Zavodovski chinstrap penguins face sharp decline

LEVEL B2


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I. WARM-UP

1. What images come to mind when you hear "Antarctica"?
2. How can warmer seas change life for ocean animals?
3. Which animals in your region depend on a single main food?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

colony
A large group of the same animals living together in one place.

decline
A steady fall in number, quality, or importance over time.

climate
The usual weather conditions of a place over many years.

endangered
At serious risk of disappearing from the wild.

ecosystem
A community of living things and the environment they share.

krill
Tiny sea animals that many birds and whales eat.

eruption
An event when a volcano explodes and releases ash or lava.

peninsula
A piece of land almost surrounded by water.

III. READING

The penguin colony on Zavodovski Island, in the South Sandwich Islands of Antarctica, was the world's largest but has suffered a two-thirds decline since 2011, according to a new study in Current Biology.

Scientists led by Prof Norman Ratcliffe of the British Antarctic Survey said the loss equals about half a million breeding chinstrap penguins and raises fears for the wider ecosystem. The team links the crash to the climate crisis.

Winter temperatures around the Antarctic peninsula have risen far above historical levels, and a record 15.4C was logged at the Esperanza base on 6 June. As waters warm, tracking shows chinstraps prefer to forage in cooler areas where they expect to find krill, but the prey has shifted south into the Weddell Sea.

Macaroni penguins, which are less picky eaters, rose by 30%, but this does not offset chinstrap losses, and chinstraps may need to be listed as endangered. Researchers ruled out local human impact and a 2016 volcanic eruption as main causes.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "World's largest penguin colony suffers...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where is the penguin colony that experienced a major decline?
2. By how much has the chinstrap population fallen since 2011?
3. What cause do scientists say most likely drove the crash?
4. Where have krill moved as waters warmed around the island?
5. Which penguin species increased, and by how much?

V. DISCUSSION

1. What details in the study make the decline seem most serious to you?
2. Should chinstrap penguins be listed as endangered now? Why or why not?
3. How might warming seas change food webs in your region?
4. What actions could help seabirds when their prey moves?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Past perfect continuous

Use had + been + verb-ing to show an action in progress before another past time, often with for/since to stress duration. Look for a second past reference: before, when, by then, until then.

> *"By the study's release, the colony* **had been declining** *since 2011."*
>
> *"When krill shifted south, chinstraps* **had been foraging** *to the north-west."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete the sentences with the past perfect continuous.

1. By then, temperatures (rise) ___ for weeks. _____
2. Macaroni penguin numbers (grow) ___ for years before the study. _____
3. When I arrived, the penguins (call) ___ for hours. _____
4. Before publication, researchers (track) ___ birds for months. _____
5. By publication, krill (move) ___ south into the Weddell Sea. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


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I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading and comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 12–15 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach or check: colony, peninsula, krill, ecosystem, decline. Use the photo context to anchor meaning.
- Run the reading in two passes: skim for main idea, then scan for numbers, places and causes. Pair-check answers before whole-class feedback.
- Differentiate by task: stronger students summarise causes and effects in three linked sentences; others underline evidence in the text first.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Prompt students to cite numbers (two-thirds, 15.4C) and locations to support their view.
2. Set up a short debate in pairs; ask for one clear reason and one risk for each side.
3. If answers are abstract, ask for one concrete change in a local food chain as an example.
4. Elicit specific steps (protected areas, fishing limits, monitoring) and ask who should act.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Writing: Write a 90-word news update explaining the decline to a general audience with one quoted figure.

Presentation: In pairs, make a 2-minute brief on how krill movement could affect two species in Antarctica.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Past perfect continuous

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

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These answers are for teachers only. Please do not share this page with students.


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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where is the penguin colony that experienced a major decline?
   Zavodovski Island in the South Sandwich Islands, Antarctica.
2. By how much has the chinstrap population fallen since 2011?
   By two-thirds.
3. What cause do scientists say most likely drove the crash?
   The climate crisis and warmer conditions.
4. Where have krill moved as waters warmed around the island?
   South into the Weddell Sea.
5. Which penguin species increased, and by how much?
   Macaroni penguins, up 30%.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete the sentences with the past perfect continuous.

1. By then, temperatures ___ for weeks. **had been rising**
2. Macaroni penguin numbers ___ for years before the study. **had been growing**
3. When I arrived, the penguins ___ for hours. **had been calling**
4. Before publication, researchers ___ birds for months. **had been tracking**
5. By publication, krill ___ south into the Weddell Sea. **had been moving**

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Use had + been + verb-ing to show an action in progress before another past time, often with for/since to stress duration. Look for a second past reference: before, when, by then, until then. (Examples constructed.)

"By the study's release, the colony **had been declining** *since 2011."*

"When krill shifted south, chinstraps **had been foraging** *to the north-west."*