



The march of the penguins.

ANTARCTICA

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MIGRATION FEATURE



In the freezing dark of an Antarctic winter, the endless night is a punishing place to be. It's as if life was never meant to be here. Yet, in the huddled masses of thousands of emperor penguins and their incubated eggs, the impossibility of life becomes possible, and it all starts with a march.

January 2005, the world was moved by *March of the Penguins*, a documentary that reveals the lives of emperor penguin in stirring detail. Across 80 minutes, their story is told by the iconic voice of Morgan Freeman.

Male and female emperors mate for life, with courtship beginning in January after a three-month feeding binge on squid and krill. Come the end of March, they embark on an epic migration across 160 kilometers of ice to their frozen rookeries, where the female lays a single egg.

Delicately, she passes it to her partnering penguin before disappearing into a white abyss. The male penguin then balances the egg atop his feet away from the freezing ice below and slips it into a snug incubating pouch. Now, it is up to him to look after the precious egg, with several months passing before he can eat or see his mate again.

"The story of the emperor penguin is a magnificent tale of survival and partnership."



Scores of males gather together en masse to protect their young from the worst of the Antarctic winter. Emperor penguin are geniuses at insulation and manage to keep their eggs at near body temperature. They huddle up by the thousands to shield their eggs from 150 km/h winds wetting them with snow. Most incredibly, they seem to take turns at the center of the group, where temperatures can reach 20°C.

After March of the Penguins was released, penguin pop culture exploded, with the birds waddling their way onto the big screen in a series of films, from Madagascar to Mr. Popper's Penguins. In 2006, Warner Bros. released Happy Feet, an animated musical comedy that brought comic relief to the hardships of the emperor penguin – and to a catchy tune. Starring Robin Williams and Elijah Wood, this was the first time we learned of the 'heart song':

"Penguins are drawn to each other by their 'heart song' – the music that attracted them to each other at the very beginning of their journey."

After a long winter away, the females return to their mates and hatchlings. Navigating their way through singing crowds, the partnering penguins are drawn to each other by their 'heart song' – the music which attracted them to each other way back at the very beginning of their journey.



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