

## U.S. Petitioned to List 12 Penguin Species as Endangered

WASHINGTON, DC, November 28, 2006 (ENS) - The nonprofit **Center for Biological Diversity** filed a formal petition with the U.S. government today requesting that 12 species of penguins worldwide be added to the list of threatened and endangered species under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the agency charged with protection of species under the act, must respond to the petition within 90 days.

Each of the penguin species named in the petition faces threats that include global warming, introduced predators, disease, habitat destruction, disturbance at breeding colonies, oil spills, marine pollution, depletion of krill which feeds their prey species, and in some cases, direct harvest.



An oiled penguin along Argentina's Atlantic coast in October 2005. (Photo by Dee Boersma courtesy [University of Washington](#))

"These penguin species will march right into extinction unless greenhouse gas pollution is controlled," said **Kassie Siegel**, **director of the Center's Climate, Air, and Energy Program**. "It is not too late to save them, but we must seize the available solutions to global warming immediately. I hope that their tragic plight will motivate people to support stringent greenhouse gas reductions."

Under the Endangered Species Act, the Fish and Wildlife Service can decide to list a species living in a foreign country after taking into account efforts, if any, being made by that country to protect the species at issue, whether by predator control, protection of habitat and food supply, or other conservation practices, within any area under its jurisdiction, or on the high seas.

Foreign species can be listed under the Endangered Species Act if they are designated as requiring protection from unrestricted commerce by any foreign nation, or under any international agreement such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, CITES.

The Galapagos penguin of Ecuador is the only penguin species currently listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

Listing under the Endangered Species Act will provide broad protection to penguins, **the Center argues**, including a requirement that U.S. federal agencies ensure that any action carried out, authorized, or funded by the United States government will not "jeopardize the continued existence" of the penguin species.

The 12 species subject of the petition are the emperor penguin, southern rockhopper penguin, northern rockhopper penguin, Fiordland crested penguin, snares crested penguin, erect-crested penguin, macaroni penguin, royal penguin, white-flipped penguin, yellow-eyed penguin, African penguin, and Humboldt penguin.

Penguins are found only in the southern hemisphere. Most live in Antarctica, but they also can be found in South America, Southern Africa and the Australian island state of Tasmania.

In its petition, the **Center for Biological Diversity** points to global warming as one of the most serious threats to penguin species not only because Antarctic ice is melting but because warmer ocean temperatures are causing a decline in a

primary food source - krill.

All penguins eat krill, tiny, shrimp-like crustaceans. For emperor, adelie, and rockhopper penguins, krill is a more important food source than fish.

"Abnormally warm ocean temperatures along with diminished sea ice have wrecked havoc on penguin food availability in recent decades," **the Center** said in a statement.



**Emperor penguins in Antarctica's Southwest Ross Sea** (Photo by Michael Van Woert courtesy [NOAA](#))

"Less food has led to population declines in penguin species ranging from the southern rockhopper and Humboldt penguins of the islands off South America, and the African penguin in southern Africa, to the emperor penguin in Antarctica," **said the organization.**

The emperor penguin colony at Pointe Geologie, featured in the film "March of the Penguins," has declined by 70 percent due to global warming, the Center claims.

To back this claim, **the Center** relies on a 2004 study by the British Antarctic Survey demonstrating that krill, tiny shrimp-like animals that serve as an essential food source for penguins, whales and seals, has declined by as much as 80 percent since the 1970s over large areas of the Southern Ocean.

Lead author Dr. Angus Atkinson from British Antarctic Survey, said when the study was released in November 2004, "This is the first time that we have understood the full scale of this decline."

"Krill feed on the algae found under the surface of the sea-ice, which acts as a kind of nursery," explained Atkinson. "The Antarctic Peninsula, a key breeding ground for the krill, has warmed by 2.5°C in the last 50 years, with a striking decrease in sea-ice. We don't fully understand how the loss of sea-ice here is connected to the warming, but we believe that it could be behind the decline in krill."

**The Center** says that many of the penguin species in its petition are impacted by industrial fisheries, either directly, such as when individual penguins are caught and killed in trawls, nets and longlines, or indirectly through the depletion of essential prey species such as anchovy and krill.

Similar fishing fleets figure in the hit movie "Happy Feet," which features two of the species in the petition - the Emperor and Rockhopper penguins.

"The planet is in denial," said John Collee, co-writer of the animated film "Happy Feet," which was rated as the top movie in the United States during Thanksgiving week.

Collee said, "Whales and penguins are literally starving to death as a result of krill depletion. As regards global warming, the entire West Antarctic ice sheet is balanced on the tips of mountains and fragmenting at the edges."

Happy Feet ends with what appears to be a United Nations ban on fishing in Antarctica and plenty of food for all penguins, but in reality, says **the Center**, fishing for krill is expected to increase in the coming year.