

Adélie penguins

Adélie penguins breed and raise their young farther south than any other penguin, on the continent of Antarctica. In September and October—springtime in that part of the world—thousands of Adélies gather on the rocky Antarctic shoreline. The huge gatherings are called colonies. This is where the Adélies breed and raise their young.

Adélie penguins build nests by scooping out areas in the ground. Then they line the depression with small stones. The female usually lays two eggs in the nest. The stones in the nest help keep the eggs dry and warm by keeping them off the bare ground.

Both parents care for the eggs. While one stays behind keeping the eggs warm and safe from predators, the other parent heads out to sea to eat. They feast mainly on krill, tiny shrimplike animals, but also eat fish and squid.

Adélie penguin eggs hatch in December, which is typically the warmest time of year in Antarctica. Parents take turns caring for their youngsters after they hatch—just as they did the eggs—until the chicks are about three weeks old. At that point, both parents may leave to forage for food while the chicks gather in the safety of a large group of other young penguins.

These groups of young Adélies are called creches. By March, when Adélie chicks are about nine weeks old, their downy baby feathers have been replaced by waterproof adult feathers. They head to sea, plunge in, and start hunting for food on their own. In the Antarctic winter, the Adélie penguins live at sea.

They usually hunt in shallow waters. Like other penguin species, Adélies are excellent swimmers. They're powerful and graceful in the water, with torpedo-shaped bodies that pierce through the water.

Their modified wings help propel them through water instead of air. These birds are swimmers, not fliers.

FAST FACTS

The scientific name for the Adélie penguin is *Pygoscelis adeliae*.

An Adélie penguin can live to be up to 20 years old. An adult Adélie penguin is about 27.5 inches (69.9 centimeters) tall, and weighs from 8.5 to 12 pounds (3.9 to 5.4 kilograms).

A group of penguins is called a colony. An Adélie penguin colony can be made up of 100 to 250,000 pairs of birds.

Adélie penguins were named by French explorer Dumont d'Urville. He named them after his wife, whose name was Adélie.

An Adélie penguin has white rings around its eyes. The feathers at the base of its bill are also white. Its bill is red. It has a solid black head and a white belly. The black feathers on its back are tipped with blue. An Adélie penguin's tail is a bit longer than other penguins' tails.

Adélie penguins often toboggan across ice. To toboggan, a penguin slides on its belly using its feet to push itself forward.

Most Adélie penguins return to the colony in the place where they hatched to mate and raise their own chicks. Adélies generally begin raising their own families when they are two to four years old.