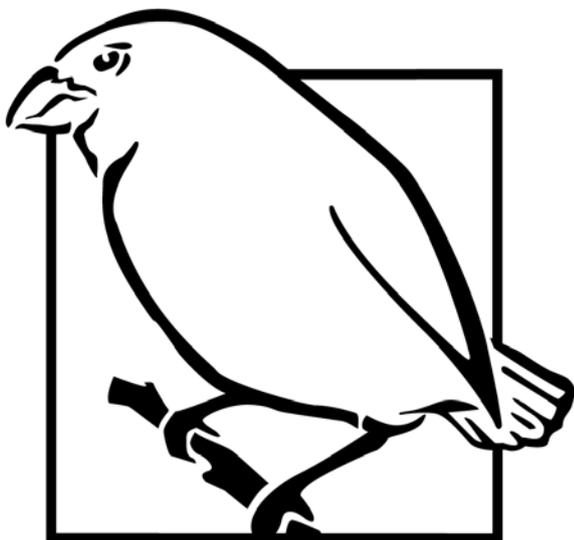


# Newsletter

December 2019

Student recording vegetation data for forest bird survey, Credit: Fauna Australis



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The Darwin Initiative supports developing countries to conserve biodiversity and reduce poverty. Funded by the UK Government, the Darwin Initiative provides grants for projects working in developing countries and UK Overseas Territories (OTs).

Projects support:

- the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
- the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS)
- the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)
- the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
- the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)
- the Convention on Climate Change (CCC)



[darwininitiative.org.uk](http://darwininitiative.org.uk)



Magdalena Island with lighthouse,  
Credit: Mike Bingham

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Magellanic penguin family,  
Credit: Mike Bingham

## Tourists protect penguins in Chile

Magellanic penguins (*Spheniscus magellanicus*) are found only in southern South America, with breeding populations in Chile, Argentina and the Falklands Islands. Population studies estimate that the world population of Magellanic penguins is around 1.5 million breeding pairs, with approximately 700,000 pairs in Chile, 700,000 pairs in Argentina and 130,000 pairs in the Falklands Islands. The Falkland Islands used to have over 1 million pairs, but the 90% decline in penguin numbers generated concern for the status of penguins in Chile and Argentina.

In 1999 the Darwin Initiative supported the establishment of a long-term penguin monitoring programme led by Mike Bingham on one of the largest and most important breeding sites in Chile, located on Magdalena Island in the Straits of Magellan.

“  
Far from being a threat to the penguins, the penguins actually have higher breeding success around the tourist path than on parts of the island where the tourists do not visit

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During the last 20 years this programme which began with Darwin Initiative funding has since developed its own funding through a penguin adoption scheme in which people can adopt and choose a name for their penguin. The adoption programme has become so successful that following its establishment in 1999, it has been extended to cover penguin colonies at Contra Maestra Island and Punta Dungeness in Chile, and Cabo Virgenes in Argentina.

Through research funded under the programme it has discovered that Magellanic penguin populations in southern South America are healthy. These four combined sites have increased from 185,000 pairs in the year 2000, to 189,000 pairs in 2019, so the population in Chile and Argentina is healthy and stable, despite the ongoing decline in the Falkland Islands.

An interesting discovery on Magdalena Island is that the tourists visiting the island are actually providing protection to the penguins they come to see. Far from being a threat to the penguins, the penguins actually have higher breeding success around the tourist path than on parts of the island where the tourists do not visit.

The main predator of penguin chicks and eggs on Magdalena Island is the Chilean skua (*Stercorarius chilensis*), a very large predatory gull.



*Penguins adapted to the presence of tourists, Credit: Mike Bingham*

The skua is very shy and avoids human presence. The skuas therefore remain in the parts of the island not visited by tourists. This reduction in the abundance of skuas around the tourist path decreases predation and increases the breeding success of the penguins. The tourists help the penguins to raise more chicks. This is promising news for penguin tourism in other areas.

Penguins at all four sites in Chile and Argentina are protected from the commercial fishing industry by no-fishing zones.

Their food supply is therefore protected and penguins at these sites can find plenty of fish to feed their chicks. Penguin populations on the Falkland Islands continue to decline, and that situation is unlikely to change unless the Falkland Islands Government agrees to provide similar protection against commercial fishing.

For further information on project 10-007, please click [here](#).