

# Every penguin in the world

*With his new book Every Penguin in the World, Professor Charles Bergman has lovingly collated his 17-year obsession with these endlessly fascinating flightless birds*

I looked up at the penguins and had to laugh. The sun was setting over the Neck on Saunders Island in the Falklands, one of the best places in the world to photograph penguins. I left the water's edge and circled back behind a small colony of gentoo penguins. They were facing the sea; I had in mind a photograph of penguins watching a beautiful sunset. The penguins, however, had their own ideas. While I bustled with my camera and tripod, setting up the shot, they all turned around. When I looked back up, they were all facing me, white bellies shining.

I had thought they were the show. They, on the other hand, thought I was the show. I had to wonder, who was watching who? The combination of comedy and curiosity is typical of penguins and they're amazing in their ability to make us laugh. In that moment, I also realised that these sunset penguins had clarified

my thinking about penguins and photography.

It was still early in what would turn out to be a 17-year quest for my wife, Susan, and me to see all of the world's 18 species of penguins in the wild. We had not set out with the goal of seeing every species, but they were irresistible, living lessons in a deepening love of the planet and its creatures, in all their beauty and vulnerability.

My book *Every Penguin in the World* emerged out of a growing dedication to them. We soon felt compelled to try to see them all and spread the word about the need for their conservation. One of the biggest surprises in our wide travels among penguins was how much I loved to photograph them. They are among the world's most photogenic wild creatures and, of course, I knew they were cute. They make wonderful portraits, with their upright stance and vaguely child-like associations.

Penguin chicks are irresistible. My photographs of gentoo penguins with two chicks in Port Lockroy, Antarctica, and chinstrap penguins on Hydrurga Rocks, Antarctica, are among my favourites. They deepened my understanding of the educational power of photography as well. I have been surprised to learn how many people had no idea there are so many species of penguins – photos of northern rockhopper penguins and macaroni penguins and erect-crested penguins are like revelations to many – or that most penguins are not found in Antarctica, like African penguins or Galápagos penguins. And photographs can play a powerful role in penguin conservation, since over half the penguin species in the world are declining and endangered, some critically.

That evening under a Falkland sunset, the gentoo penguins took my photography to another level. What I realised is that



*Above* Gentoo penguins – Falkland sunset. *Opposite* King penguins – Volunteer Point.





Above Emperor penguin chicks – Snow Hill Island.  
Below Macaroni penguins – South Georgia Island.

photography has a unique power to change the way we see penguins and wildlife. I began to see my photography less as *me* taking pictures of *them*. When they turned to face me, I realised that wildlife photography is a conversation between us. They will reveal how they want me to see them. It sounds a little funny to say it this way, but when the gentoos turned around, they improved the photograph. Their white chests were more beautiful than their dark backs, and with soft fill flash, the penguins became luminous under the fiery sky, like glowing candles.

That insight into penguins developed over time. The more I tried to be attentive, the more I realised that photographs have a unique ability to help us enter into the world of the creature. I wanted to learn to look into them, not at them. They are not objects to be looked at, however beautiful and charming, and I wanted to take photographs that reveal a sense of depth and mystery. For instance, the courtship behaviours of king penguins at Volunteer Point, in the Falkland Islands, was transformative for me. I was able to follow one pair of courting kings through the whole process.

King penguins court by posing with each other. One penguin strikes a pose and holds it, while the other strikes a similar pose, often mirroring the prospective mate. Together they hold the pose for some time, before releasing and striking one another. These poses are extremely moving and intimate. When they pose with beaks touching, it can be as tender as a kiss. They can be intensely expressive, as well. When they point their beaks skyward, with their orange highlights, they look like living flames rising up. The poses continued for hours, culminating with the male wrapping his neck around the female's neck, over and over, in extraordinarily intimate gestures. I call them penguin hugs.

The unavoidable question is whether these are simply behaviours, or if penguins feel something for each other. Is there a corresponding inner experience for them? Increasingly, scientists are studying the minds and feelings of animals. The well-known biologist Frans de Waal, for example, has said that occasions like this, when animals mirror each other, reveal to us 'the biological origins of empathy'.

A courting pair of king penguins on Macquarie Island walk down the pebbled beach, flippers touching as if holding hands. If you look with an attentive heart, with your own empathy, the penguins suggest both feelings and mystery.

The emperor penguins and their chicks offer perhaps the most unforgettable examples of photography's ability to suggest the interior world of penguins (plus, emperor chicks are arguably the cutest animal babies in the world). At Snow Hill Island, I watched a parent and chick find each other after the adult had been



Top (left) Southern rockhopper penguins – Falkland Islands. Top (right) Emperor penguin and chick – Snow Hill Island.  
Below Gentoos penguin – Falkland Islands.





Top Magellanic penguins – Peninsula Valdés, Argentina.  
Above Southern rockhopper penguins – Falkland Islands.

away fishing. The chick turned and sank into the parent's golden, pillowed chest. A look of contentment came over the chick's eyes and the parent leaned forward to touch the chick with its beak. You can look at the photo and see a behaviour and no more, but if you look with the eyes of the heart, if you will, the image resonates with feeling.

I had not imagined, when our quest began so many years ago, that penguins would teach me so much about wonder, care and empathy.

To see more of Charles' work visit [charlesbergman.com](http://charlesbergman.com)



Every Penguin in the World: A Quest to See Them All is published by Sasquatch Books and is on sale now, price £20.



Top (left) King penguins – South Georgia Island. Top (right) Adélie penguins – Weddell Sea.  
Bottom (left) Gento penguins – Port Lockroy,. Bottom (right) Emperor penguins – Snow Hill Island.