

# Be Penguin Aware

## Little Penguins - Big Future



### THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT LITTLE PENGUINS

#### What is a Little Penguin?

- The Little Penguin is a seabird. Little Penguins can't fly. They have heavy, solid bones and flippers, instead of hollow bones and wings like other birds.
- Their scientific name is *Eudyptula minor* and true to their nature, translates as 'good little diver'. They are also called Fairy Penguins. Their Aboriginal name is carangarang binyang.

#### What do they look like?

- Little Penguins are the smallest penguins in the world! They are only 30-40cm high, just slightly taller than this page!
- Most penguins' dark feathers are black, but Little Penguins' are a deep, rich blue. The simple pattern of dark feathers on top and white underneath camouflages them with the sea surface from above and sunlit surface from below, to protect them from natural predators such as sea eagles and sharks. This pattern is even on their feet!
- Little Penguins usually weigh about as much as a bag of sugar (1kg).
- It is not easy to tell male and female penguins apart. Unlike most birds, the male doesn't have 'plumage ornaments' such as fancy eyebrows or an impressive tail.

#### How many Little Penguins are there?

- If all Manly's Little Penguins were put on the Jetcat, one per seat, they would fill only the first 10 rows!
- There are 74 breeding pairs in Manly.
- There are 49 000 penguins in NSW and 1 million Little Penguins in the world!

#### Where are Little Penguins found?

- All penguins are found only in the Southern Hemisphere!
- Little Penguins live in places where the water temperature stays between 5-30°C. Unlike other birds, they can't easily pant to reduce heat. In colder water they lose too much heat too quickly because of their large surface area to volume ratio, so you won't find Little Penguins in Antarctica.



This project has been funded by Manly Council's Environmental Levy. This project has been funded by Coastcare—a cooperative Commonwealth/State/Local Government program supporting communities caring for our coast.

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### LITTLE PENGUIN LIFECYCLE

#### Burrow Construction and Nesting

- The male constructs the burrow.
- Both male and female collect plant material from the surroundings to line the nest.



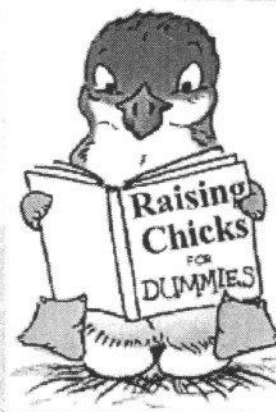
Artwork: Richard Ling

#### Breeding

- Most penguins return to their mate and burrow from the previous season.
- At 2-3 years of age, they return to breed in the colony they were born in.
- They go through courtship and even go on a 'honeymoon', after courtship and before they breed. When courting, unmated males 'advertise' to females. In a pair, one partner will copy the action of the other.
- Two eggs are laid in a 'clutch', although if plenty of food is available there are sometimes two clutches in a breeding season.

#### Incubation and Chick Rearing

- Both parents share the duties of incubation and chick rearing which take about 13 weeks.
- They keep the egg and new-born chicks warm using their brood patch, a warm patch on their belly!
- The chick uses a handy tool, its egg tooth, to chip its way out of the egg. This usually takes about 24 hours.
- Chicks know how to catch food and swim instinctively, they are not taught by their parents.
- Young penguins will try to 'beg' for food from other penguins but are not usually successful.
- Both parents feed their chicks, by regurgitating fish caught at sea. So if parents fail to return for a few days, the chick dies.
- It is thought that chicks don't know their parents. It is up to the parents to recognise the chick by its voice and the position near the burrow.
- Little Penguins grow at an amazing rate. Only 5-8 weeks after hatching they have grown a full coat adult feathers.



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## Moult

- Little Penguins moult after breeding to get rid of old feathers and to maintain a waterproof coat.
- Moulting takes about 3 weeks. Their coat is not waterproof during the moult so they can't fish for food and they can lose up to half their bodyweight
- They prepare for the moult by fattening up to twice their usual body weight.

## Mortality & Lifespan

- Less than a third of fledglings survive to maturity (about 3 years of age).
- Adults usually live to 6.5 years



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