FEED ME!
THE STORY OF PENNY THE PENGUIN CHICK

Wolf Berger, Ph.D.
with advice from Brianna
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Penny wants food

This is Penny. She wants food.

I am hungry. Please! Feed me!
This is Penny’s mother. Her name is Jentoo. She is coming up from the sea to feed Penny. She walks over the rocks at the beach. She puts out her wings for balance.
This is Penny’s brother Meetoo.
He is hungry also.
Who will get food next?
Jentoo goes to Penny.
She opens her beak.
Penny puts her beak inside to get the food.
Now Penny is tired. She has to rest.

Meetoo is still hungry. Jentoo calls for Penny’s father to bring food.
He starts walking. Penny’s uncle Fredo follows him. Fredo has food for his own chicks.

This is Jontoo. He is Penny’s father. He has food. He hears the call.
They bring krill. They caught the krill in the sea. The krill are small. They fit into the beak of a penguin.

Sometimes Penny’s father brings a small fish or a small squid.

Penny likes fish.
Penny’s father looks up. It is a long way up the hill.

Penny’s father and Fredo go up through the snow. They bring the food to their chicks.
This time, Meetoo gets food from his father.

Penny and her friends are waiting. They are hungry. Which one is Penny? Which one is Meetoo? Who will get food?
The parents have no more food.

They go back to the sea to get more food.

Penny’s parents jump in the ice-cold sea. The krill, the fish and the squid live in the sea. Her parents dive to catch them for food. They swim below the surface to look for krill.
Penny’s neighbors

When the chicks were little, only one parent could leave to get food.

One parent had to stay because of the Big Brown Bird. He takes little penguin chicks to feed his own chicks. He is very dangerous.

Watch out, Penny! Watch out, Meetoo!

He has a big hooked beak. Just now he is taking a bath in the pool nearby.
Other big birds also are looking for food. They look down from the sky.

The little chicks stay close to their parent to be safe.
Penny can see her aunt Tardie. She is in her nest. She was late in laying her egg. Her chick is very small.

Where is Penny’s cousin Eeny?

Eeny hides from the big birds and also from the Little White Bird.

The Little White Bird steals food when the chicks are eating.

Watch out, Eeny!
Penny has a nice neighbor.

Her name is Ada. Ada is a different kind of penguin. Can you see the difference? Ada brings food to her chick Dallie.

Dallie and her sister Dellie are still hungry. But Ada has no more food. She runs away. The chicks run after her.

Ada’s cousin Bert is changing his feathers.

He looks silly.
Penny can see Petrella in her nest.

Petrella is very big. She has huge wings. She also has a very big beak with a sharp hook. Petrella looks for food at sea and also on the beach.

Penny is afraid of Petrella.
She looks like a penguin.
She swims and dives like a penguin.

Penny can see Shaggie the cormorant.

But she can fly!
She flies up to her nest to feed her chick.

He is big and very hungry.

Please! More fish.
Penny can see Vitta, the tern.

Vitta has her nest nearby in the cliffs.

Vitta is small but she has no fear.

She has a sharp beak.

She flies at the Big Brown Bird and drives it away.

Thank you, Vitta!
When Penny is big

Penny and her friends are growing.
Soon Penny will be big like her parents.
She will get a shiny black and white coat.
She will be ready to go into the water to catch krill.
The krill is in the water.

The water will be cold.

But Penny has lots of fat and feathers.

She will be warm.

She will be hungry.

Penny will go into the water to get food.
Penny will fly through the water.

She will dive to get food.

She will come up to get air.

She will meet many other animals in the water.
This is Penny’s cousin Chinnie. Chinnie jumps out of the water to go faster and to find his way.

Penny will learn to jump just like Chinnie.

Penny will meet Cesar and his kind. Cesar is big. He swims fast. Penny will not keep up with Cesar.
Penny will meet many seals.

Seals like to play catch. Some seals eat penguins. Penny does not want to meet them.

This seal eats krill. It is resting on floating ice. Hi there.
Penny will see whales. Whales are huge animals, bigger than an elephant. These whales eat krill. Hi there.

The big whale cannot see Penny. Can you see Penny swim under the big whale?
Some whales eat seals. Also, they eat penguins. Penny does not want to meet them.

How does Penny know which whales are dangerous? They make shrill sounds and they have big teeth. Careful, Penny!
The most dangerous animal in the water is the leopard seal. Stay away, Penny!

When there is danger, Penny can jump out of the water. She will be safe on the ice. Can you see the penguins on the ice?
Penny will find a mate. Her mate will help find or make a nest. Penny will lay two eggs. She will have chicks of her own. She and her mate will protect the chicks from the big birds in the air and from the Little White Bird.

The chicks will be very hungry. Please, more food! Penny will be busy.
Notes for parents and teachers:

The focus of the story is on the life of Gentoo Penguins as seen on the shores of Bransfield Strait, along the Peninsula of Antarctica. Two closely related penguin species are shown also: Adelie Penguins (“Ada,” “Dellie,” “Dallie,” “Bert”) and Chinstrap Penguins (“Chinnie,” jumping while traveling). The Emperor Penguin (“Cesar”) was not seen; it does occur all around Antarctica but breeds on the ice, away from the water. It is the largest of the penguins (35kg vs. 5 kg for Gentoo).

The scientific name for the Gentoo is Pygoscelis papua. The others are P. adeliae, P. antarctica, and Aptenodytes forsteri. All four species are widely distributed in the seas and islands around Antarctica. Other penguin species (there are 18 in all) live farther north. All are restricted to the southern hemisphere, to regions of high productivity. Some species only raise one chick per season (e.g., the Emperor), others raise two if food is plentiful, otherwise only one (even though there are two eggs to begin with).

Species other than penguins:
Krill: Euphausia superba. They are euphausid shrimp, about 2 inches long. They feed on diatoms (“grass of the sea”) which are abundant around Antarctica in southern summer. Krill is the staple food of Gentoo, Adelie and Chinstrap penguins, as seen in the spilled food on colony grounds.
Fish, squid: generalized. No particular species.
Big Bird, “Petrela”: Giant Petrel, Macronectes giganteus. Scavenger.
Little White Bird, Snowy Sheathbill, Chionis alba. Scavenger.
Cormorant, “Shaggie”: Antarctic Shag, Phalacrocorax bransfieldensis.
Seals: sub-adult or female Fur Seals, Arctocephalus gazella; adult Crabeater Seal Lobodon carcinopha (note tooth marks on belly); Leopard Seal, Hydrurga leptonyx. Baleen whales: a pair of humpback whales, Megaptera novaeangliae.
Toothed whales: a group of orcas (one male, two females), Orcinus orca. An orca weighs as much as a large elephant (5 tons plus or minus 2 tons), and is much larger than any predator on land. From the point of view of a penguin, the presence of orcas is a mixed blessing: they keep the penguin-eating leopard seals away, but they also eat penguins if they can catch them (big ones preferred).

Bransfield Strait is at the northernmost tip of Antarctica. It is reached by ship from Ushuaia, which is located in Beagle Channel in the southern tip of Argentina.
Technical notes


Cruise participation (on M/V Corinthian II) was arranged by Dr. Nigella Hillgarth of the Birch Aquarium at Scripps. Cruise Leader: John Frick; Naturalist: Lyn Mair. Images were processed using Adobe Photoshop.

Factual information on Antarctic fauna is based on:
For a general introduction to marine biology, see:
Penguin expert Torrence Stockard (S.I.O.) checked identifications. Several colleagues and friends gave valuable advice. Thanks to all!

Discussion Questions

How do parents recognize their own chick? (By voice, mainly. Chicks from neighbors sometimes beg for food and are told to go away.)

How do they find back to the right place where the chicks are? (They look when jumping, upon approaching the shore.)

Why do some penguins spread their wings even when not walking? (Probably to cool off. It gets warm under that black suit when the sun shines.)

Why do penguins have webbed feet with strong claws? (For steering and pushing to jump, in the water, and for climbing the rocks and snow.)

Will Aunt Tardie’s Eeny make it? (Unlikely. It must grow much bigger before fall comes with sea ice, and there is not much time left.)

Does Petrella eat penguin chicks? (Petrella eats dead animals on the beach and looks for food in the water.)

Can you tell the difference between Gentoo and Adelie chicks? (Yes. Markings.)

What is the best way to escape from a leopard seal? (Jumping out on the ice.)
About this book, the author and his advisor:

The book started out as a family weekend project, putting together a story on Gentoo Penguin childhood using pictures taken during a week’s visit to the breeding grounds of penguins around Bransfield Strait, Antarctica. During that visit, the weather was unusually favorable – no storms, no fog, no indication whatever that these parts of the world offer some of the nastiest weather imaginable. Thus, conditions for taking photos were ideal.

The story emerged readily enough, based on observation, but there were requests for various additions and explanations, especially with regard to the leopard seal and other potentially threatening large animals. The appropriate illustrations were created using Adobe Photoshop.

W. H. Berger has degrees in geology and oceanography from Colorado University and the University of California. He works at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, University of California, San Diego. He has published more than 250 technical papers on ocean history, climate change, and marine ecology. His current research is on cycles in coral growth and on the effects of Antarctic climate change in whale evolution. He is engaged in public education through an outreach website at SIO, and as a speaker for the Rotary Clubs in the San Diego area. This is his first children’s book.

Brianna is in kindergarten (2006). She likes animals and stories about animals, and she likes the beach and the ocean. She pointed out what is of interest to children, commented on the choice of names for the various characters in the story, and edited the text for clarity. She likes the story about Penny the penguin chick and hopes Penny will never meet a leopard seal.

Good luck, Penny!