

9 APRIL 2026

Emperor Penguin now Endangered due to climate change

Species

Systems



BirdLife International’s new Red List assessment reveals the shocking impact of climate change on Emperor Penguins. We call on governments to act by designating the Emperor Penguin as an Antarctic Specially Protected Species in May.

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As the **official Red List Authority for birds**, BirdLife regularly reassesses the global extinction risk of all the world’s bird species to help draw attention to those at highest risk and to highlight where conservation action is working.

Header image: Adult Emperor Penguin leading a group of five chicks across Antarctic ice © Vladsilver/Shutterstock

One of the species re-assessed by our scientists this year, in collaboration with the **IUCN SSC Penguin Specialist Group**, was the **Emperor Penguin**. Beloved by many, this charismatic Antarctic species is being uplisted today from Near Threatened to Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

The main culprit for the negative downward trend faced by Emperor Penguins is **climate change**. Indeed, it is leading to a drastic decline and erratic changes in sea ice persistence in the region, which are projected to cause the Emperor Penguin population to halve by the 2080s.



Emperor penguins in the colony of Haswell, Davis Sea, East Antarctica. © Sergey 402/Shutterstock

Rob Martin, Red List Team Manager at BirdLife International, who co-ordinated this reassessment, says: “The Emperor Penguin’s shift from Near Threatened to Endangered is a worrying signal of the reach of climate change impacts into the most remote parts of the globe. Future projections for the species robustly point to severe reductions over the rest of this century.

Emperor Penguins are completely dependent on the Antarctic habitat for breeding, moulting and feeding, but it will become harder for them to survive as ice patterns become less predictable and this crucial habitat keeps decreasing.”

Satellite images indicate a loss of around 10% of the population between 2009 and 2018 alone, equating to more than 20,000 adult penguins. The primary driver is the early break-up and loss of sea-ice, which has reached record lows since 2016.

Emperor Penguins require fast ice – sea-ice that is ‘fastened’ to the coastline, ocean floor or grounded icebergs – as habitat for their chicks and during their moulting season, when they are not waterproof. If the ice breaks up too early, the result can be deadly.

It is challenging to draw firm conclusions regarding population changes about the tragedies we can observe, such as the collapse of a breeding colony into the sea before the chicks can swim. But population modelling considering a wide range of future climate scenarios shows that without abrupt and dramatic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, Emperor Penguin populations will continue to rapidly decline during this century.



An Emperor Penguin feeding its chick at Snow Hill Emperor Penguin Colony, Antarctica. © Robert Mcgillivray, Shutterstock

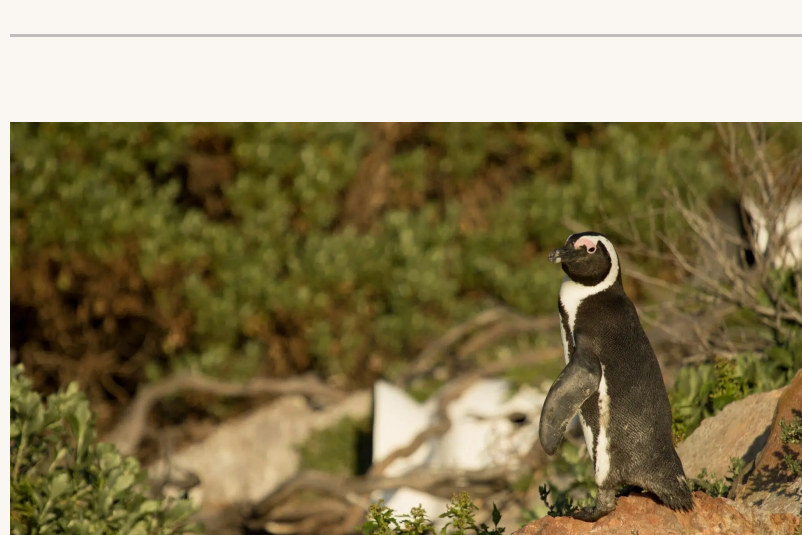
Governments have an opportunity to act for Emperor Penguins at the upcoming 48th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in Hiroshima in May. This meeting will bring together governments to oversee and shape environmental protection policy for the Antarctic. BirdLife International contributes by providing the Red List assessment for the Emperor Penguin to inform decision-making.

Martin Harper, CEO of BirdLife International, says: “Penguins are already among the most threatened birds on Earth. The Emperor Penguin’s move to Endangered is a stark warning: climate change is accelerating the extinction crisis before our eyes. Governments must act now – starting by designating the Emperor Penguin as an Antarctic Specially Protected Species this May.”

Becoming an Antarctic Specially Protected Species would create legally binding obligations for governments to prevent actions that directly harm or disturb Emperor Penguins and their habitat.

Birds are our compass. Their health reveals the health of our world. And Emperor Penguins are showing us how stark the future of the Antarctic will be if we don’t change course now and urgently decarbonise our economies.

[READ THE NEW ASSESSMENT HERE](#)

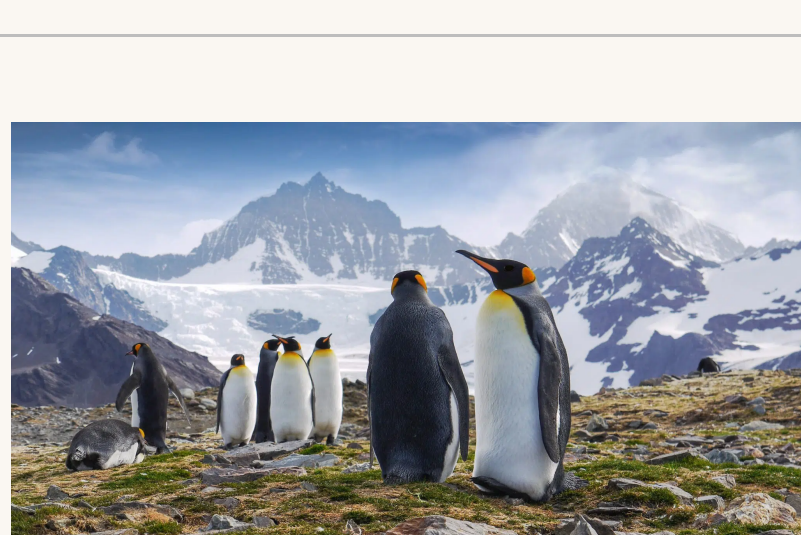


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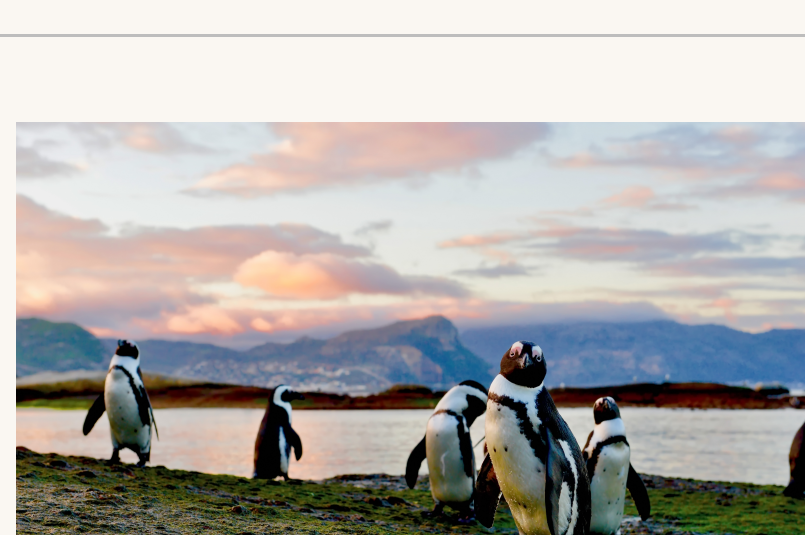


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