

Dressed for Their Own Funeral

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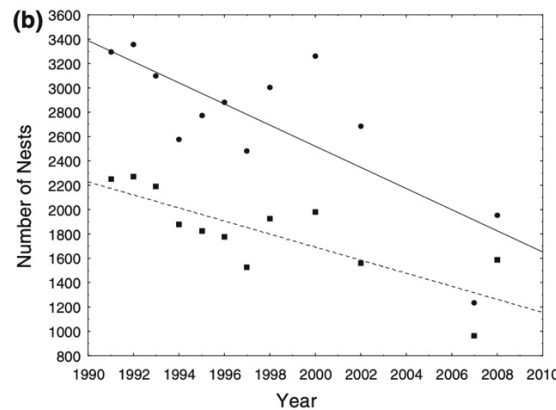
What is causing the decline of chinstrap penguin in Antarctica? It still doesn't seem like there is a clear answer. The reason we need to know why their population is decreasing is because the niche and the involvement of each species in a habitat is unique and important. That niche is the particular role that the species plays in the habitat. The loss of a species can heavily affect the food chain in their habitat, as well as the environment it was in. Most data that have been collected shows events caused by humans negatively impacting their environment.



(Wild Republic)

Within the species of the chinstrap penguin, there is a specific time of year that their population size was studied: from December to January, which is considered the peak hatching time. During this time, scientists went out to the nesting colonies and took photographs from the same location in different years. These pictures were then analyzed, and each nest was counted. Typically, the nests had one or two eggs. Eventually, for each year the number of nests was recorded, and this process happened every year. The graph below shows the data that was collected from 1990 to 2010 and it demonstrates a steady decrease in the number

of nests in the penguins' colonies. This leads to a significant decline in the population size.



After the hatchings of the eggs, the chicks were tracked with an attached metal flipper band. Research showed that the average survival age was 46 days, which was then determined as the success age.

One of the biggest leading factors of the decline in chinstrap penguins is climate change. It is widely understood that the actions of humans lead to climate change. Climate change affects the sea-ice land areas, and it also decreases the number of krill and fish, which happen to be the main food sources for the penguins. This decrease in krill causes a lower success rate in the procreation of the penguins. Alternatively, researchers observed an increase in the population of the penguins' predators, such as the killer whale, which eat lots of krill, too.

Another human action that results in the decline of the chinstrap penguin is the fact that researchers spend time in the penguins' environments. More precisely, that a lot more humans are disturbing the colony. Each year there are about 25,000 people who visit Deception Island due to it being a volcanic origin and biodiversity. There are eight breeding ground spots in that area and researchers noted that the human presence had an even bigger negative effect on another sub-species.

The effects of human activity have a lot more impact on Earth than it can directly be seen. For instance, humans cause climate change; which affects habitats of other animals; which is causing the melting of ice on the North and South Poles; which subsequently, decreases the habitat of the animals in that environment. The climate has been changing for decades while scientists were assembling proof that it was caused by humans. Many people are still not convinced and only slowly steps are being taken to mitigate its negative effects. But it is not only about saving the environment, it is about saving the threatened species too. For now, the chinstrap penguins are on the losing end, with declining numbers and with the decay of their entire food chain.

References:

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