

MAXIMUM LONGEVITIES OF AFRICAN PENGUINS *SPHENISCUS DEMERSUS* BASED ON BANDING RECORDS

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Stainless steel flipper bands have been used as a research tool in the study of African or Jackass Penguins *Spheniscus demersus* since 1971 (Cooper & Morant 1981). Each band carries a unique number sequence along with a reporting address. The numerals are large enough to be read at close quarters with the naked eye or up to a distance of 50 m or more with a good telescope. A total of 14 479 African Penguins had been banded up to June 1979 (H.D. Oschadleus pers. comm.) of which 23 were known to have survived for 20 years or more.

The oldest known wild African Penguin was banded (P6593) as an adult at Dassen Island (22°26'S, 18°05'E), Western Cape Province, South Africa, by John Cooper on 30 November 1972. It was the unfortunate victim of a traffic accident in Simonstown, Western Cape Province, where the Boulders penguin colony is situated (34°11'S, 18°27'E), on 28 March

1999. The true age of this bird is unknown as it was in adult plumage when banded. Given that adult plumage is attained between 12 and 22 months of age (Randall 1989), the bird would have been at least 27 years and 4 months old at death. This supercedes two other recent recoveries of penguins that were released by the Southern African National Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB), at Robben Island (33°48'S, 18°23'E), near Cape Town, South Africa (Oschadleus & Whittington 1999). The first of these was released on 13 September 1972, banded P4240. It had been found at Mossel Bay, Western Cape Province, (34°09'S, 22°07'E) on 28 August 1972, weighing only 2.0 kg, and was cared for by SANCCOB prior to its release. It was found freshly dead by NTWK at Bird Island, Algoa Bay, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa (33°50'S, 26°17'E) on 25 September 1998, a little over 26 years later. This would make this individual between 26 and 27 years old. It had been previously

TABLE 1

African Penguins aged twenty years or more

Band number	Age at banding	Treated at SANCCOB	Date banded	Date resighted	Age at resighting (years)
P6593	Adult	No	30 Nov 1972	28 Mar 1999	27+ (dead)
P4240	Immature	Yes	13 Sep 1972	25 Sep 1998	26–27 (dead)
P4364	Immature	Yes	10 Aug 1973	04 Jan 1999	c. 26 (dead)
P3265	Adult	No	06 Oct 1974	13 Mar 1999	>25 (alive)
P3741	Adult	Yes	26 Sep 1972	03 Oct 1995	>24 (alive)
P4234	Immature	Yes	13 Sep 1972	01 Jan 1996	>24 (dead)
P7347	Immature	No	02 Dec 1972	17 Aug 1995	c. 23 (nest)
P3351	Immature	No	11 Dec 1976	27 Mar 1999	c. 23 (alive)
P6101	Immature	No	16 Mar 1977	27 Mar 1999	22–23 (+chicks)
P9631	Immature	No	23 Apr 1977	27 Mar 1999	22–23 (+chick)
P9759	Adult	No	18 Aug 1977	27 Mar 1999	>22 (alive)
P4302	Immature	Yes	08 Dec 1972	06 Jun 1994	c. 22 (alive)
P3254	Adult	No	06 Oct 1974	13 Nov 1995	>22 (alive)
P9482	Immature	No	17 Dec 1977	27 Mar 1999	c. 22 (alive)
P3222	Adult	No	03 Oct 1974	18 Aug 1994	>21 (alive)
P8778	Adult	No	01 Jul 1976	27 Aug 1976	>21 (alive)
P9447	Chick	No	06 Mar 1978	27 Mar 1999	21 (+chicks)
P9449	Chick	No	06 Mar 1978	27 Mar 1999	21 (on eggs)
T1050	Chick	No	24 May 1978	27 Mar 1999	20.8 (alive)
P4470	Chick	No	29 Apr 1975	13 Nov 1995	20.5 (alive)
P4432	Chick	No	24 Sep 1975	10 Feb 1996	20.3 (dead)
P4777	Chick	No	10 Nov 1977	05 Feb 1998	20.25 (dead)
Z1028	Chick	No	21 Jan 1979	27 Mar 1999	20 (alive)

resighted in June 1979 on St Croix Island (33°48'S, 25°46'E), also in Algoa Bay. Another rehabilitated immature, P4364, released on Robben Island on 10 August 1973, was approximately 26 years old when found dead at Plettenberg Bay, Western Cape Province (34°03'S, 23°22'E) on 4 January 1999. It had been sighted at St Croix Island on a number of occasions in 1978 and 1979 and, most recently, on 13 November 1995.

The oldest African Penguin resighted alive in the wild (P3265) was seen near Mossel Bay on 13 March 1999 (L. Wright *in litt.*). Banding schedules held at the South African Bird Ringing Unit (SAFRING), Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town showed this bird to have been banded at St Croix Island on 6 October 1974. This bird was at least 25 years old when resighted. On 3 October 1995, an African Penguin bearing flipper band P3741 was seen on Dyer Island (34°41'S, 19°25'E), Western Cape Province (A.M. Gildenhuys pers. comm.). It had been found oiled on the beach at Struisbaai (34°47'S, 20°02'E), Western Cape Province and taken to SANCCOB on 27 August 1972. After cleaning, it was banded and released on Robben Island on 26 September 1972. This bird was at least 24 years old when resighted and had previously been seen on Dyer Island in September 1983, November 1985 and was present at an empty site within a breeding colony there in March 1995 (BMD & PAW pers. obs.).

Another individual, over 22 years of age, was banded as an immature on 2 December 1972, with band P7347, at Dassen Island. It has since been resighted three times on Seal Island (34°08'S, 18°35'E), False Bay, Western Cape Province, most recently on 17 August 1995. On the latter occasion, the bird was nesting in a pipe, placed on the island as an artificial nest site, and had two, large, feathered young.

A further 17 penguins over 20 years old have been resighted or recovered dead, mostly from the islands in Algoa Bay (Table 1). An immature, rehabilitated by SANCCOB and released at Robben Island on 13 September 1972 with band P4234, was seen alive on Bird Island, Algoa Bay on 6 May 1994, when it was over 21 years old. It was subsequently found dead between Boknes and Cannon Rocks (33°44'S, 26°33'E), Eastern Cape Province on 1 January 1996 and was

therefore over 24 years of age at death. An immature, P4302, also rehabilitated by SANCCOB, was seen alive when about 22 years old on Bird Island on 6 June 1994. It was released on Robben Island on 8 December 1972. Fourteen of the remaining 15 birds over 20 years old were banded at St Croix Island between 3 October 1974 and 21 January 1979 (Table 1). All were resighted alive except for P4432, banded as a chick on 24 September 1975 and found dead at Stilbaai (34°23'S, 21°26'E), Western Cape Province on 10 February 1996. Twelve of the other 13 were resighted at St Croix Island, three of them with chicks, whereas P3222 was seen at nearby Bird Island. P4777, banded as a chick on Bird Island on 10 November 1977 was found freshly dead there on 5 February 1998.

The rehabilitated penguin P3741 is the longest lived oiled bird that has been cleaned and rehabilitated in the wild to date (A.J. Williams pers. comm.).

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