

Let's Go Fishing

Background: African penguins form monogamous pairs, which means they typically mate for life. The female builds a nest out of guano (yes, bird poop!) because their rocky habitat offers little else in the way of nesting material. She lays two eggs per clutch, on average. Both parents take turns incubating the eggs, or sitting on them to keep them warm, for 38 to 42 days. Once the chicks hatch, the parents also take turns feeding them. Around 14-21 days after hatching, chicks leave their nests and form small groups, or crèches that are guarded by adults. Cooperative care allows individual sets of parents to go out to sea to feed. Chicks finally fledge 60 to 130 days after hatching.

The Maryland Zoo maintains the largest colony of African penguins in North America and breeds the species at the recommendation of the AZA Species Survival Plan for African penguins. Since 1967, more than 1,000 African penguins have hatched at the Zoo. Thank you for your continued support!



Materials:

- Tongs - these will be your “penguin beak”
- Fish - ideas to represent fish include plastic toy food, wood blocks, or twigs if you are able to go outside; ask your kids to help you brainstorm and use their imagination!
- Nesting materials - once again, be creative! Try using a box, items from the recycling bin, or leaves if you are outside!

Instructions: Designate one area of your home or back yard as the “ocean” and one area as the beach. The kids can build their nest on the beach while you distribute the “fish” all around the ocean. Encourage the kids to waddle like a penguin on the beach and “swim” by flapping their “wings” when they are in the ocean. They should use the tongs to collect fish for their chicks. If you only have one set of tongs and more than one child, one child can sit in the nest while the other child hunts for fish, and then they can switch, just like penguins do!