



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Endangered South African Penguins Driven Away by Shipping Noise

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Penguins in South Africa are being driven from their native environment because of noise from shipping activities.

The African penguin lives on St. Croix island off the east coast of South Africa. The animals are already endangered. But a new study has found that African penguins are leaving their natural environment to escape noisy ship refueling operations.

The island once held the world's largest reproducing colony of the animals. But the population has dropped sharply since South Africa started permitting ships in the area to refuel at sea six years ago, the study found.

Lorien Pichegru is acting director of the Coastal and Marine Research Institute at Nelson Mandela University, which led the study. She told Reuters news agency the organization had found that noise levels in the area had doubled since the refueling activities began.

Scientists say high noise levels affect the ability of ocean animals to find and catch other animals for food. Noise also makes it more difficult for the animals to communicate with each other and map travel paths.

"This year we are at 1,200 **breeding** pairs at St Croix from 8,500 pairs in 2016," Pichegru said. "I was counting the dead birds every month on the beach of the bay."

The study recently appeared in the publication *Science of the Total Environment*. The researchers said the study is the first to explore the effects of ocean traffic noise pollution on a seabird.

In 2016, South Africa's Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) awarded the country's first offshore refueling operator's **license** to Aegean Marine. Later, it gave two licenses to SA Marine Fuels and Heron Marine.

The companies operating the refueling activities did not return Reuters' request for comment.

An order to halt any new licenses has been in place since August 2019. It will only be lifted after an environmental study is completed by port officials. The study is expected next year.

Nelson Mandela University's study used data from ship identification tools to estimate underwater noise from passing ships.

Oil-covered penguins were found in 2019 in Algoa Bay after an oil spill from ship-to-ship refueling. Environmental groups have called for the activities to be banned in the bay.

Pichegru said penguins in the area were already struggling to reproduce because of a series of issues, including industrial fishing operations. She added that the refueling activities did not kill all the penguins. "It was just the thing that made the whole **ecology** tip over and then the penguins couldn't **cope** with that," she said.

I'm Bryan Lynn.

Reuters reported this story. Bryan Lynn adapted the report for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

breed – *v.* to reproduce

license – *n.* an official document giving someone permission to do or have something

ecology – *n.* the relationship between living things and the environment

cope – *v.* to deal with something

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