

Emperor penguin

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Excellent divers and hunters, emperor penguins are also the only animal to breed during the Antarctic winter

The emperor penguin (*Aptenodytes forsteri*) is the largest of the penguin species, standing 1.15m tall and weighing 23 to 40kg. Its distinctive yellow markings and bright orange bill easily distinguishes the penguin from other species.

Emperor penguins are unusual in that the males are not territorial and huddle with other males during the cold Antarctic winter to keep each another warm. Their mass also enables them to survive a possible wind chill temperature of -60C.

HABITAT

Penguins are found in Antarctica and breed in

ancestral areas called colonies, which can contain a few hundred or up to more than 20,000 pairs. Colonies are located on fast ice (frozen sea) situated between islands or grounded icebergs.

DIET

Emperor penguins are capable of diving for extensive periods, making them excellent hunters.

They dive to catch prey at up to 250m and can stay under water for three to six minutes at a time as they chase fish, krill and squid.

They generally prefer small prey because it will be extremely cold when swallowed, making it easier to heat to body temperature and digest.

COLD FRONT



OFFSPRING

Emperor penguins are the only animal to breed during the Antarctic winter. After mating, the female penguin gives birth to the egg and then passes it along to the male, who will incubate it on his feet – keeping it warm until ready to hatch.

At about 450g, the egg is quite small in comparison to the female penguin, but the male must balance the egg on his feet and cover it with a special brood pouch. If the egg touches the ice it will freeze and the chick will die.

During courtship and incubation the male does not eat for about four months. After hatching, the chick must remain warm and it is then the female's turn to protect the hatchling while the male eats. The hatchling must remain protected on its parents' feet for another 50 days before it is able to walk on the ice.

WEBSITES: antarctica.gov.au/about-antarctica/fact-files/animals/penguins/emperor-penguins

■ This poster complements the Mercury's BBC Earth David Attenborough Wildlife Collection NIE kit. DVD to watch is *Life in the Freezer: The Big Freeze* (G).

Compiled by Georgina Cook. Image: AP



22 MINS

The longest recorded dive by an emperor penguin was for 22 minutes.

565m DIVE

The deepest dive by an emperor penguin is listed at 565m.

NAKED

Emperor chicks are virtually naked when they hatch.

ROTATE

When the emperor penguins huddle they will rotate their position in the closely packed circle to share the warmth.

80km

In some areas female penguins may need to travel 80km to reach the open ocean.