

## Little Penguins (or "Fairy Penguins") – *Eudyptula minor*

Little Penguins are small flightless birds which live along Tasmania's coastline. They are the smallest of all the penguins and the meaning of their scientific name is 'good little diver'. Little Penguins can dive to 70 metres and can dive to varying depths up to 700 times per day.

An average adult Little Penguin weighs a kilogram, is 33 cm tall and lives for seven years.

Around 110,000 to 190,000 breeding pairs live around Tasmania. Penguin populations have declined significantly on the mainland, making Tasmania important for their survival. Most Little Penguins are found on the 330 smaller Tasmanian islands, largely those without human populations.

### Life in the sea

Little Penguins take to the sea to catch food. Their main diet includes small fish, squid or krill. They eat their food whole.

During autumn-winter most of their time is spent at sea, while in the spring and summer months more regular trips to their burrows occur.

### Life on the land

Little Penguins nest in colonies located along the coastline. They usually return to nest sites as the skies darken each evening. Penguin nests may be amongst rocks, a scrape under coastal vegetation, or even under buildings.

### Breeding

Little Penguins breed annually with a clutch of two eggs the norm. June to October is the breeding season, with burrows prepared and courting underway. Penguins may choose a new partner each year. Eggs are laid from June to November and hatching takes around 33 days. Penguins share the time on the nest in 1-2 day shifts. The chicks are seen outside burrows from 5 weeks of age and at around 8 weeks are ready to head to sea.



*Penguins live in burrows.*  
Photo source: Raelee Turner



*Penguins in rehabilitation centre.*  
Photo source: Anna Wina

### Penguin song

Little Penguins make distinctive songs to attract mates, ward off intruders and communicate in their colonies.

### Threats

The number of Little Penguins living on Tasmania's main island is greatly affected by human impacts. Humans are by far the greatest threat to the penguin population. A wider list of threats includes:

- Food availability (which can be affected seasonally or annually)
- Gill nets
- Oil spills
- Plastics
- Uncontrolled dogs or cats
- Foxes
- Humans – direct (harassment) or indirect (road kills, vegetation burn-offs, housing development or coastal development)



*Penguin footprints in the sand*  
Photo source: Perviz Marker



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### What can I do to help Little Penguins?

- Join a Friends of Penguins group in Burnie or Lillico to protect their habitat, and become a volunteer guide
- Keep your dog on a leash.
- Desex cats and keep them indoors at night.
- View penguins at a designated viewing centre at Burnie or Lillico with the volunteer guides.
- Don't trample penguin homes - stick to the walking tracks.
- Don't remove coastal vegetation - penguins may be nesting there.



*Coastcare members constructing an artificial penguin burrow.*

*Photo source: Anna Wind*



*Planting native vegetation to increase penguin habitat.*

*Photo source: Anna Wind*

### Further information

Use a search engine to look up "Little Penguins" within each website:

Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment  
[www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au](http://www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au)  
 Penguin watching guidelines

Parks & Wildlife Service Tasmania  
[www.parks.tas.gov.au](http://www.parks.tas.gov.au)

Penguin Island  
[www.abc.net.au/tv/penguinisland/about/](http://www.abc.net.au/tv/penguinisland/about/)

Wikipedia  
[www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org)

