

# Little Penguin FAQ

Question	Answer
<b>General</b>	
What is the scientific name for the little penguin?	<i>Eudyptula minor</i> , which means 'good little diver'.
Why is it called a little penguin?	Because it is the smallest of the 17 penguin species. It can also be known unofficially as a Fairy Penguin, Little Blue Penguin or Blue Penguin.
What is the little penguins' conservation status?	It is of 'Least Concern', although some individual colonies are threatened.
Where do little penguins live?	In colonies along the southern coastlines of Australia (from near Perth on the west coast, to Sydney on the east coast, and around Tasmania), entire coastline of New Zealand and the Chatham Islands.
Do any other types of penguins live in Australia?	Not on the mainland, but Macquarie Island is home to Gentoo, King, Royal and Southern Rockhopper penguin colonies.
What colour are little penguins?	The top of the head and back are blue and the front is white. This blue plumage is unique to the little penguin. This distribution of colouration is a counter-shading camouflage technique that makes them less visible from above and as well as below when swimming which makes them less visible to both their predators and prey.
How do you tell the difference between male and female little penguins?	By their beak shape. Adult females have a thinner beak than males. Males have a distinct hook on the end of their beak.
How long do little penguins live?	The average is generally 7 years in the wild, 10-15 years in the St Kilda colony and 20-25 years in captivity. The average is higher in the St Kilda colony owing the lower presence of natural predators and close proximity to a rich food source. The oldest recorded penguin at St Kilda was 22.
How tall are adult little penguins?	About 33cm, on average.
How much do adult little penguins weigh?	About 1 kg for a female and 1.2 kg for a male, on average.
Why is red light okay for illuminating the little penguins?	The little penguin's eyes are adapted to see better at the blue end of the visible light spectrum than the red, this is because the blue end of the visible light spectrum penetrates water to a much greater depth than the red.
What are little penguin's natural predators?	Long nosed fur seals but not Australian fur seals, sharks, sea eagles, large gulls, snakes and large reptiles; plus introduced predators (such as foxes, dogs, cats, rats).
What is the collective noun for a group of little penguins?	A 'raft' for a group in the water. A 'waddle' for a group on land. A 'colony' for an entire population living together in one place.
What do the various calls mean that the little penguins make?	Little penguins have a variety of different calls that are used for attracting mates, aggression, pair communication, alarm/danger, location, and other purposes.

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<b>Swimming and Feeding</b>	
What do little penguins eat?	Little penguins can eat about 25% of their body weight (approx. 250g) of small fish, squid and crustaceans daily. However, the type of prey may change to adapt to the availability of food in their habitat. The main food source for the St Kilda penguins is anchovies and pilchard.
What times of day do penguins leave the colony and return?	The little penguins leave before sunrise and return after sunset.
How far can little penguins swim in a day?	Little penguins swim an average of 15 to 50 kilometres a day.
How fast can little penguins swim?	On average they can swim 2-4km/hr but they have been recorded swimming at 6.4km/hr.
How deep can little penguins dive?	A little penguin dive averages approximately 24 seconds to depths between 5 and 20 metres. The maximum dive depth is approximately 60 metres.
What makes the little penguin such a good swimmer?	As with all penguins it has flippers instead of wings, which allow it to 'fly' under the water propelled by its webbed feet.
Do little penguins have to return to land every night?	Not necessarily, they can float and sleep on the surface of the water if they wish to remain out at sea overnight.
How do little penguins keep themselves waterproof?	Little penguins have a gland located at the base of the tail from which they spread an oil like substance over their feathers when preening to help keep them waterproof.
How do little penguins get freshwater?	Little penguins have a gland on their beak which they use to excrete sodium chloride.
How do little penguins keep warm?	The bases of their feathers are very downy which traps air providing effective insulation when the little penguin is at sea.
<b>The St Kilda Colony</b>	
How many little penguins are there in the St Kilda colony?	There are estimated to be about 1400.
How long is the breakwater?	About 650 metres, with roughly the first 20% accessible for viewing.
When did little penguins start nesting on the breakwater?	First official recording of this was in 1974, but little penguins were first sighted on the breakwater a few years after the breakwater was built in 1956.
What are the main threats to the St Kilda penguins?	Entanglements and nest pollution.
Why do little penguins choose to live on the breakwater?	The way in which the breakwater was constructed provided many nesting opportunities in between the rocks that form the structure. The breakwater is also large enough that it provides enough space for a colony to establish. It is also located close to a good source of food for the little penguins.

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Why don't the little penguins arrive all together after sunset like at Phillip Island?	At Phillip Island and other ocean-side colonies, little penguins return in a group as a survival tactic designed to confuse and overwhelm predators. The St Kilda penguins arrive into the harbour in groups of 5-10 which is smaller than Phillip Island because there are less penguins in general. They don't emerge onto the rocks in groups because they are much better swimmers/they are safer in the water and reduce their walking distance by coming up right near their nest.
<b>Breeding and Rearing</b>	
At what age are little penguins sexually mature?	Females at 2 years and males at 3 years.
Do little penguins mate for life?	Typically, but if breeding success is low, little penguins may look for a new mate.
When do little penguins breed?	Between June and February, in the St Kilda colony, which is longer than average compared to other colonies due to the close proximity of a good food source. At Phillip Island the breeding season usually only lasts 3 months.
How many eggs do little penguins lay?	Two, and they can have more than one clutch per breeding season. At St Kilda they can have up to 3 clutches per breeding season.
How big are the little penguin eggs?	They are about the same size as a chicken egg, but with a more pointed shape.
How long does it take to incubate little penguin eggs?	About 35 days, with both parents taking turns to incubate the eggs. The eggs can be left unincubated for 10 days and still survive. However, this will extend the incubation period.
Do both parents bring up the chicks?	Yes. During incubation parents alternate between incubating and fishing with "shifts" taking between 1-10 days at a time (~50% of shifts are only 1 day). For the first 2 weeks of the chick's life the parents only conduct 1 day shifts (guard stage). During the post-guard stage (the last weeks before the chick fledges), parents can leave the chicks unattended and conduct 1-6 day foraging trips.
How long before little penguin chicks can fend for themselves?	Between 7-11 weeks of age, when they have shed all their down and have a full set of adult feathers. At this point the parents stop feeding them (called fledging) compelling them to leave the nest and hunt for their own food.
Do little penguins teach their chicks how to swim and fish?	No, the chicks know how to do this instinctively.
<b>Moulting</b>	
What is moult?	Moult is the complete replacement of all feathers, called a 'catastrophic moult'. During this time little penguins are restricted to land because their feathers are not waterproof.
How often do little penguins moult?	Once per year.
When do little penguins moult?	At the end of the breeding season, usually December - April.

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How many feathers does a little penguin have?	About 10,000, three to four times the feather density of flighted birds in order to provide a waterproof and insulated coat.
How long does a little penguin moult last?	About 17 days.
How does a little penguin manage to feed itself when moulting?	It doesn't eat anything. It cannot fish as it is not waterproof when moulting, so it has to put on additional weight (up to 50%) beforehand in order to survive the moulting period. By the end of the moult they will have lost around half their body weight.