change is the primary culprit.

Other problems include oil spills and competition with humans for food.