The Majestic King Penguin

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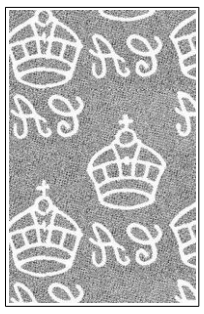
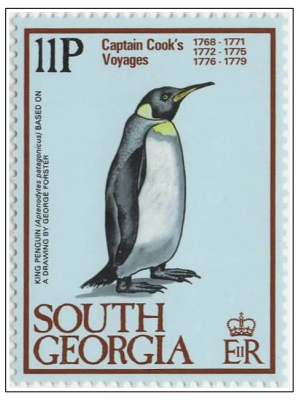
Big and bold, the king penguin (Aptenodytes patagonicus) is the second-largest penguin of the 18 known penguin species.

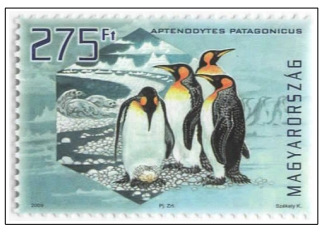


Falkland Islands, 1933 with Multiple Script CA watermark.

China, 2006. 80 分 pre-paid picture postal card.

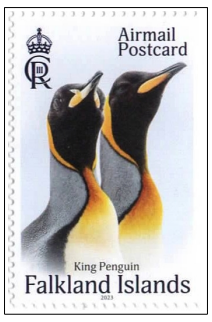
Colonies of the king penguin can be found throughout the subantarctic, including the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and Macquarie Island. By clicking on the speaker icon, one can listen to a king penguin call.

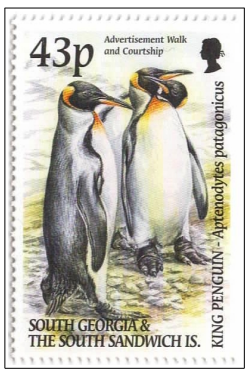




Early references to the species include those by Johann Reinhold Forster, the naturalist who accompanied Cook's second voyage to the Southern Hemisphere (1772-1775).

This species of penguin is easily recognised by the two closed orange patches on either side of its head. Physically, the king penguin is slimmer when compared to the emperor penguin and its flippers are larger in proportion to their body size. Overall, king penguins are the smaller of the two species, with king penguins being about 70-100 cm tall and weighing between 15-18 kg, with the female being slightly smaller.

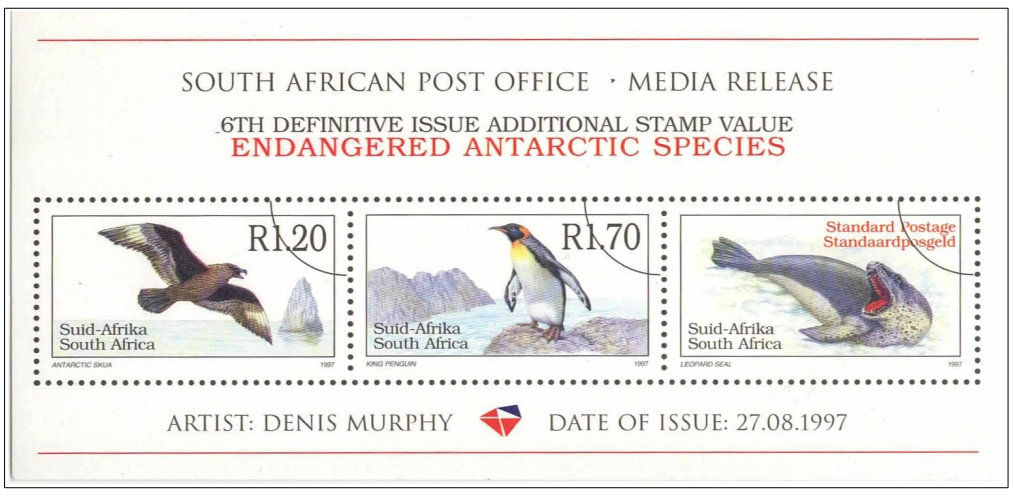




The breeding cycle of the king penguin lasts between 14 to16 months from initial courting, the laying of one egg, and the raising of the chick. After about 13 months, the chicks molt their juvenile brown plumage, and are ready to go to sea.

King penguins are known to consume small fish, squid, and krill, but it is the lantern fish that constitutes nearly 95% of their diet. On the other hand, king penguins provide nourishment for both orcas and leopard seals, while the smaller chicks and eggs are robbed by giant petrels, skuas and other gulls.

lantern fish



With their 'least concern' ranking on the UCN Red List of Threatened species and more than a million breeding pairs, the king penguin is likely to survive, if not thrive, in nature for years to come. However, we must be ever vigilant to ensure that these and other penguin species are present in the wild for future generations to enjoy and not just in our zoos, aquariums, or stamp album pages.