

Protecting the Penguins:

The key to protecting the Little Penguins is education of people about them and protecting their habitat in particular where Little Penguins may encounter people and their pets.

In 2005 the **Volunteer Penguin Warden scheme** was initiated by National Parks and Wildlife Services and there are now 25 volunteers whose role is to help protect the penguins during the penguin breeding season, particularly unleashed dogs in breeding areas and on-lookers who may get too close to the penguins. If requested to move behind barriers or refrain from taking flash photos of the penguins, we ask that you do so, to ensure the protection of our unique and wonderful penguins at Manly.

If you are interested in becoming a Penguin Warden contact the Area Manager, NPWS, PO Box 623, Mosman, 2088 or Manly Environment Centre (9976-2842).



NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

More Information:

http://users.tpg.com.au/users/battagli/Penguins/Manly_Little_Penguin_Program.htm

References:

Australian Museum www.amonline.net.au/factsheets/little_penguin.htm

DECC Little Penguin Recovery Plan

Stahel, C. and Gales, R. 1987. *Little Penguins*. New South Wales University Press. Sydney

Front Page Photograph: Cropped DEC/G.Robertson

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Manly's Little Penguins Fact Sheet

Introduction:

The Little Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*) is the smallest of all the world's 17 species of penguins. An adult weighs about 1 Kg and is approximately 30 cm tall. Other names you will hear it called are the Fairy Penguin and Blue Penguin (New Zealand) because of the colour of its feathers. The penguins are streamlined with their wings acting as flippers. The upper head and back are covered by dark blue feathers and the underside by thicker/softer snowy white ones. Their eyes are dark grey.

Manly's Little Penguins are the only New South Wales mainland colony, and as such are considered as an endangered colony and were given protection by the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation under the Threatened Species Act in 1997. Members of the Manly community raised concerns about the slow loss of penguins in the colony. Fifty years ago there were known to be around 300 penguins but the colony became almost depleted with just 35 penguins by the early 1990s. Other causes for the decimation of the colony included habitat loss, dog attacks, shooting and disturbances to their nesting sites.

Today there are approximately 50 - 60 breeding pairs in the Manly Colony. The penguins are not captive but wild birds. Unlike other penguin colonies, Manly penguins do not come into their burrows at set times and are not considered 'tourist attractions'.

The Little Penguins spend the first 2-3 years of their life at sea and eventually return to breed between July and March. The average life span of a Little Penguin is about 8 years although in captivity they can live significantly longer.

Nests:

Penguins tend to make their nests in rock crevices, in sand or soft soil and nesting material is from leaves, twigs and bark or whatever is available, even plastic packaging or paper bags. Generally they will have several paths to their nests so that they can approach them in safety. The male is responsible for the nest building and the female must decide whether the nest is good enough for her to lay her eggs. The male can sometimes be seen gathering material for the nest.

Breeding:

At the start of the breeding season, the male returns to the nest first to await his partner or if an adolescent in his first mating season, to call for a mate by standing erect with flippers extended, head back and mouth open and emitting a loud call, which will come to a crescendo. This continues until a mate is found. Once a mate is found they form an essentially monogamous bond but the male will mate with another female if another male is not within close proximity.

The current population at Manly is reasonably stable and if the conditions are good, the parents tend to have two clutches of chicks per breeding season, initially in August/September and another in November/December.

The female lays two eggs approximately the size of a large chicken egg. They are laid about 3 days apart, but they hatch together. **Both parents incubate the eggs for 36 days.** The chicks open their eyes at one day after hatching and the eyes are fully open at one week. Newly hatched chicks (pullus) are covered by a dark down, eventually replaced by a second chocolate brown coat. The chicks stay in the nest for **approximately 59 days.**

Both parents share responsibility for caring for the chicks. A few days after the chicks hatch both parents alternate in guarding the nest and going out to sea to feed. At two weeks, both parents start going out to fetch food for the chicks which by now are ravenously hungry.

When the chicks are of sufficient size the parents will start to groom them, removing the down and stimulating the oil gland at the base of the tail, which waterproofs the feathers and allows the dense blue feathers to develop. Eventually the parents will stop feeding the chicks (fledglings) at around 8 weeks (800 grams) and they will start venturing towards the water. The parents must remove all of the baby fluff feathers and spend time grooming the chicks, to ensure the waterproofed feathers come through. A few days before the chicks finally leave the nest, the parents will sing with them.

Moulting:

After the chicks have fledged and gone out to sea, the parents then moult, which is a process whereby they lose their feathers and must remain in the nest until new feathers are replaced and waterproofed. This takes around three weeks. During this time the birds are confined to their nests and are unable to go out to sea to feed until their new waterproofed feathers come through. They are vulnerable to attacks by predators such as dogs during this time, and if frightened may go out to sea, and could drown.

Feeding:

Penguins leave the nest about an hour before sunrise and return about an hour after sunset. Whilst penguins are mainly solitary feeders, they sometimes group and feed together. Their main diet is small shoaling fish, squid and cuttlefish. An adult can travel 20 km per day when foraging, and have been known to dive as deep as 60 m. During the breeding season they do not venture far for foraging.

Living with the Penguins:

Thoughtless activities have led to the destruction of nests or the paths the penguins use to get to and from their nests. This means the Little Penguins may fail to reproduce. Whilst currently stable at between 50 - 60 pairs, the Manly Little Penguin colony still needs our protection. Little Penguins do not know where the defined 'critical habitat' areas are (defined areas under the Threatened Species Act) and may choose to make nests outside those areas.

Dogs are the major land predator of penguins, and it is vital that dogs are kept on a leash in penguin breeding areas to ensure that penguins are not attacked by dogs.

What You Can Do:

- Keep dogs on a leash near Little Penguin breeding areas. Dogs must not go onto beaches in penguin breeding areas.
- Companion animals are prohibited in Little Penguin Critical Habitat Areas.
- Avoid using bright lights or flash cameras around Little Penguins.
- Dispose of all rubbish properly; plastic and fishing lines can harm Little Penguins
- Keep noise and other disturbances to a minimum on and off the water.
- Keep away from nesting areas.
- Do not anchor boats in Little Penguin Critical Habitat Areas.
- It is illegal to fish in the Little Penguin Critical Habitat Area between sunset and sunrise