

Little Penguins

Q & A

Eudyptula minor

Eudyptula = good little diver
minor = smallest

GENERAL

Q: What type of animal is a Little Penguin?

A: The Little Penguins are seabirds that don't fly. They have a beak, little feathers and lay 2 eggs. They have specially designed wings called flippers that they use for swimming in the ocean.

Q: How many species of penguins are there?

A: There are 17 species of penguins found in the world. All the species are found in the southern hemisphere (Australia, New Zealand, Antarctica and sub-Antarctic islands, South America and Africa). The smallest penguin is the Little Penguin found in Australia and New Zealand and the largest is the Emperor Penguin found in Antarctica.

Q: How many Little Penguins are there at the Penguin Parade?

A: There are approximately 2,000 breeding and non-breeding penguins in the Penguin Parade area. On Phillip Island, there are approximately 32,000 breeding penguins.

Q: Do Little Penguins migrate?

A: No. Although adult Little Penguins from Phillip Island regularly spend long periods of up to 4 weeks out at sea fishing in western Bass Strait and Port Phillip Bay. Juvenile penguins swim further (usually towards South Australia) and return when they are 1 year of age. From 2-3 years of age they will come back to breed.

Q: Why do Little Penguins come ashore during the non-breeding season?

A: They come ashore to maintain their burrows and moult their old feathers.

DAILY CYCLE

Q: What time do the Little Penguins leave their burrows in the morning?

A: They leave about 1-2 hours before sunrise, to head out to sea to go fishing.

Q: Why do they come ashore in groups at sunset?

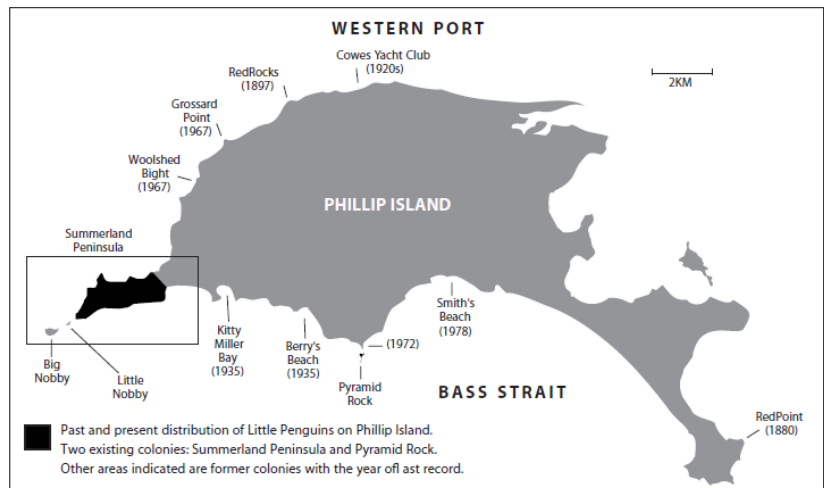
A: It is for protection from predators, ie. birds of prey such as Pacific Gulls and Sea Eagles.

Q: How long do they keep coming in at night?

A: Most penguins cross the beach in the first 50 minutes and the majority arrive within 2 hours.

Q: How do Little Penguins find their burrows?

A: Just after sunset, they always arrive in the same place on the beach each night. Then they cautiously waddle across the sand and walk the familiar tracks back to the same burrow or a nearby one. Along the way, they look for landmarks or listen for a partner calling to help them find their way home.



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“The deepest dive recorded was 73m and the longest dive lasted 114 seconds.”

Q: What are the wooden boxes for?

A: They are placed in areas where penguins are not already digging their burrows or where the burrows would collapse because of the lack of vegetation. In 1985 the Victorian Government initiated the Penguin Protection Plan which involves purchasing houses within the housing estate on the Summerland Peninsula amongst the penguin colony. Once the houses are removed, the PINP Rangers rehabilitate those areas for the Little Penguins by placing boxes, getting rid of the weeds and replanting native vegetation for the penguins.



DIET

Q: What do Little Penguins eat?

A: Penguins can eat about 25% of their body weight (approximately 250g) of small fish daily such as Barracouta, Anchovies, Red Cod, Warehou and Pilchards with a small quantity of squid as well.

Q: Do the parents feed each other?

A: No, they only feed their own chicks by regurgitation.

Q: How fast can they swim?

A: On average they can swim 2-4km/hr but they have been recorded swimming at 6.4km/hr.

Q: How deep do they dive?

A: Researchers have been using miniature depth sensors to study the diving of our Little Penguins. They have found that Little Penguins can dive 200-1300 times per day with an average depth ranging from 10-30m. The deepest dive recorded was 73m and the longest dive lasted 114 seconds.

Q: How far do they travel at sea each day?

A: Little Penguins can travel 15-50km each day. Our research staff have placed satellite trackers on the backs of penguins from Phillip Island to find out where they travel to find food throughout the year. We have discovered that Little Penguins from Phillip Island may be out at sea from 1 day up to 4 weeks at a time, searching for small fish and squid in Bass Strait, Western Port and Port Phillip Bay.

BREEDING SEASON

Q: When is the breeding season?

A: Usually between August - February.

Q: How can you tell the difference between male and female penguins?

A: Male penguins are slightly heavier and have a bigger beak with a more defined hook when comparing them to females.

Q: How many eggs do they lay?

A: Little Penguins lay 2 eggs, each weighing 55g, which are the size of chickens' eggs. Both parents take it in turns to incubate them.

Q: How long is the incubation period?

A: Approximately 35 days.

Q: What do the parents feed their chicks?

A: Both parents feed their chicks by regurgitating fish and squid caught at sea

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“Most penguins renew the pair bond each season”

Yearly Cycle The Penguin Calendar

Activity

Burrow Attendance

Nest Building

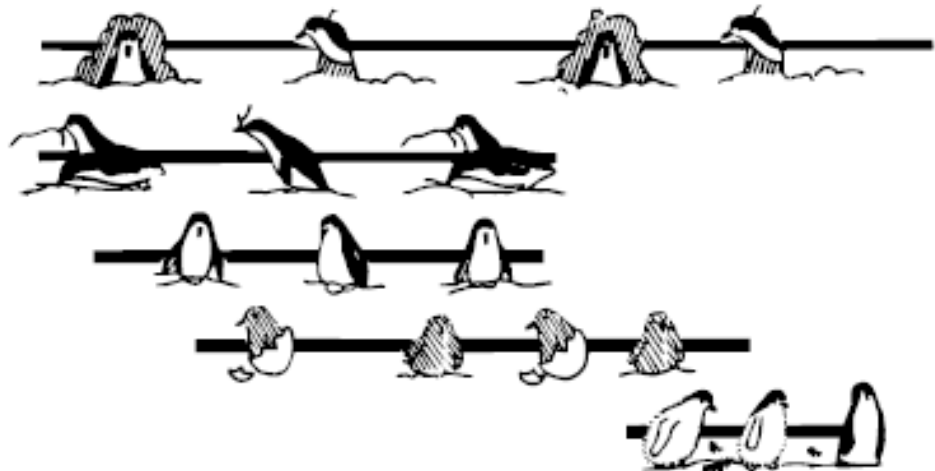
Egg Laying

Chick Raising

Moult

Month of the Year

June July Aug Sept Oct Nov Dec Jan Feb March Apr May



Q: Do the chicks recognize their parents?

A: It is a hard question. Chicks try to get food from any adult they come across. Whether they don't recognize their parents and they are sneaky trying to get extra food is not known. The parents are able to find their chick by its voice and the position near its burrow.

Q: At what age do the chicks head out to sea?

A: They leave their parents behind and head out to sea for the first time when they are 7-11 weeks of age.

Q: Are they taught to swim by their parents?

A: No. They know how to swim and catch food instinctively.

Q: Do they have the same partner each year?

A: Most penguins renew the pair bond each season, although they have a divorce rate of 18% to almost 50% in some years. Also if a partner dies, they can look for a new mate.

MOULTING SEASON

Q: When do the Little Penguins moult?

A: Penguins moult between February – April staying ashore for approximately 17 days.

Q: Why do Little Penguins moult?

A: Penguins moult to replace their old and worn feathers. They do this so they can maintain a water proof plumage. Without waterproof feathers, they would lose lots of heat and eventually die of hypothermia.

Q: Do they eat during the moult?

A: No. They almost double their body weight before the moult. As they are not waterproof whilst moulting, they will fast on land.



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PENGUIN THREATS

Q: What are their natural predators?

A: At sea, there are Leopard Seals that hunt them. On land, Pacific Gulls, White Sea-eagles, Swamp Harriers, kites and kestrels will prey on them. Little ravens prey on penguin eggs and chicks. At sea starvation is a greater cause of death than predation.

Q: What other problems do penguins encounter?

A: Humans have introduced many threats to the penguins' environment. Oil spills, dogs, foxes, feral cats, commercial fishing and plastic pollution all contribute to reducing Little Penguin numbers.

THE PENGUIN PARADE

Q: Why don't the lights and people affect the penguins?

A: The beach and boardwalk lights were gradually introduced over many years so that the penguins have become used to them. Also the lights work on the red spectrum which doesn't affect their eyes. People have been watching the penguins come ashore since the 1920s so they are used to minimal noise and seeing people on the beach.

Q: Why do people have to pay to see the penguins?

A: The Nature Parks is a not for profit organisation that protects and manages 20% of Phillip Island. All revenue (ticket sales, souvenirs, food & beverage) from the Penguin Parade, KCC, Churchill Island and the Nobbies Centre helps to protect a variety of flora and fauna, to support education, research, ongoing operations and to provide facilities within the park. This includes non fee paying areas such as the entire southern coastline and beaches. Therefore you are helping the penguins!

Q: I used to come and sit on the beach and watch the penguins, why has it all changed?

A: Approximately 500,000 people come to see the penguins each year. The boardwalks and viewing stands are necessary to protect the penguins and their habitat. Penguins can be seen up close on the beach near the roped off areas and on the boardwalks without disturbing them in any way.

Q: How many penguins are there on Phillip Island?

A: Phillip Island Nature Park is home to about 32,000 breeding Little Penguins which is approximately one third of Victoria's total penguin population. The Summerland Peninsula provides an ideal habitat for penguins to breed and the waters of Bass Strait, Western Port and Port Phillip Bay ensure an extensive fishing area.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES:

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