

Title

April 25th is World Penguin Day, possibly because this marks the start of the return of Adelie Penguins to their breeding grounds, possibly because it provides an excuse to dress up in tuxedos and celebrate these popular and endearing birds.

Whatever the reason, penguins need all the public support they can get. Of the 18 species, 15 are considered globally threatened or Near Threatened. Work to conserve them is hampered by the patchy nature of the data on where penguins go when away from their breeding grounds. To fill in these important gaps, BirdLife International and the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research have joined the British Antarctic Survey to compile a tracking database on six penguin species. The project is funded by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative.

There have been numerous penguin tracking studies, but the results have never been brought together in one place. The database will collate existing data on Chinstrap *Pygoscelis antarcticus* and King *Aptenodytes patagonicus*, Adélie *Pygoscelis adeliae* and Gentoo *Pygoscelis papua* (both Near Threatened), Macaroni *Eudyptes chrysolophus* and Southern Rockhopper *Eudyptes chrysocome* (both globally Vulnerable) penguins in the Weddell and Scotia Seas of Antarctica, as well as the waters around South Georgia.

BirdLife already manages the world's largest seabird tracking database. The Global Procellariiform Tracking Database, which brought together the work of all the world's experts on albatrosses and petrels, has been crucial in informing marine management decisions, particularly in relation to longline fisheries.

Penguins are excellent indicators of key marine habitats. The places where they forage are, generally speaking, also important for other marine predators like seals and whales. Once identified, areas on the high seas that prove to be important for penguins can be added to BirdLife's directory of marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs). In turn, they may be added to the list of ecologically or biologically significant areas for conservation (EBSAs), as candidates for marine Protected Areas.

Some penguin species have undergone declines of up to 80% in recent years, said Ben Lascelles, BirdLife's Global Marine IBA Officer. Better protection of their marine habitats is vital to build resilience into hard-hit populations. By bringing the existing penguin tracking data together and identifying candidate areas for protection, this project should be able to deliver major bangs-for-the-buck in marine conservation terms.

[Find out more about BirdLife's Marine work](#)