



XPenguins

Antarctic Invasion

No matter whether you use a color gradient or a wallpaper, static desktops are simply boring. The XPenguins programs pep up your screen and is a pleasant diversion from the daily grind.

BY ANDREA MÜLLER

An amazing scene takes place once a year at zoos around the world - as soon as the temperatures drop below zero, the king penguins line up behind a keeper on a march across the grounds. If you have never seen this live, you may have seen it on TV, as the strolling tuxes regularly make the news.

Fortunately, Linux users don't need to wait for the temperature to drop, to enjoy the spectacle of penguins on the move. A program called *XPenguins* [1] by Robin Hogan fills your desktop background with a whole flock of Linux mascots, no matter what the outside temperature may be - and it doesn't cost you a fortune in fish.

Breeding

If your distribution CD does not include XPenguins you can try your luck with the RPM packet provided by the program's author. If this does not work, you can always compile the application yourself. This is quite straight forward, as XPenguins only requires the XFree86 development packets and *libxpm*.

After unpacking the tarball, change to the directory this created, *xpenguins-2.2*

and perform the usual three-command trick to configure, compile and install the software: `./configure ; make ; make install`. *xpenguins* is installed below `/usr/local` by default, and this is why you need to be *root* to run *make install*.

After completing the installation steps, you can use XPenguins with any window manager, although KDE's *kwin* does require some additional preparatory steps, as KDE places a window on top of the **root window** by default. For KDE version 3.1 or higher, enable the *Enable icons on desktop* option in the *Desktop / Behavior* menu.

XPenguins will destroy the desktop icons both on KDE and on GNOME, but they are re-drawn as soon as you quit the program.

Penguin Parade

Type the following command to run XPenguins for the first time

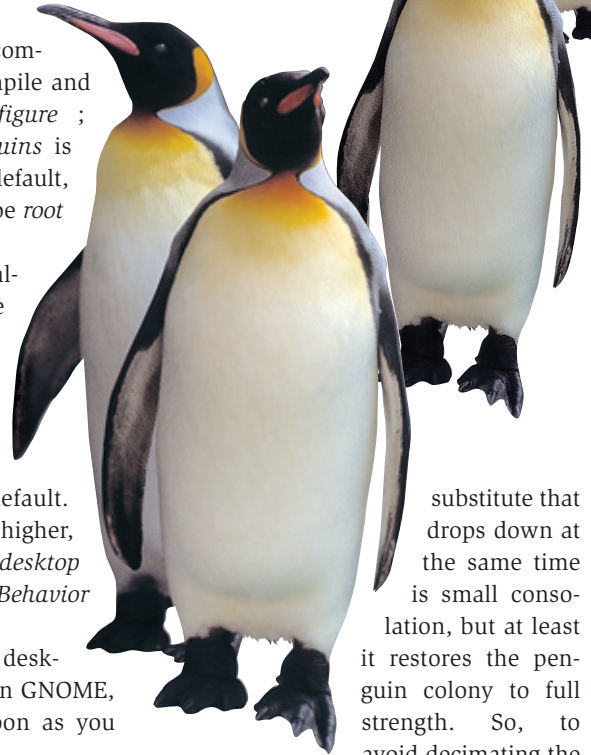
```
xpenguins
```

You do not need to add an ampersand, &. Although this means you lose the prompt, you can press [Ctrl-C] at any time to quite the program.

When you enter this command, eight penguins drop down from the top edge of the screen. Some of them turn somersaults in the air, whereas others use a bunch of balloons to brake their fall and ensure a soft landing.

Of course, there is no guarantee of this: penguins cannot fly, and dropping from a great height means grave danger for them. Some of these poor creatures actually do come to an untimely end, if they hit a window frame too hard, or land at the bottom edge of the screen.

Horrified users see a splash of blood, and just a little while later, the recently deceased penguin sets off on its last journey as angel wearing a halo. The



substitute that drops down at the same time is small consolation, but at least it restores the penguin colony to full strength. So, to avoid decimating the penguin population,

make sure you do not move your windows too quickly.

It is well worth waiting to see what happens next: Instead of just running back and forth on window frames after landing, your new desktop inhabitants engage in a whole range of leisure activities. The more sporting types get on their skateboards, some of them have brought a good book along, and occasionally you see a conscientious individual with a protective helmet and a jack-hammer.

If you wait long enough, you may be treated to the sight of penguins actually doing something to combat their lack of flight skills, such as using a head-mounted rotor to fly back up to the top of the screen.

Caring for Your Penguin

The program author provides a number of additional *Xpenguins* parameters to take the monotony out of watching these penguin antics. You can use a combination of parameters to put even more pep into your desktop.

deskTOPia

Only you can decide how your desktop looks. With deskTOPia we regularly take you with us on a journey into the land of window managers and desktop environments, presenting the useful and the colorful viewers and pretty toys.

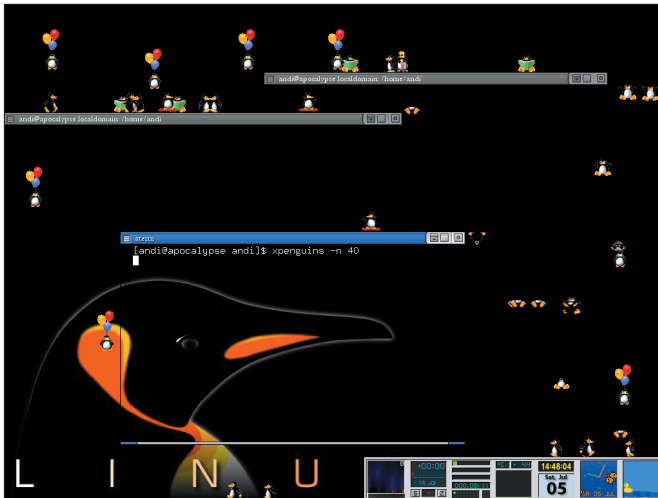


Figure 1: Desktop penguin colony

`xpenguins -n $NUMBER` specifies the number of penguins to perform on your desktop simultaneously. If you use a screen resolution of 1024x768, `xpenguins -n 40` provides for a pleasantly chaotic scenario with too many of the birds getting in each others way (see Figure 1).

You can use the `-b` parameter to launch a version of the desktop game suitable for children; this removes the splatter effect when a penguin bites the dust.

Adding `-a` also eliminates the penguin angels flying up to Heaven. The `-s` flag is obviously an acronym for sadistic mode, as it allows you to squash the humorous creatures by clicking on them with your mouse. In this mode, the cursor in the root window changes into a crosshair, and as a punishment for being sadistic, you have to do without root menus, such as a window list or the drop-down menu, until you quit XPenguins.

The `-r` and `--nice $NUMBER1 $NUMBER2` options are interesting for older hardware. `-r` tells the program to assume that all your windows are square, and this saves CPU time. If you use window decorations with straight edges, you will not notice any change from the normal XPenguins mode.

But strange things happen if you use window decorations with unusual

GLOSSARY

Root window: All the other windows on your desktop build on the root desktop window. In contrast to all other windows, the root window does not have a frame, but displays the desktop background.

shapes, like the ones that some Enlightenment themes include.

If you specify the `--nice` parameter, the program parses `/proc/loadavg` every five seconds. If the system load exceeds the first value for `--nice`, the number of penguins is reduced; if the system load actually reaches the second value, the penguins disappear altogether, and do not return until your system has completed any CPU intensive tasks. The following is useful for desktop systems:

```
xpenguins --nice 1.0 1.5
```

Give the Penguins a Break

If these South Pole characters are causing you too much hassle, XPenguins still has another goodie to offer: the program supports themes, and includes a few in the basic packet. You can type `xpenguins -l` to see what is on offer and select a theme with:

```
xpenguins -t $THEME-NAME
```

Theme names that include space characters need to be enclosed in quotes.

In addition to the standard theme, *Penguins*, there are two others. The nostalgically inclined might opt for *Classic Penguins*, and users with higher screen resolutions might choose the *Big Penguins* theme, to catch the details.

Turtle lovers should take a look at *Turtles*. And if you select *Bill*, you will be confronted by the protagonist of the *xbill* game, who keeps stopping off to install Windows on a Linux computer. This syntax really brings the Linux geek's

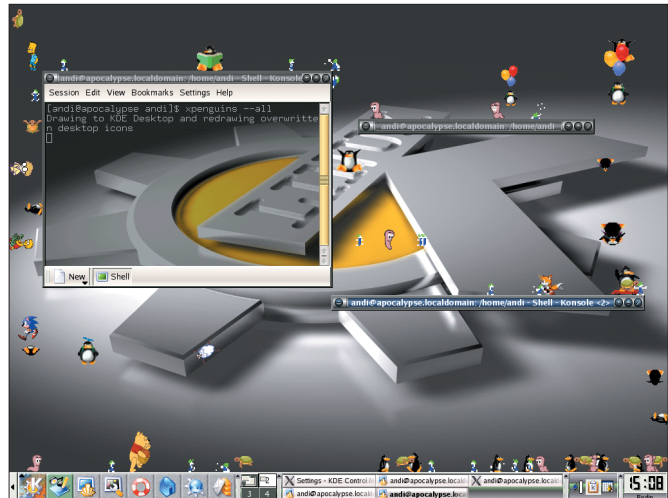


Figure 2: XPenguins displaying all the available themes simultaneously

nightmare to life, but you can always start moving windows around, of course.

```
xpenguins -n 50 -t Bill
```

To put the characters from multiple themes on your desktop simultaneously, specify multiple `-t` parameters, and type `xpenguins --all`. This combines all the available themes and turns your desktop into a multi-cultural exchange (see Figure 2).

If you are not satisfied with the five themes that come with the package, more are up for grabs on the `contrib/` directory on the program author's homepage. After unpacking new theme files, remember to copy them to the right directory, as in:

```
cp -a themes/* /usr/local/share/xpenguins/themes/
```

INFO

[1] XPenguins: <http://xpenguins.seul.org/>

THE AUTHOR

Andrea Müller is a law student who keeps herself busy with Linux whenever she gets tired of legal theory.

When time permits she additionally likes to take a peek at other operating systems, such as QNX, BeOS and NetBSD, or even tries to polish her Python skills. Apart from Linux and her university career Andrea is interested in literature, European history and cycling.

