

# namib times

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## Africa's Only Penguin Species on the Brink of Extinction



An injured penguin getting treatment at the rehabilitation facility in Cape Town (Photo: Ocean Conservation Namibia).

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# Africa's Only Penguin Species on the Brink of Extinction

*Eileen van der Schyff*

Yes, penguins do live here! The African Penguin, found along Namibia's coast and into South Africa, is the only penguin species native to the continent. With colonies near Lüderitz and famous tourist sites like Boulders Beach in Cape Town, these tuxedoed little seabirds are beloved by many. But now, they are in serious trouble.

Since July 2024, the African Penguin has been officially uplisted to "critically endangered" on the global IUCN Red List, the final category before extinction in the wild. "This is the first penguin species in the world to reach that status," Damian Schreiber, Marine Conservation Communications and Field Officer at Ocean Conservation Namibia (OCN) explained to the Namib Times this week.

"We've lost 97% of the African Penguin population in just over a century. From an estimated 1.45 million individuals in 1910 to just around 19 800 today, the decline is heartbreaking and urgent."

The reasons are many. Overfishing, oil spills,



African Penguins at the Boulders Beach colony

(Photo: Naude Dreyer)

human disturbance, and climate change are the major drivers.

Historical pressures like guano harvesting, egg collection; and hunting haven't helped either. And if we lose them, the impact would be much bigger than we think. Schreiber explains Penguins play a key role in the marine food web. Their disappearance would disrupt ocean life, from the smallest fish to top predators. "On land, we'd also feel it. Ecotourism in both Namibia and South Africa depends heavily on penguin sightings. Their loss would hit local economies and jobs hard."

In South Africa, groups like SANCCOB are working to rescue, rehabilitate, and protect the

species. Schreiber said Namibia has also stepped up with its own seabird rescue effort, founding NAMCOB in 2022. And here in Walvis Bay, OCN is playing a vital role. "If you see a penguin in Walvis Bay or further north, it's likely not well," said Damian. "It may be starving or injured and in desperate need of care before it can be returned to its colony in the south."

If you spot a penguin, or any seabird in distress, reach out to one of the trained first responders listed below. Every report counts.

**Walvis Bay / Swakopmund**

Naude Dreyer (OCN) – +264 81 149 7377

Kobus Bekker – +264 81 269 4550

**Lüderitz**

NAMCOB Office – +264 81 556 3567

**Oranjemund**

Martha Dumeni – +264 81 561 6165

The public can help by report stranded or injured seabirds immediately; Choose sustainable seafood, look for ocean-friendly labels; Respect wildlife and coastal habitats; Talk about it, share what you have learned with friends, schools, and community groups.

"Every small effort makes a difference. And every penguin saved brings us one step closer to reversing the tide. Let's make sure these beloved birds remain part of our coastline, and not just our memories, Damian concluded.