

Little Penguin

Kororā, (*Eudyptula minor*)



Auckland's penguins – are they on your coastline?

The little penguin is the world's smallest penguin standing only 25cm high and is native to New Zealand and southern Australia. Most of Auckland's penguins are found on predator-free offshore islands, but there are some populations remaining on the mainland. These populations are declining due to introduced predators, habitat loss and human disturbance.

Did you know?

- New Zealand is home to the most diverse range of penguins in the world, and has more fossil species than any other region.
- The average lifespan of a little penguin is 6.5 years but some can live up to 20 years.
- Little penguins feed on small fish (sardines and anchovies), crustaceans and squid.
- Little penguins back feathers are slate-blue, while those on their belly are silvery-white. This counter-shading helps camouflage them while they are in the water.



► **Contact the biodiversity team** at Auckland Council if you would like assistance with coastal restoration initiatives.

Find out more: phone 09 301 0101, email biodiversity@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz or visit www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz



Little penguin behaviour

- Little penguins generally feed close to shore, hunting for food within 20km of their colony. However, they can travel up to 75km per day.
- Before they come ashore at dusk or dawn, penguins often form into small groups just offshore called "rafts".
- Their calls range from a long trumpeting to a loud growl.

The little penguin calendar

Breeding (August-February):

- Pairs nest in isolated burrows.
- Females lay two eggs, 2-3 days apart. These are incubated for approximately 36 days before hatching.
- Both parents are involved in incubation and chick-rearing.
- Chicks are guarded by at least one parent until they are 2-3 weeks old.
- Fledglings leave the nest at 7-9 weeks of age, once they reach 90 per cent of adult body weight (approximately 1kg).

Moulting (January-April):

- When penguins moult they replace old feathers with new plumage. During this time penguins spend 15-18 days ashore with new feathers that are not yet waterproof and are unable to hunt food. This is a stressful time for penguins and they are very vulnerable to disturbance.

Non-breeding (May-August):

- Penguins forage further off shore during the winter months, spending longer periods at sea.

Where do they live (habitat)?

- In Auckland, most little penguin populations are found on offshore islands where they are protected from introduced predators and human disturbance.
- Most Auckland colonies are small, hosting between ten to a few hundred little penguins.
- Little penguins roost and nest in burrows. These may be natural or artificial structures (e.g. rocky crevices, beneath coastal vegetation, drainpipes or under buildings).

Main threats to little penguins

- Dogs, cats, stoats and rats can attack eggs and chicks in nests and kill adult birds.
- Human activities have caused habitat loss resulting in decreased penguin numbers. Coastal development, uncontrolled dogs, traffic and vandalism put our penguins at risk.
- Marine-related threats include: boat strike; entanglement in nets/plastics and competition from fisheries for species they eat.
- Exposure to pollutants and household plastics that find their way into the marine environment (e.g. oil spills).

What is Auckland Council doing to help little penguins?

- Auckland Council is working with external partners, community groups and schools to raise awareness about little penguins and help reduce the threats they face. The council regulates the impacts of development at coastal sites, including areas where penguins are found. Important locations include: Waiheke Island, Shakespear Regional Park, Tawharanui Regional Park and Auckland's West Coast Beaches.

What can you do to help little penguins?

Be a responsible beach user

Keep your dog leashed in areas where penguins and other seabirds are found. If you live close to the coast keep your cat inside at night.

Be a tidy kiwi

Use environmentally friendly household products and keep plastics away from the ocean where penguins can become entangled in or eat them.

Be aware of seabirds when fishing or boating

Slow down your boat when there are seabirds in the water and take care when fishing (Seabird Smart Fishing, visit www.southernseabirds.org).

Reporting injured penguins (or penguins under your house!)

Please do not disturb little penguins. A scruffy penguin is probably moulting, not sick. If you come across an injured penguin, or penguins nesting under your house, please contact the Department of Conservation's 24 hour emergency hotline 0800 DOC HOT.

Get involved

Many coastal community groups carry out coastal restoration providing pest control and safe nesting areas. To find out where you can help visit www.naturespace.org.nz

