



GENTOO

Pygoscelis papua

Background Information

The Gentoo penguin is a member of the genus *Pygoscelis*, which contains two other members, the Adelie and the Chinstrap. When inspecting the three, the Adelie looks more like the odd one in the group of three. Chinstraps and Gentoos share more morphological features, but the Gentoo is the most colorful of the three with its orangish beak and pinkish-orange feet. They can also be positively identified by an interorbit band of plumage that runs superiorly over the head.

Gentoo penguins weigh-in at 6.2 kilograms (the northern varieties) or a little over 5 kilograms (southern races). Their heights are equally diverse: northern races reaching 81 cm and southern races only catching up at 71 cm. The male and the female of the species are monomorphic and difficult to differentiate.

Magellanic penguins and few others overlap spatially and temporally with the Gentoo penguin, as its chief center of residence is the Periantarctic ring of islands, specifically South Georgia, Heard Islands, Iles Kerguelen and the Falklands. Although they spend considerable time in the nesting area, they are considered to be a migratory species since they return to natal grounds to breed and rear chicks. Although lower than others in number, the Gentoo penguin is considered to be a stable population of 320,000 pairs.

Gentoo penguins eat the basic marine creatures that most other penguins consume: small fish, crustaceans, squid, etc. Since they occupy similar niches with other species of penguins, they compete for the same food, but I assume the competition is minimal. While searching for food, they are susceptible to predation by the leopard seal and sea lion. If they abandon their nests while foraging, their eggs and/or chicks may fall prey to skuas or petrels.

Author Bernard Stonehouse

Gentoo penguins *Pygoscelis papua*, largest of the pygoscelids, are widely distributed on temperate and Antarctic islands, breeding south to about 65S on Antarctic Peninsula. The scattered populations show considerable variation on weight and measurement; of several subspecies proposed, Stonehouse (1970b) has provided statistical evidence in favour of a small southern form (*Pygoscelis papua ellsworthii*) originally identified by Murphy (1947), but could not separate other variant stocks on data from museum specimens alone. However, it seems probable that several island races will eventually be identified among Northern Gentoos. The southern subspecies, breeding on the Peninsula and islands of the southern Scotia Arc, has thinner plumage and relatively longer extremities than nominate forms. It breeds on bare hillsides and beaches, and probably winters on pack ice close in shore. Northern Gentoos nest among tussock grass on South Georgia,

the Falkland Islands, Marion Island, Iles Crozet and Kerguelen, Heard and Macquarie Islands; they are also reported to breed on Staten Island and northern islands of the South Sandwich group. Gentoos build nests of stones, tussock grass or moss, usually in small, scattered colonies of several dozen or a few hundred pairs. Laying two eggs in early spring, they incubate and rear their chicks throughout summer and have them ready for independent life by early autumn. Apart from early behaviour studies by Bagshawe (1938) and Roberts (1940), and a more recent ethological analysis by Van Zinderen Bakker Jr (1971), little has been published on the breeding biology of this species.



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