

# JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL MAP COLLECTORS' SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER 2023 No.174 ISSN 0956-5728

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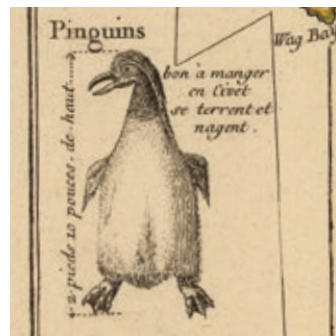
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Front cover Giovanni Maria Cassini, Detail of three celestial gores created for the complete set of his largest celestial and terrestrial globes (1788). HEK MC 140/141.

# ADMIRER, EXAMINED AND EATEN

## *Penguins on maps*

Stephen Martin

Two penguins decorate the cartouche of 'Exquisita & magno aliquot mensium periculo lustrata et iam resecta Freti Magellanici Facies'. It was published in the 1630s and shows the strait between Tierra de Fuego and America. These intriguing birds are among the first penguins to be depicted on maps. They appear haughty, or display perhaps just a resigned solemnity as they are clasped into the elaborate designs of the cartouche. If they looked across the landmass, in addition to the practical information in the map of the passage through the Strait, indications of landforms and depths of the waterway between the South American landmass and Tierra de Fuego, they

would see a whale at the western opening of the Strait near a fleet of ships, and two sea lions, one with pups, decorating the bottom left of the map. If they looked a little closer in one of the bends of the Strait, they would discover the island 'Pinguyns Eylanden'; no doubt their home.

Olivier van Noort, in his account of his voyages in 1599, identified two Penguin islands on his map of the Straits of Magellan. One in the Strait and the second on the northwest coast of America near Porto Desire. Standing prominently at the southern tip of America is an illustration of a 'Pinguyn'.

Here the bird stands for more than decoration. This



Fig. 1 Mercator / Hondius, 'Exquisita & magno aliquot mensium periculo lustrata et iam resecta Freti Magellanica Facies', 1630. 35 x 46 cm. Two penguins, nondescript but alert, incorporated in the design of the cartouche. State Library of NSW X910/6A.





Fig. 2 Emanuel Bowen, 'A new & accurate map of the islands of Newfoundland, Cape Briton, St. John and Anticosta; together with the neighbouring countries of Nova Scotia, Canada &c. Drawn from the most approved modern maps and charts...', London, 1747. 35 x 43 cm. 'Penguin' [Islands] appear off the south coast near C. Raye and another 'Penguin I'[island] north of C. Bonavista on the east coast. David Rumsey Collection

is no cartographic sleight or engaging conceit. This a deliberate and accurate reference to the location and nature of an island that was, in some cases, a lifesaving source of food. In the southern summer, penguins and penguin eggs were a staple source of food for mariners who quickly learned where and when penguins and their eggs were available for the taking. The birds were killed and stored in salt for future consumption.

Penguins have been a part of European culture for more than 400 years and for just as long have been admired, examined, and eaten. Europeans in southern penguin habitats commented frequently on the appearance of the flightless birds often alluding to recognisable, even attractive, human-like attributes of their shape or behaviour.

In 1578 the English sailor, explorer and sometime pirate, Sir Francis Drake sailed south along the coast of

Patagonia. John Winter sailed with him and left us with the following account of an encounter with penguins on St Georges Island (now called Santa Magdalena) about 25 miles north-east of Tierra de Fuego:

*Here we stayed one day & virtualled our selves with a kind of foule which is plentiful in that isle, and whose flesh is not farre unlike a fat goose in England: they have no wings, but short pineons which serve their turne in swimming. Their colour is somewhat blacke mixt with white spots under their belly, and about their necke. They walke so upright, that a farre off man would take them to be little children*<sup>1</sup>

Winter was probably not the first to make such a comparison and he certainly was not the last. In 1694 Sir John Narborough published an account of his voyages south and included in it the account of his

gathering penguins for food. This included a description of the penguin that was to be often repeated in stories about the bird: ‘They are short-leg’d like a Goose and stand upright like little Children in white Aprons’.<sup>2</sup>

Familiarisation grew into a fondness; penguins became an attraction, an acceptable decoration on all sorts of commodities, including maps.

Penguins occupied a similar ecological niche to that of the Great Auk (*Pinguinus impennis*), commonly called penguins, in the north. The two birds resembled each other in appearance and to some extent in behaviour. Both were flightless, easy to catch and good eating. The Great Auk was found in the cold North Atlantic coastal waters along the coasts of Canada, the northeastern United States, Norway, Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Ireland, Great Britain, France and northern Spain. It left the North Atlantic waters for land only to breed.

Sailors took them in enormous numbers for food. Islands with auk rookeries took on the name of the bird and ‘Penguin I[sland] appeared on maps of

northern seas (Fig. 2). Auks had probably been hunted in Newfoundland by Europeans since the middle of the fifteenth century and in 1844, after years of such exploitation, they became extinct.

So, when sailors and sea travellers went south and saw a small flightless bird that gathered in colonies and which were both edible and easy to catch, they marked the locations down on their personal and published maps. They called them penguins. The name stuck. Penguin Islands appeared on maps of the south.

Southern penguins were also being noted and described in journals and published accounts of voyages. Among these early descriptions penguins are described as exotic, almost marginal creatures. They may have childlike qualities, but they were mysterious birds; unfamiliar and being seabirds, from a different element. Often they were seen as half bird, half fish.

Illustrators mainly relied on textual descriptions and skins rather than on live specimens for reference. Representations vary – the standard silhouette, of a creature standing upright, with a distinctive beak and flippers was (and is) consciously used, with variations.



Fig. 3 Georges-Louis Le Rouge, ‘Cartes des Isles Malounies dites Falkland d’après celle de Bowles’, Paris, 1771. 33 x 47.5 cm. Penguins, here are noted as ‘bon a manger’, a source of nourishment and example of the Island’s natural inhabitant. BNF.