

# Little Penguin

the smallest of all penguins



## What do they look like?

Standing about 30 to 35cm in height, the little penguin weighs approximately one kilogram when fully grown.

Its upper body and flippers are slate blue or blue-grey in colour, with the underside and throat being white. The little penguin's bill is black, its feet are pale pink, and its eyes are silvery-grey. The males of the species are slightly bigger than the females.

## What do they sound like?

The little penguin makes a variety of noises for different situations. It has a short, sharp bark when at sea; it uses throbbing growls and hoarse whoops when attracting a mate; and if disturbed it lets out a sharp, snorting yelp.

## What do they eat?

Little penguins feed on small fish, squid and krill (tiny shrimp-like crustaceans). They mainly feed in shallow waters within 15 to 20 kilometres of the coast. They hunt near the surface for fish. They can also quickly dive to the sea floor to feast on squid and krill.

Little penguins can eat about 25% of their body weight every day!



Above: Council's sustainability team with penguin nesting boxes for Snapper Island



## Where do they live?

The ocean is the little penguin's natural environment. Their wings have evolved into flippers with which they propel themselves - 'flying' underwater. The birds are excellent swimmers, and are able to survive at sea for long periods.

They generally spend the day at sea and return to their colonies after dark. On land they stand upright, walking or waddling awkwardly on their hind legs.

## The little penguin is the only penguin species that breeds on the Australian mainland.

Little penguins are found along the southern coasts of Australia, from near Perth in Western Australia to around Coffs Harbour in northern NSW. They also live in New Zealand.

Originally, little penguins were fairly common on the Australian mainland, but these days their colonies are generally restricted to offshore islands.

## Approximately 25,000 pairs nest on islands off the coast of NSW.

In the Eurobodalla we have birds on:

- Montague Island
- Snapper Island
- Tollgate Islands

Snapper Island and the Tollgate Islands have "No landing" policies. That means no person can land their boat or kayak on these islands.

## Breeding and lifecycle

Little penguins live an average of seven years, and are ready for their first breeding season at around three years of age.

Eggs are incubated for 35 days with both males and females taking turns incubating eggs. Until around 15 days after hatching, one parent will remain with the young chick while the other goes hunting for food. After this, the young are left alone while both parents go hunting.

When chicks are around 8 weeks of age, they leave their nests and head out to sea for the first time. Parents don't teach the chicks how to survive so they have to learn to swim and catch food instinctively by themselves.

## Protecting the little penguin

If you are near a little penguin colony, you can help protect these native seabirds:

- If you see little penguins when you are at the beach, keep your distance. Do not try to get close to them.
- Never allow your dog or cat to roam free in areas where the little penguin might be.
- Pick up any marine debris you see in your area to prevent the birds from entanglement or eating it.

