

Little penguins finally return to Doctors Rocks to rebuild the colony

Meg Powell

A raft of little penguin chicks have finally returned home.

About 5.30am on Wednesday a team of volunteers dressed in high-vis trudged down to a beach at Doctors Rocks, carefully navigating a rocky path in the dark.

In their hands were seven, large boxes. From each box came soft noises, the excited cheeps of birds who were at last ready to leave the nest.

Penguin Rehab and Release president Kathy Grieveson was close at hand, directing the volunteers to take a box each and start carrying them towards the water.

"We'll put the two lead penguins out first, and hopefully the rest will follow," she explained.

"They have more of a chance if they're all together."

The orphaned chicks were rescued about seven weeks ago. Ten were saved, but two have died since.

The rescue followed a dog attack which killed at least 42 little penguins from the Doctors Rocks colony.



Release: The volunteers brave icy waters at Doctors Rocks to let the seven birds swim to their freedom. Picture: Meg Powell

The penguins have since been in intensive care at Burnie's Rehab and Release, and it seems the hard work has paid off.

It took only moments for the birds to take to the sea once the boxes were lowered.

The volunteers stood and watched from the shore as the babies swam off into the distance, scanning the sky for eagles.

"I reckon I would have dived out there if I'd seen one go for one of the babies," Ms Grieveson said.

"That would've made a good story. That's why we do it before first light, they miss breakfast."

I reckon I would have dived out there if I'd seen (a wedge-tail eagle) go for one of the babies. That would've made a good story.

Kathy Grieveson

The volunteers had a moment to rest once the penguins were out of sight, taking the chance to swap cold, wet crocs for warm, fluffy socks.

"I'll have to stay here an hour more," Ms Grieveson said, pouring herself a cup of hot drink from a thermos.

"Some say you should stay for six hours. That'd be nice. Maybe if I didn't have other penguins to look after and it was summer."

Ms Grieveson now has three penguins left in her care, including one rescued from the dog attack.

"I've got a lot of cleaning up to do when I get back," she said.

"It doesn't stop here."

She said she was looking forward to a small sleep-in and getting the rehab centre in order.



