

I just love the way they evoke love and affection in us

Charles Bergman has travelled far and wide, seeking every species of penguin in the world. Mairi Hughes picks up the story.

On a trip to South Africa's Robben Island, Charles Bergman and his wife, Susan, spent two weeks looking after penguins as part of an Earthwatch programme.

Penguins had become something of a hobby for Charles and Susan, with the couple having spotted different species across the world, from Galapagos penguins on the Galapagos Islands to Magellanic penguins on Tierra del Fuego.

But it was on Robben Island that their mission to see every species of penguin in the world in its natural habitat was born.

"There was one day where we captured a penguin and we were helping weigh and measure him.

"Susan turned to me and said, 'This is our tenth

species of penguin.'

"I said, 'And today is our tenth wedding anniversary, so that's ten for ten.'

"There was something about the symmetry, and that's the moment we decided," Charles continues.

An academic in environmental literature in Washington, Charles spends much of his time writing about and photographing animals.

Now he has published the book "Every Penguin In The World", a photographic documentation of his journey to see every species of penguin around the globe.

"I really, really love animals," Charles says. "I suppose in many ways my career became dedicated to increasing people's appreciation of wildlife."

There are currently 18 species of penguin

scattered across the world, in the farthest-flung places.

Charles and Susan's mission to see them all took 17 years in total.

"One of the big misconceptions about penguins is that most people think they're only in Antarctica.

"In fact, they're not. There's a whole bunch of islands that circle around Antarctica, and there are three or four species of penguin that can only be found on one particular set of rocks in the Southern Ocean," Charles says.

One of the most isolated species of penguin in the world is the Northern Rockhopper penguin.

"The Northern Rockhopper is found only on Gough Island, which is about halfway between Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro, in the middle of the South Atlantic," Charles explains.

"We got on a boat that was repositioning from Antarctica to the Arctic for its summer tours, and we just rode north.

"We had two hours on Gough Island.

"There was a hurricane coming; I thought we would not get to see them. But we managed to and it was terrific."

Charles and his wife have made several treacherous journeys to catch a glimpse of penguins living in some of the most remote corners of the world.

However, for Charles, the amazing encounters were worth the often extreme journeys required to find them.

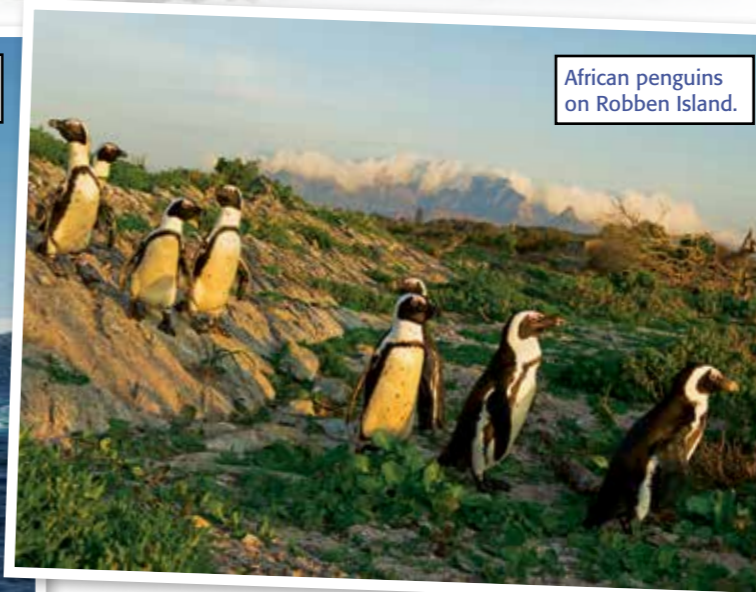
"The Royal penguin on



Charles with a feathered friend!



Adélie penguins on Paulet Island.



African penguins on Robben Island.



Emperor penguin chicks.

Photographs courtesy of Charles Bergman.



King penguins, St Andrews.

Macquarie Island is the friendliest penguin in the world.

"You get out of your Zodiac boat and you have fifty of them gathered around looking at you.

"When you walk down the beach they just follow you," Charles adds.

Charles can testify that penguins are incredibly social creatures which are interested in people and usually found in protective groups.

Among Charles's penguin adventure highlights is watching Gentoo penguins entertain themselves on

the Falkland Islands.

"They'll ride the waves; they're literally surfing. They'll come in, then they'll head back out and do it again. They're playing," Charles says fondly.

It is safe to say that Charles, having dedicated years of his life to "penguin hunting", is both an enthusiast and an expert.

But what, I wonder, is his favourite species of penguin?

"Emperor penguin chicks," Charles admits.

"They're so cute, and it's this ferocious environment and you think, what do

they need to be cute for?

"Who sees them besides their parents?"

Charles's book is both a celebration of these loveable creatures and a call to action, with 11 of the 18 species currently in decline.

"We think they're so far away, what we do has no effect on them, but it's just not the case.

"What we do matters entirely," Charles insists.

"Our behaviour and our habits in the northern hemisphere do have direct ramifications in the southern hemisphere."

Charles and Susan's challenging journeys all over the world to encounter different species of penguins certainly prove the ability of these endearing creatures to capture our hearts.

"These penguins are like living lessons in a deepening love for the planet and the creatures.

"I just love the way they evoke love and affection in us, and we can learn from that.

"How hard is that; if we just showed a little love for the planet?" Charles asks. ■

A Close Encounter

"There was a group of penguins standing around this pond that formed in a stream coming out of the mountains," Charles says.

"King penguins are gorgeous, and they were reflected in the pond and I thought, 'I must photograph this.' So I got down on my tummy and crawled on my elbows.

"I realised something was pecking at my boot. I turned around and there was a King penguin knocking on my boot like a woodpecker.

"It came walking up to check out my jacket, pulled at the sleeves, and the next thing it was standing right beside me.

"I was on my stomach and they're three feet tall, so it was looking down on me. He put his head back and gave a penguin call. That call is how they tell you who they are; their identity is inscribed in that call.

"That moment was like, 'How do I say to this penguin who I am, how do I answer that penguin's call?' That's what the book is about: it's my answer to that penguin who asked who I am."

You can buy Charles's book, "Every Penguin In The World", in hardback now for £19.99.

