

Conservation Corner

By Christina Hagan

The breeding season for African Penguins is well underway at most colonies, including the Simon's Town colony (encompassing Boulders and the adjacent areas into which the penguins have spread).



A small chick is protected by its parent on Foxy Beach at Boulders

Photo: Christina Hagen

African Penguins have an extended breeding season and don't breed as synchronously as penguins in colder areas like Antarctica. It isn't unusual to see pairs at very different stages of the breeding cycle, with some still setting up their nest, while their neighbour's chicks are almost ready to fledge.

Raising two hungry penguin chicks is an energy-intensive process, needing both

parents to go to sea to hunt for sardine or anchovy as the chicks get bigger.



Two large chicks, which are almost at a size where their parents can leave them alone for a time, without much risk of predation by Kelp Gulls

Photo: Christina Hagen



Chicks can form creches when they are left alone. The blue-gray one in the centre of the photo is close to fledging, having lost all its down

Photo: Christina Hagen

One of the important conservation initiatives is to ensure that the penguins have adequate opportunities to catch fish by managing competition with the small pelagic fishery. False Bay has been closed to fishing for sardine and anchovy since the 1980s, which makes it useful for comparison with areas that have not had this protection.

To see where penguins go while foraging, miniature GPS devices are attached to their backs. The data can then be used to delineate important foraging areas and see how this changes over time and between colonies.



Researchers from BirdLife South Africa attach a GPS device to the back of a penguins. The tracking work is done under permits from the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment and SANParks and is a collaborative effort between BirdLife South Africa, SANCCOB, SANParks, CapeNature and other organisations.

Photo: Albert Snyman

To learn more about African Penguin threats and conservation, visit

www.birdlife.org.za/penguins

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