

PENGUINS IN THE WILD



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Penguin land

Gentoo Penguins stand below the hanging glaciers and snow-capped peaks that loom over Gold Harbour on the South Atlantic Island of South Georgia. At least 300 pairs of this species nest at the site in the tussock grass behind the beach, but to reach them one must first negotiate a wall of blubber created by the breeding rookery of Southern Elephant Seals. Few places on Earth support a similar abundance of wildlife in such a spectacular setting and initially it can be almost overwhelming. To take this shot I took advantage of the long sunny summer days, catching the crystalline light just after 4am.



A small group of Gentoo Penguins sits out a blizzard at the decaying whaling station of Grytviken on South Georgia. Towering over them is the rusting hulk of *Petrel*, an old whaling vessel.





Chinstrap Penguins are highly gregarious and often gather in their hundreds, and sometimes thousands, on the immense icebergs drifting between the subantarctic islands and the Antarctic continent.



The glorious lichens that encrust the rocks at this Adélie Penguin colony at Shingle Cove on Livingston Island add an unexpected splash of almost tropical colour to the scene.



On the move

Although penguins are best adapted to their life in the water, they are no mean movers on dry land. I came across this group of Gentoo Penguins running excitedly down a Falkland Island beach. They were travelling at such a pace I would have had to run hard if I'd wanted to keep up.





Summer in an Emperor Penguin colony. Those chicks that are old enough to be left by themselves often go exploring. They reminded me of packs of teenagers hanging around on the edge of town.



Unlike most penguins, Emperors don't have a territory to defend. Instead, when incubating their egg or brooding their young, they shuffle around. Within a colony there may be many sub-colonies, groups standing together that change in size and structure. I lay on the ice next to this parent with its chick to capture an intimate portrait. There is surely no cuter baby bird on Earth than an Emperor Penguin that is just a few weeks old.



New life in one of the harshest environments on Earth. The chick was so snuggled down and almost invisible in its parent's brood pouch that I had to wait for hours on end in conditions of -10°C (14°F) for its tiny head to appear. My long vigil was rewarded. The temperature in the adult's brood pouch is a constant 36°C (97°F). If tipped out accidentally on to the ice the chick would freeze to death in two minutes.



Survival

My diary entry for the 17th November reads: 'The storm has raged for 24 hours now but last night we decided to try and make it to the colony. The three of us roped up and made our way over leads opening in the ice. At times there was no visibility and we had to stop and wait until we could see again. Eventually we reached the Emperors. Around 300 chicks were huddled together in a crèche. At times the colony, which I was right next to, would disappear from view in the blizzard. It was wild and very exciting to be in this storm with the birds.'

