



GENTOO PENGUIN

cute and cheeky

GENTOO PENGUINS ARE CURIOUS AND OUTGOING CHARACTERS WITH A SEEMINGLY ENDLESS SUPPLY OF ENERGY. THESE CUTE AND CHEEKY PENGUINS ARE ALSO THE FASTEST UNDERWATER SWIMMING BIRD IN THE WORLD.

What do they look like?

There's no denying that the Gentoo penguins are very attractive and gorgeous animals. They are members of the brush-tailed family and feature a reddish-orange bill, cute orange feet and white patches above each eye that meet across the top of their head.

They have long, stiff tail feathers, which makes them fairly easy to spot, as no other penguin has such a prominent tail. While their tails stick out behind them when they walk, they are cocked up in the water when swimming.

What is special about them?

Gentoo penguins are active little characters with an amazing amount of energy. They are curious and outgoing and will investigate and interact with anything new. Gentoo penguins often call to each other with a honking sound and sing together in a loud chorus.

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They are certainly speedy little characters. Gentoos are the fastest underwater swimming bird in the world and can reach up to 36 kilometres per hour as their bodies slip through the water. While they can sometimes look a little clumsy on land as they waddle through the snow, Gentoo penguins can out-run humans over short distances. As well as their famous waddle, they also employ another way to get around on land – by using their stomachs to slide along the ice, which is known as tobogganing.

They also have an amazing ability to regulate their own heart rate. During deep dives, Gentoo penguins can reduce their heart rate from 80 - 100 beats per minute down to as low as 20 beats per minute to save energy and allow them to stay underwater for longer periods. This energy conservation is certainly needed, as Gentoos have been known to make up to 450 dives a day.

What is their breeding cycle?

The cheeky and feisty nature of Gentoo penguins remains on display during the breeding process. Unlike the King Penguins who incubate eggs on their feet, Gentoos are ground nesting birds

who make nests by piling up a circle of pebbles, stones, sticks, grass, feathers and practically any other material they can find.

The nests are closely guarded and their ownership can be the subject of noisy disputes between individual penguins. The females rule the nests, so much so that a male can often gain favour from the female by offering her a nice stone to add to her nest!

Two (sometimes three) eggs are laid and both parents share incubation, changing duty daily. The eggs hatch after 34 to 36 days and the chicks remain in the nests for about 30 days before forming crèches. The chicks molt into sub-adult plumage and go out to sea at about 80 to 100 days. Unlike other species of penguins, Gentoos can lay a replacement clutch of eggs if they lose the original clutch.

Where are they placed in Antarctica's food chain?

The favourite delicacies on the menu for wild Gentoo penguin are Rock cod, Lantern fish, squid, krill and other crustaceans. They are opportunistic feeders and typically forage in the sea quite close to their colonies. At Melbourne Aquarium, they eat herring, as well as baby salmon and sprats.

However, Gentoo Penguins need to be extra careful that they are not someone else's next meal. At sea, their main predators are Leopard Seals, Sea Lions and Orcas, while on land they need to watch out for opportunistic shore birds and feral cats taking eggs and young penguins. There other source of danger comes from clumsy Elephant Seals, who sometimes flatten Gentoo nests as they move about the colonies.

Where do they live?

Gentoo penguins live on Antarctic Peninsula and a number of sub-Antarctic islands. The main colonies are on the Falkland, South Georgia and Kerguelen Islands, while smaller populations are found on the Antarctic Peninsula, Heard and South Shetland Islands and the Australian-managed territory of Macquarie Island.

They prefer the low costal plains, fairly close to a sandy beach which is used to gain access to the open ocean. With an average lifespan of about 20 years, the current population of Gentoo penguins is estimated at approximately 640,000.

fast facts

NAME: Gentoo Penguin (*Pygoscelis papua*) **HEIGHT:** 75 to 85 centimetres **WEIGHT:** 5 to 8.5 kilograms
POPULATION: 640,000 estimate **LIFESPAN:** 20 years **DISTRIBUTION:** Antarctic Peninsula and sub-Antarctic Islands
FEATURES: Red-orange feet and bill, white eye patches