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Not so happy feet ...

11/28/2006 10:45:36



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The Arizona Republic

They're cute, they're misunderstood (at least that's what [Opus](#) would have us believe) and they do boffo box office, all of which makes [penguins](#) a potent symbol in the fight to push climate change on to political center stage.

The plight of the penguin was chronicled poignantly in last year's French documentary "[March of the Penguins](#)" and with some humor in this month's "[Happy Feet.](#)" Now the [Center for Biological Diversity](#) wants to help the tuxedoed birds.

The Tucson-based environmental group filed a formal petition seeking threatened and endangered species protection for 12 species of [penguins](#). According to the group:

Abnormally warm ocean temperatures along with diminished sea ice have wrecked havoc on penguin food availability in recent decades. 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. The ocean conditions causing these declines have been linked by scientists to global warming and are projected to intensify in the coming decades.

The colony of Emperor Penguins profiled in "March..." has shrunk by 70 percent because of warming temperatures, the center argues. The supply of krill, the aquatic species that provides food for penguins and other sea life, has declined by 80 percent as a result of climate-induced changes to the ocean's temperatures.

"We're all in denial," said John Collee, co-writer of "Happy Feet." "The planet is largely covered with water yet we have this bizarre delusion that we can utterly destroy our marine ecosystems and somehow emerge unscathed. Coral reefs are in terminal decline.

"The horrible reality of our war on the environment is so dark that most people don't want to contemplate it."

The center's request is unusual because penguins don't live in this country, but the group says we're causing the problem and should step in to help fix it:

The United States, with four percent of the world's population, currently produces about one quarter of the world's [greenhouse gases](#). The U.S. Government Accounting Office projects that these greenhouse gas emissions will grow by 43.5% through the year 2025.

The U.S. Supreme Court will hear arguments Wednesday in a potentially landmark [global warming case](#) that seeks to force the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate greenhouse gas emissions.

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