

Penguins, The Ultimate Guide

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BOOK REVIEW

Penguins, The Ultimate Guide

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Penguins, The Ultimate Guide by Tui De Roy, Mark Jones, and Julie Cornthwaite. 2013. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, and Oxford, United Kingdom. 240 pages, >400 color photographs. \$35 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0-691-16299-7.

This book is a singular, magnificent step forward, a supernova for the eyes and minds of all penguin-lovers and, indeed, penguin researchers everywhere. That said, it needs noting that the penguin research world is necessarily small and, inevitably, denizens in our little universe wind up crossing paths. Or, in this instance, occasionally needing to face the challenge of reviewing a book co-authored by two colleagues (Tui De Roy and Mark Jones) with whom I've collaborated on another book (*Wild Ice: Antarctic Journeys*, Smithsonian Press, 1990) and which, as well, contains a supplementary article in its Science and Conservation section by a present-day colleague (Heather Lynch) with whom I continue collaborating on my ongoing Antarctic Site Inventory project. And so, let me admit these connections straightaway and proceed, damn the torpedoes, to review what I believe to be the finest penguin book of recent vintage.

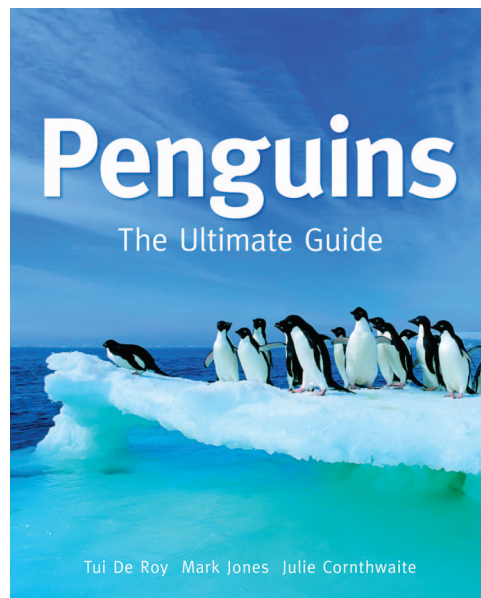
The authors' photographs, all through this new book, are stunning. As a picture book or coffee-table item, this effort is superlative and an enormously pleasing visual experience. It's especially impressive to spy so many photographs showing off penguins' characteristic behaviors (e.g., Rockhopper Penguins (*Eudyptes chrysocome*) hopping over rocks and cliffs, various species in ecstatic display during the breeding season, penguins sleekly

'porpoising' through the water). And, as a photographer myself, I truly love the setups and the numerous penguin-level (or below-penguin-level) camera angles that are presented, the author-photographers having obviously gotten their fingernails very *dirty-in-guano* to capture many of these shots.

But the photos are just the staggering, first impression of a truly meaty tome. Our attention is peaked with such images. The authors then take us on a detailed, comprehensive journey encompassing myriad aspects of the breeding biology, feeding ecology, and population ecology of these remarkable birds, buttressed by conservation issues facing various species. It's a potentially consuming approach that allows one to dig as deeply as one chooses.

The book is divided into three sections: Life Between Two Worlds, Science and Conservation, and Species Natural History, with much shorter, subsidiary sections on Where to See Wild Penguins and Notes on References and Further Reading. Life

Between Two Worlds contains the authors' essays about their passion for these birds, the cycle of penguin life, and impressions of various groupings of the 18 penguin species. There are many enjoyable, first-person accounts of the authors dealing with penguins up close and personally, and this initial section is the reader's introduction to each species, which, later in the book, will be amplified. Science and Conservation is my favorite of these three major sections because it expands details regarding the scientific work to which many of us researchers are devoted and dedicated, but which, often,



isn't fleshed-out in popular, penguin-oriented books. Here lies true, scientific grit, described via a series of short, supplementary articles by present-day field researchers covering key, diverse topics such as: the fossil penguin record; Adélie penguins (*Pygoscelis adeliae*) as harbingers of climate change; penguins' evolutionary adaptation to food storage; remote, satellite censusing to study penguin population changes and assess climate change impacts; feather and beak pigmentation; DNA analyses of penguin bones; the divergent egg sizes among crested penguins; tracking penguins at sea; minimizing researcher impacts on penguins; diving and range characteristics of young emperor penguins; and an examination of conservation imperatives regarding particular species and locations.

Proceeding from this more technical part of the book, the Species Natural History section contains individual accounts, elaborating for each species everything from coloration, size and weight, voice, population and distribution, to breeding ecology, feeding ecology, and principal threats. An appealing aspect is the subsection of Fascinating Penguin Facts on pp. 194–197, using photos and text snippets to cover a panoply of more than 30 such tidbits, ranging from catastrophic moult, binocular and adaptable vision to fighting, waterproofing, chick-crèching, and predation. On pp. 198–199, the authors present a handy table summarizing the range and population status of each species.

This book is exhaustive—and I say that as positively as I possibly can. It will enhance the dreams of those already 'hooked' by penguins and likely start others down the same path, toward what easily becomes an obsession with—and for—these magnificent, 'A-List' creatures.

The capstone for me is that, throughout, the authors don't lose sight of—and clearly, gently, drive home—a valuable and, I'd trust, enduring conservation imperative that is stated so nicely by Mark Jones:

We all have a vested interest, and we all have a responsibility to act appropriately. Penguins, those charismatic little creatures-turned-social phenomena, whose positive influence on people is so great that we seem to be unable to live without them, are at the heart of these issues. Their very existence—and ours—depends on the future welfare and resilience of the oceans.

Indeed, we humans can't help seeing ourselves in these animals that walk upright like little children and waddle around like we adults do. No question, penguins represent our proverbial, ecological *canaries-in-the-coal-mine*. And hopefully, by greatly enhancing our specific, in-depth knowledge and understanding of penguins' lives, this book will help more and more people take our planet's conservation seriously.

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