

HUMBOLDT PENGUINS



Issue

Two new Humboldt penguin chicks were born in Mumbai's Byculla Zoo this year. These birds are unique among all penguins.

Background

Humboldt penguins are one among 17 other species of penguins. There are some reports that say there are 19 species.

Details

- The Emperor penguin is the largest among the species. The Little penguin is smallest among all. The Humboldt penguin is of medium stature.
- Penguins are majorly classified into six genera. The Humboldt penguin (*Spheniscus humboldti*) belongs to the 'banded' group genus.

Features

- The Humboldt penguins naturally occur on the Pacific coasts of Chile and Peru. Their habitat is near the cold water current Humboldt, resulting in their name.
- To help keep them cool, these penguins have large, bare skin patches around their eyes. In wild, they breed around March-April or September-October.
- They have the special ability to withstand warmer temperature and artificial settings, making them a favourite for zoos around the world.
- The most striking feature is the presence of a large region of pink flesh on the face that extends backward to encircle each eye.

Prey habits

These penguins largely prey on marine foods such as anchovies, herring and pilchards. They also obtain sea food from the cold water currents of the sea.

Conservation

- The species is witnessing decline in numbers since the middle of 19th century. They are placed under vulnerable category in International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species since 2000.
- Aggressive commercial fishing in the eastern Pacific Ocean has threatened their food sources, making them vulnerable to extinction.
- Their habitat is encroached by mining companies looking for guano deposits as a source of fertilizers. These penguins also sometimes get entangled in fishing nets.

NOTES

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