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March of the penguins-- Onto the endangered species list

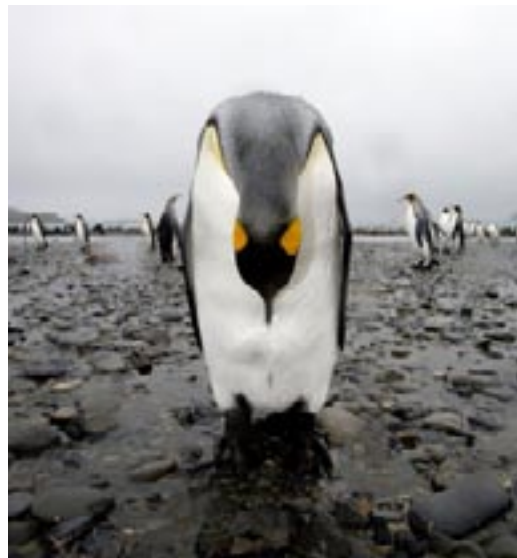
By David Biello
60-Second Science Blog

Seven species of penguins will now join polar bears on the list of species endangered by climate change and other environmental threats, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) said this week. Worst off: the African penguin, which is disappearing due to overfishing and oil pollution.

The other threatened penguins: yellow-eyed, white-flippered, Fiordland crested, erect-crested (all from New Zealand) and the Humbolt penguin of South America. Still safe, at least according to the FWS, are the southern and northern rockhopper as well as the lord of all penguins—the emperor, which the agency decided was safe because it lacked enough info on how Antarctica will change over the coming century.

Given the rapid warming of the Antarctic peninsula—and other signs of climate change on the southernmost continent—it may not be long before the emperor joins his subjects on the list. Already, the emperor penguin colony featured in the hit film *March of the Penguins* has lost more than half its members in recent years.

Of course, being on the list affords scant protection for the penguins that don't live in the U.S. —it



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merely prohibits their import or export. But if the proposed listing is adopted after a public comment period, nearly half of known penguin species will officially be listed as threatened or endangered. Not a good sign for a warming world experiencing what has been called the sixth (mass) extinction.

“Right now, penguins are marching towards extinction due to the impacts of global warming,” said seabird biologist Shaye Wolf of the Center for Biological Diversity in a statement. “For the species proposed for listing, today’s decision is an important step forward. However, for the emperor penguin, it is a step closer to extinction.”