

On December 28, 2015, (mid-summer in the southern hemisphere) we were on a cruise ship which docked in the Falkland Islands. We were lucky enough to book a spot with a caravan of six, four-wheel-drive vehicles headed across the trackless peat bogs to Volunteer Point, a conservation site on the far side of the island.



This slide show is best viewed in full screen mode.

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We drove a half-hour out of Stanley past this farm, which is at the end of the road.



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For the next hour and a half, all we saw were sheep, rocks, and peat bogs. There are no trees, because the ground is boggy, and the wind blows all the time.

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The vehicles go in groups because someone almost always gets stuck...



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And they have to tow each other out of the bogs.



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At the end of our drive
we reached Volunteer
Point.

Volunteer Point Beach La Playa - Am Strand

1. Wildlife always has the right of way
2. Never panic the penguins into the sea or block the pathway of penguins returning to the colonies
 1. Siempre de prioridad al de animales
 2. No asustar a los pingüinos o causar que huyan al mar
No bloquear la vuelta de los pingüinos a sus nidos
3. Beware of the sea lions on the beach and in the dunes
4. Do not approach sea lions for your own safety
 3. Tenga cuidado con lobos marinos que pueda haber en la playa o en las dunas
 4. Por su propia seguridad, no se acerque a los lobos marinos
3. Nehmen sie sich vor Seelöwen am Strand und in den Dünen in Acht
4. Zu Ihrer eigenen Sicherheit halten sie Abstand zu den Seelöwen

Produced with assistance from Falklands Conservation Small Grant Scheme 2009

The King Penguins

1. Keep 6m distance from the penguins
Mantenerse a 6m de distancia de los Pingüinos
Bitte halten Sie mindestens 6m Abstand zu den Pinguinen
2. Please stay behind the white stones around the colony
Por favor, permanezca detrás de las rocas blancas
Bitte bleiben Sie hinter ausserhalb der weißen Steine
3. It is prohibited to touch or feed the penguins
No tocar o alimentar a los pingüinos
Anfassen und füttern der Pinguine ist verboten
4. Avoid disturbance especially during the egg incubation period - November to January
No molestar a los pingüinos. El periodo más crítico de incubación es entre Noviembre y Enero
Vermeiden Sie die Störung der Pinguine, insbesondere während der Ei-Inkubationszeit von November bis Januar

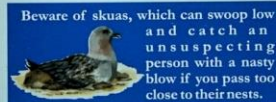
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VOLUNTEER POINT

Welcome to Volunteer Point. Enjoy your visit here and we hope you will find this information helpful. Follow the simple guidelines and remember they are in use for the long-term protection of our wildlife.



King Penguin



Beware of skuas, which can swoop low and catch an unsuspecting person with a nasty blow if you pass too close to their nests.

Resident here are over 700 breeding pairs of gentoo penguins, hundreds of pairs of Magellanic penguins, wading birds such as oystercatchers and sandpipers, coastal marine mammals such as the Commerson's dolphin and southern sea lion and of course, the King penguin colony of over 500 breeding pairs.

Penguins are very specialised birds. Their wings have changed into paddles suited to underwater swimming. There are 17 species in the world, five of which breed in the Falkland Islands.

Take care not to trample the burrows of Magellanic penguins which nest all over this area.

Leave vehicles in the designated parking areas.
Listen to the warden - who is there to protect you and the wildlife.
Never drive on the beach.
Please read the signs provided and take care not to prevent wildlife getting to either the sea or it's nesting sites.
Do not cross the protective fencing.
Be aware of and follow the Falkland Islands Countryside Code.
Leave no trace of your visit.



King Penguin

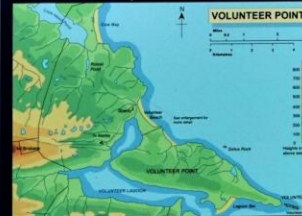


Gentoo Penguin

This is an impressive peninsula. Volunteer Point is to the north east of Berkeley Sound, named after the ship Volunteer in which the American navigator Captain Fanning called at Port Louis in 1815.



To get here you will have passed through the settlement of Johnson's Harbour, some 10 miles overland to the south, which runs some 15,000 sheep and was established in 1870 by George Patterson Smith.



This site is a privately owned Nature Reserve



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The only people who live on this side of the island are one couple who run a small B&B.
We were very lucky that day to have the one man who lives here as our driver and guide.



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Here is some information about the three kinds of penguins that breed here annually.



KING PENGUINS
Aptenodytes patagonicus



The population of King Penguins at Volunteer Green was about 1500 pairs in March 2014. This has increased from 31 pairs in 1971. There were 746 chicks in May 2015. This number varies each season from between 650 and 850 due to the breeding cycle of this penguin.

Statistics: Height is between 85 to 95cm or 3ft
Weight is between 12 & 15Kg or 26 & 33 Lb
Age. They can live to about 20 years in the wild.
Breeding starts when they are between 4 and 6 years
Main predators are seals, skuas and vultures.

BREEDING CYCLE

The breeding cycle of a King penguin takes more than one year, meaning that they can only raise two chicks in any three year period.

EGG PERIOD One egg is laid between November and March. It takes 55 days to incubate the egg and both parents share the job.

SMALL CHICK Chicks start hatching from January. The small chick is never left unattended and both parents share shifts of feeding and caring for the chick.

LARGE CHICK (March) the large chicks group together in crèches. Both parents go to sea to bring back food for the growing chick.

WINTER (April - August) Chicks stay on land for the winter whilst both parents go to sea. Adults return to the colony less frequently and chicks can lose up to 50% of their body weight.

JUVENILE MOULT (October - November) Parents return after the winter to carry on feeding the large chicks. The chicks begin to moult into their adult feathers.

JUVENILE DEPART (November - December) The juveniles have full adult feathers and are large enough to fend for themselves and will depart for the sea around November to December.

ADULT MOULT The adults remain on shore and after their chicks have fledged they moult their feathers (24 - 30 days). The adults take a year off and will breed again the following year.

Going to Sea and Feeding

King penguins are adept swimmers and divers and spend large periods of their lives at sea. King penguins eat small fish called myctophids or lantern fish as well as squid. King penguins dive deeper than any other penguins diving up to 300m in search of their prey. During the breeding season the penguins forage close to the Falklands, but during the winter they must look further for the food and can travel hundreds of miles in search of food.



GENTOO PENGUINS
Pygoscelis papua



There are approximately 3600 breeding pairs of gentoo on Volunteer Green. In 1992 there were only about 750 breeding pairs. Breeding success for 2014 was just about 1 per breeding pair. This can vary from season to season due to food supply, sea temperature and weather conditions.

Statistics: Height is around 76cm or 2ft 6 inches
Weight is between 5 & 8 Kg or 11 & 18 Lb
Age. They can live to about 20 years in the wild.
Breeding ages start at 3 to 4 years.
Main predators are seals, skuas and vultures.

BREEDING CYCLE

Both female and male gentoo's are at the nest site before breeding begins, and take turns to feed at sea. Nest building starts in September using diddle-dee torn from nearby plants, grasses, small stones or even hard lumps of mud. Two large round white eggs are laid in October. Chicks are brooded until they are 3-4 weeks old when they form small crèches. The crèches become larger as the chicks grow bigger, and eventually the chicks move away from the nesting site and towards the shorelines, often waiting on beaches for their parents to return from sea with food. The young are fully moulted by late January, and ready to go to sea in late February. Gentoo penguin chicks engage in what is known as the 'chick chase' where they must chase their parents to get fed. It is thought that this behaviour builds up strength of the chicks and also encourages them to venture towards the sea edge and eventually follow the adult birds out to sea.

Going to Sea and Feeding

Gentoo penguins are inshore foragers and generally do not venture more than 20 km from the shores off the Falkland coast in the summer whilst raising chicks, they leave on daily trips departing the colony at first light and generally returning from early evening onwards. Gentoo penguins are opportunistic feeders with great variation in prey ratios between colonies. In the Falklands they feed on a variety of lobster krill and other crustaceans, but squid and fish (blue whiting) are also important food. In the winter gentoo's remain around the Falklands coast and they may disperse further afield from their breeding colonies.



MAGELLANIC PENGUINS

Spheniscus magellanicus



There are no accurate figures for the number of Magellanic penguins on Volunteer Green but an estimate would be in the region of 2500 breeding pairs. Numbers seem to be on the increase and many young survive except on years when there is heavy rain, which can flood the burrows.

Statistics: Height is around 70cm or 2ft 3 inches
Weight is between 2.3 & 7.8 Kg or 5 & 17 Lb
Age. They can live to about 20 years in the wild
Breeding age starts at about 4 years
Nest in burrows in the ground
Main predators are seals, skuas and vultures

BREEDING CYCLE

Males return first in September and begin to prepare the old burrows. Females arrive soon after. Pairs normally bond for life. After courtship 2 eggs are laid about 4 days apart in early October. Incubation takes about 39 to 42 days. The first egg is normally larger than the second. All penguins lay at about the same time in October. Eggs hatch about 1 day apart and if food is short first born or largest is favoured so 1 chick may not survive. Both adults take turns to incubate the eggs and alternate with their feeding. Chicks fledge between 60 and 120 days. All penguins go to sea by the end of April before returning again in September.

Going to Sea and Feeding

They feed on small fish, cephalopods and crustaceans usually at depths averaging 30m but they have been recorded at depths of over 90m

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The Magellanic penguins nest in holes in the ground which seemed to be scattered among the sand dunes, so you had to watch your step.

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The Gentoos nest on top of the ground, all grouped together and separated from the other species of penguins.



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The king penguins all crowd together in a big circle on the bare ground.
Fortunately, the camera cannot capture the smell.



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The baby chicks look like balls of taupe fur and their parents take turns feeding them. The babies can't go into the water until they get rid of all their fur.



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You can see how hard the wind is blowing by looking at the baby's fur.

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As the adolescent penguins shed their fur, they begin grouping together in little gangs called “waddles” and marching around outside the parental circle.



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They look pretty ratty while they're shedding.



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Looking for a friend?

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Is it a match?



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Hmmm... maybe not.

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Let's give it another try.



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Once the fur is gone, they march down to the beach to test out their swimming and fishing skills.



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The locals were wearing short sleeves and commenting on what a nice day it was. It wasn't raining after all.
Keep in mind that I'm from Chicago. I was not planning to take a dip.



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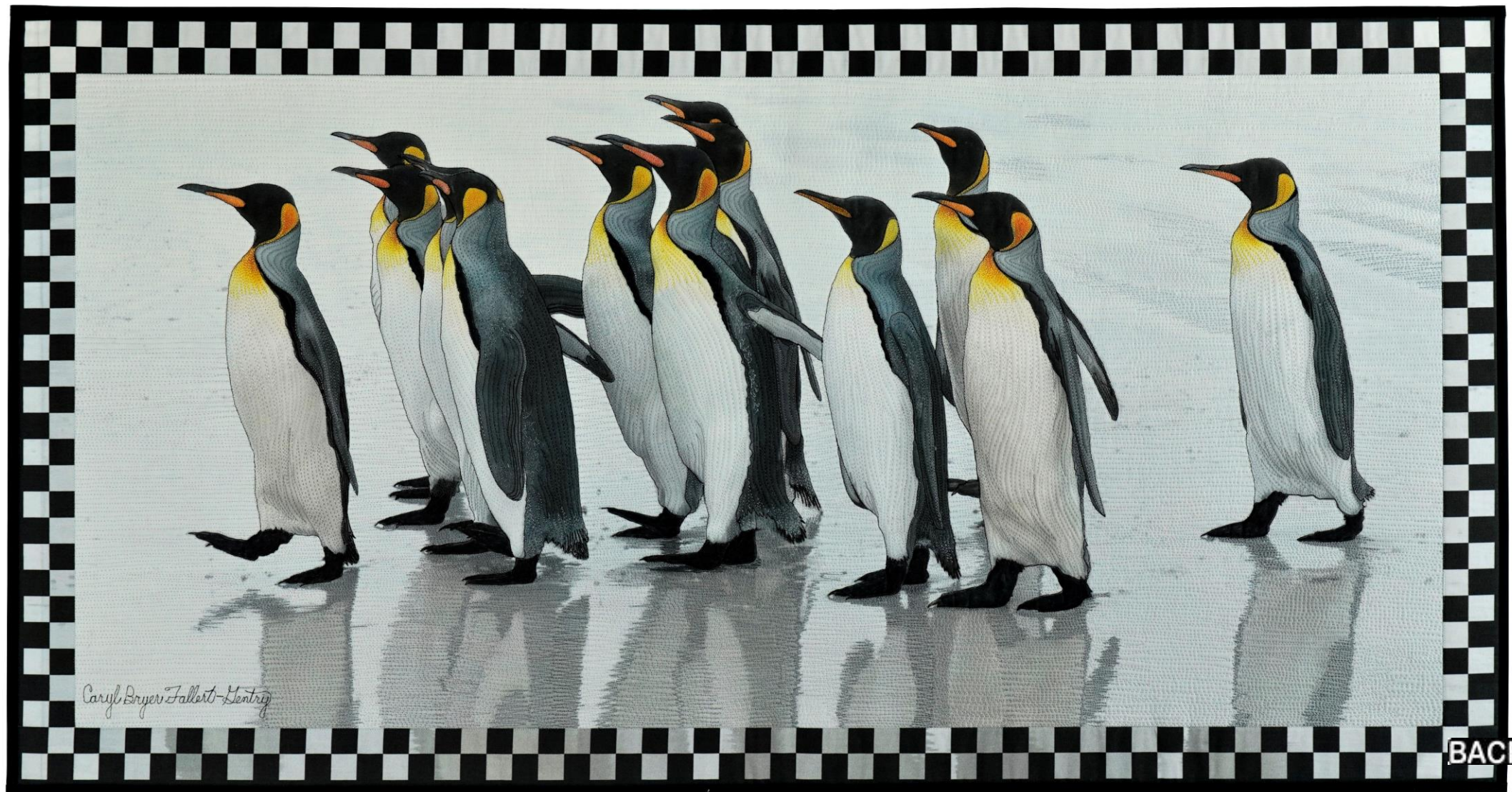
Yep... let's just waddle on back to the sand dunes.



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For the Waddle design, I combined individuals and groups from several different photos of young penguins marching across the beach. I added details with digital painting and faded the background to white at the top. I designed a black and white checked border, which was printed separately. I knew the center would shrink and pucker as it was heavily quilted, so I added the border after the center was finished, to make sure it finished perfectly square. I used more than a dozen different shades of black, white, and grey threads in the quilting.



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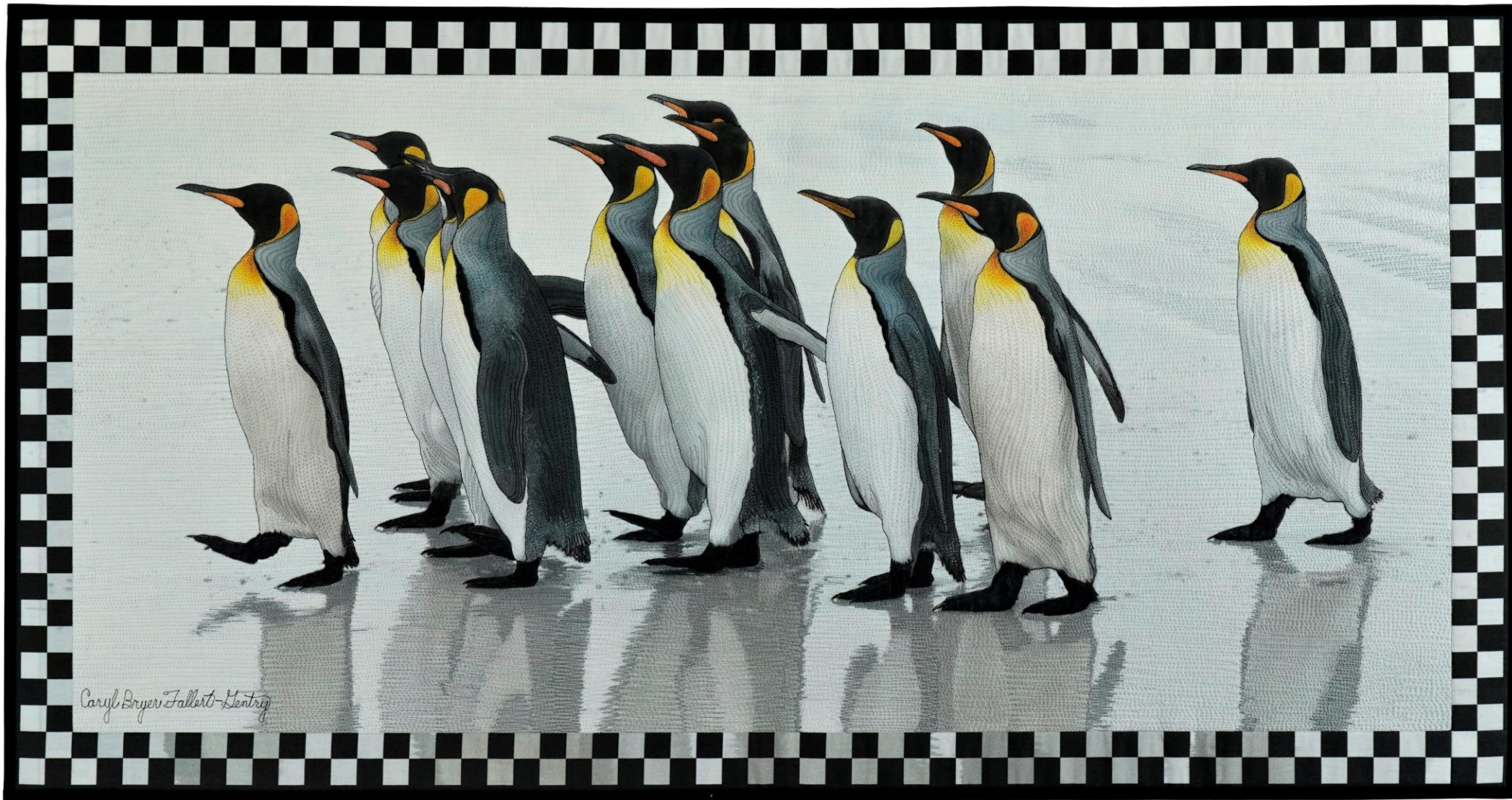
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