

# The Life Cycle of a Penguin

Most adult penguins breed every year and they go back to the same place when it is time to breed. Adult males go to the site and try to attract a female penguin to mate with. Female penguins will only mate with strong healthy males as rearing a chick is a lot of hard work. Both adults need to work very hard hunting and looking after their chick.

Some breeds of penguin mate with the same partner each year. Adult penguins call to one another. They also clean each other's feathers. This is called preening. Adult males will also give their mate gifts such as stones and pebbles to make a nest.

## Egg to chick

Once an egg is laid, the parents take turns to sit on the egg to keep it warm. This is called incubation and it can take up to eight weeks for an egg to incubate. When the chick inside the egg is fully developed, it uses its sharp beak to break through the egg shell. The chicks need a lot of care when they first hatch, as they must be kept warm and dry.

One parent stays with their chick at all times. Parents take it in turns to go and hunt for food to feed themselves and their chick. A penguin chick needs to feed once a day.

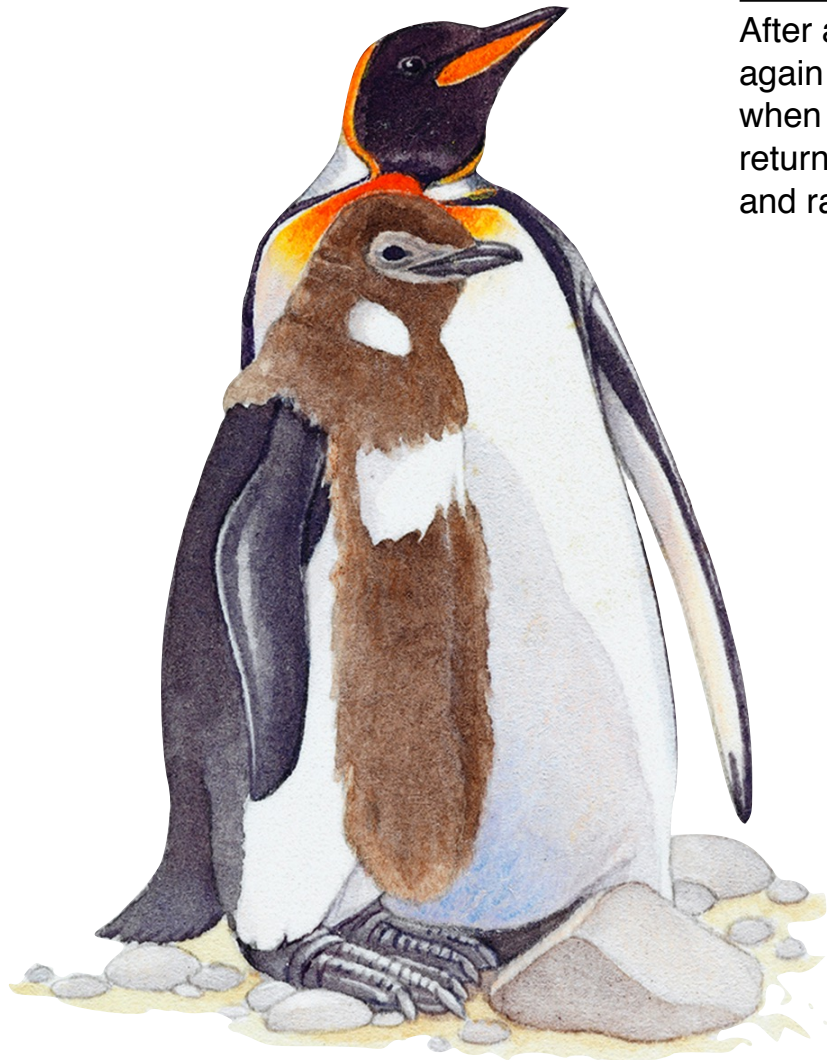
To keep warm, a chick sits on their parent's feet or under their bellies. As the chick grows they develop a thick coat of downy feathers. This means they no longer need to be sheltered by their parents.

There are many predators so chicks do not go too far from their nest site. As the chicks grow they need more food. Then both parents have to leave the chick and go hunting to provide enough food. When this happens, some species of penguin chicks huddle together in big groups (called 'crèches') to keep warm and protect each other.



### **Chick to juvenile**

As the chicks grow they begin their first moult. They lose their 'baby' feathers which are replaced by their waterproof feathers. This means they can swim in the sea and catch their own food. Juvenile penguins must quickly learn how to catch their own food and how to avoid predators in the water.

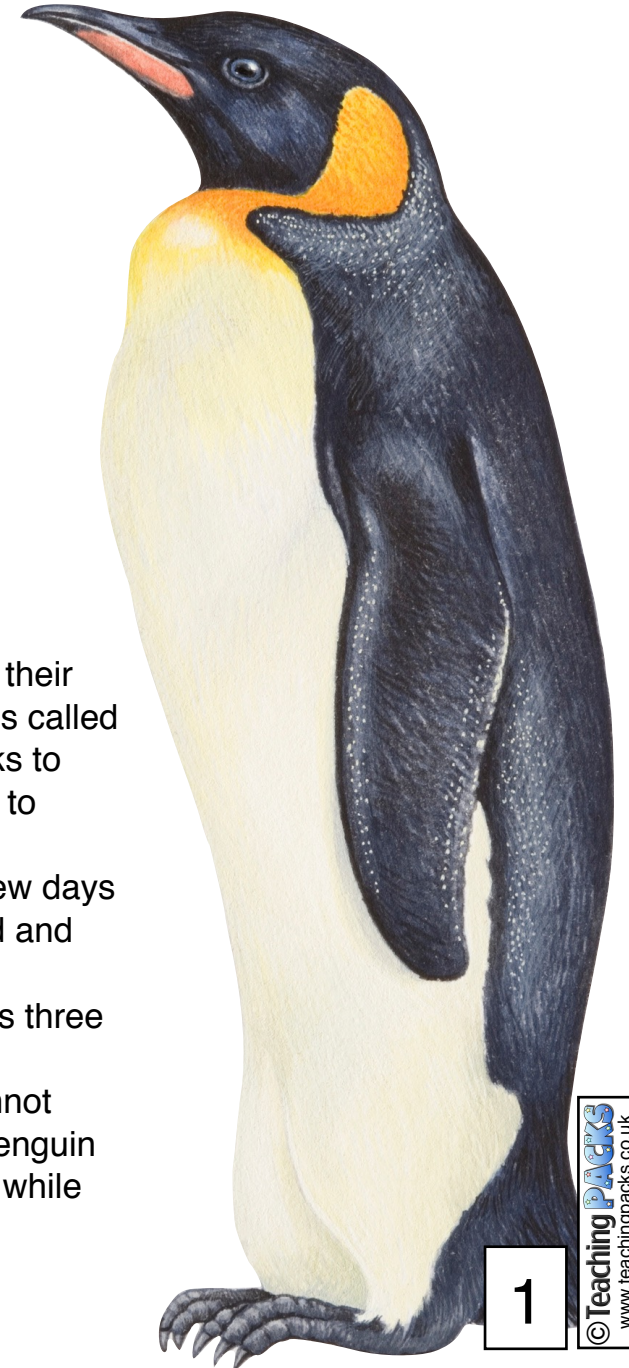


### **Juvenile to adult**

After a year juvenile penguins will moult again and get their adult feathers. Usually when they are two years old, they will return to the colony to find a mate, breed and raise their own chick.

### **Moulting**

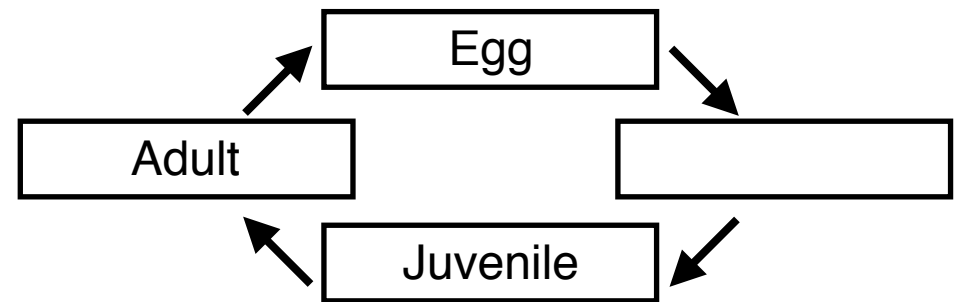
All adult penguins need to replace their feathers every year. This process is called moulting. Adults wait for their chicks to become juveniles so they are able to swim and catch their own food. They then return to the sea for a few days themselves so they can catch food and build up their fat reserves. This is important as moulting usually takes three weeks and during this time adult penguins cannot swim so they cannot catch any food. Some breeds of penguin will moult at their breeding colony, while others will go somewhere else.



## The Life Cycle of Penguins

1. Why do female penguins only breed with strong healthy males?
2. What is 'preening'?
3. What might a male penguin give to their mate?
4. What does a chick use to break through the shell of its egg?
5. How often do penguin chicks need to feed?
6. Why do chicks not go too far from their nest site?
7. Give two reasons why some species of penguin chicks huddle together.

8. Fill in the empty box below to show the stages in the life cycle of a penguin:



9. At what age do penguins usually return to the colony to find a mate and breed?
10. Why do penguins wait for their chicks to become juveniles before they return to the sea?
11. Fill in the blank spaces in the sentences below:  
*All adult penguins need to replace their \_\_\_\_\_ every year. This process is called \_\_\_\_\_.*
12. Can you name an animal that might be a predator for a penguin?

Version 1