

Under pressure Salazar's Interior Department lists African penguins for ESA

By Jean Williams, Environmental Policy Examiner

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The only nesting penguin found on the African continent was listed by the Interior Department on Tuesday, September 28, for Endangered Species Protection.

The African penguin, also known as the black-footed penguin, finally got the listing after pressure from environmentalists groups.

The decision responds to a 2006 Center for Biological Diversity petition to protect 12 penguin species under the Act as well as a legal settlement with the Center and Turtle Island Restoration Network concerning delays in protecting the penguin.

"African penguins are sliding toward extinction with no signs of stopping," said Catherine Kilduff, a Center attorney. "Climate change, oil spills, overfishing and habitat destruction are among the many threats that the Endangered Species Act must begin to address."

African penguin populations, which breed in Namibia and South Africa, have declined by 95 percent since preindustrial times. Commercial fisheries have forced penguins to feed on less nutritious prey and swim miles farther to find food, even as climate change and ocean warming are making the penguins' prey more scarce. The birds live along the major global oil transport route, so spills oil them often.

Furthermore, until as recently as the late 19th century, African Penguin eggs were considered a delicacy and

harvesting their eggs for sale was an additional problem that impacted the decline of the species.

In addition, guano harvests eliminated their preferred nesting substrate, leaving them exposed to predators, heat stress, flooding and sea-level rise. Today's listing will raise awareness of their plight, increase research and conservation funds, and offer additional oversight of U.S.-government-approved activities that could harm penguins.

"Industrial fisheries and ocean warming are starving the penguins. Longlines and other destructive fishing gear entangle and drown them," said Todd Steiner, biologist and executive director of TIRN. "Finally the government is throwing penguins a lifeline to recovery by protecting them under the Endangered Species Act."

According to the Center, the endangered African penguin joins five other penguins with new protected status, the Humboldt penguin of Chile and Peru and four New Zealand penguins (the yellow-eyed, white-flippered, Fiordland crested and erect-crested). The Center and TIRN plan to file suit against Interior for denying listing to emperor and northern rockhopper penguins despite scientific evidence that they are jeopardized by climate change and commercial fisheries.

By mid-century, if greenhouse gas emissions remain on their current trajectory, climate change will commit one-third of the entire world's species to extinction.

Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar has a worse record on ESA listings than former President George W. Bush. There are over 300 species languishing on the list waiting for ESA protection.
