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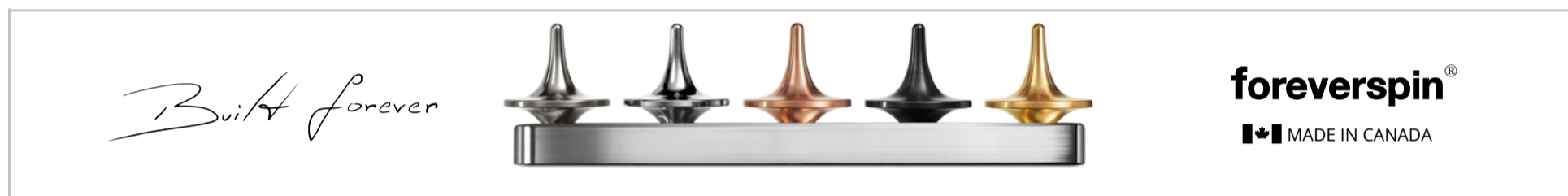
## Young emperor penguins need better protection

By **Katherine Bucko**  
Earth.com staff writer

Scientists and European research institutions are calling for better protections for juvenile emperor penguins. This comes as the U.S. considers listing them under the Endangered Species Act and the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) considers expanding Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Southern Ocean.

Juvenile emperor penguins are more vulnerable than adults as they have not fully developed foraging and predator avoidance skills. As [climate change](#) reduces sea-ice habitat, greatly expanded MPAs are crucial to protect this threatened penguin species at every life stage.

The study tracked eight penguins with satellite tags over a year. Results showed that the young birds spend about 90 percent of their time outside of current and proposed MPAs. They were also found to travel over 1,200 kilometers (745 miles) beyond the species range.



“While everyone is looking at the adult population, the juvenile population – which leaves the relative safety of its parents at about five months – is neither monitored nor protected,” said Dan Zitterbart, an associate scientist at the [Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution](#).

“The current and proposed MPAs in the Southern Ocean only include the range of adult emperor penguins, which do not travel as far as juveniles. From a conservation perspective, it’s important to know where these juveniles go. It’s one more piece of the puzzle to protect their marine habitat.”

Protection of juveniles is critical as emperor penguins have low fertility rates. Without protecting juveniles, the population of breeding adults would be threatened.



The researchers are now conducting a long-term monitoring study of the Atka Bay emperor penguin colony on the Weddell Sea. The Weddell Sea is home to one-third of established emperor penguin colonies. Colonies in this region are less vulnerable to climate-induced melting than other areas of the Antarctic.

“Some of the Weddell Sea colonies are expected to still be present 50 to 100 years from now,” said study lead author Aymeric Houstin. “It’s important to preserve colonies that will be able to endure climate change, as they could become a refuge for the entire population of emperor penguins.”

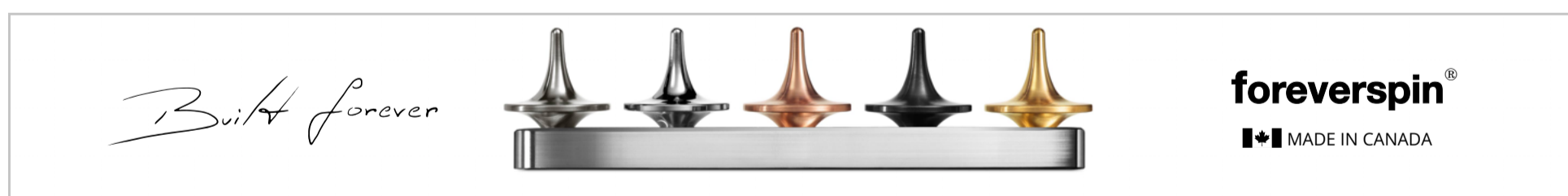
The establishment of three new MPAs has been considered in the Weddell Sea. While this would preserve one of the most pristine ecosystems in the world and a critical zone for global ocean circulation, the authors say that the boundaries are inadequate to protect juvenile emperor penguins.



“The Weddell Sea MPA design, as the other MPAs around Antarctica, should include the distribution at sea of all age-classes of the emperor penguin population – not only the adults from a few study colonies,” said Céline Le Bohec, of CNRS/Université de Strasbourg France and the Centre Scientifique de Monaco. “Juveniles are currently clearly lacking protection and their presence in the Northern waters needs to be considered in the future, especially regarding the development of fisheries in those regions.”

The researchers plan to continue tagging both adult and juvenile penguins from the Atka Bay colony to track their movements and behavior as the environment changes. Long term data could help develop a “dynamic MPA” with shifting boundaries based on the predicted movement of penguins.

A dynamic network of MPAs could be essential, as is maintaining dialogue with the fishing industry to ensure sustainable resource management to preserve these unique and sensitive polar regions.

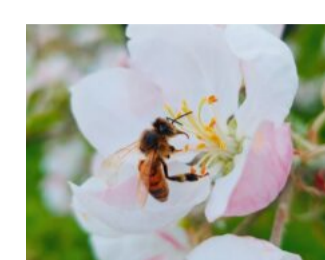


By **Katherine Bucko**, [Earth.com](#) Staff Writer

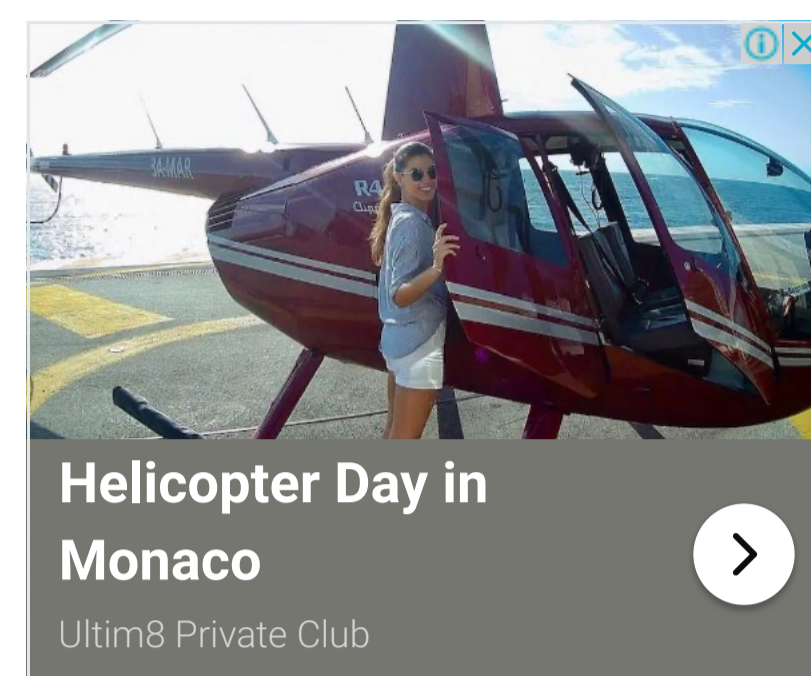
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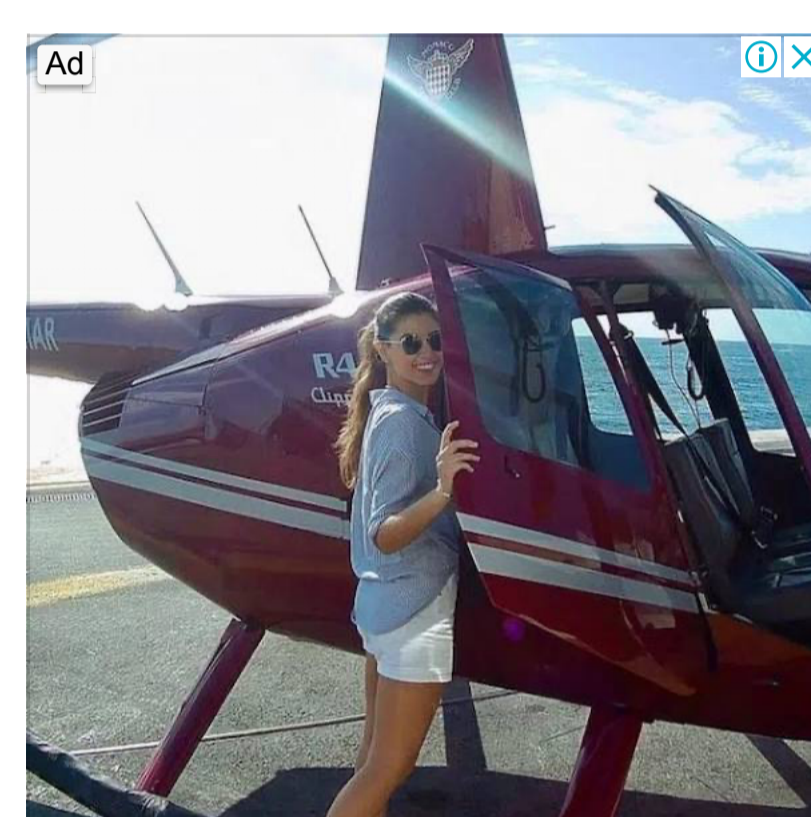
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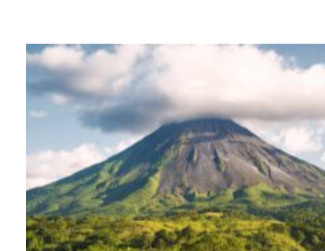
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