

## PENGUIN VIEWING - DIAMOND ISLAND RESORT

We are fortunate that our property forms part of a Little (or Fairy) Penguin rookery, and the little creatures nest throughout our, and neighbouring properties. As a result, we are able to offer a complimentary penguin viewing to our guests each night.

The Little Penguins do not generally move around on land during when it is light. However, just after it gets dark there tends to be a bit of a "rush". That is when we start our viewing. It last for roughly half an hour or so, depending on when the penguins arrive.

Tonight's starting time is on the Hotel Information sheet provided to you on Checkin. Interested guests are asked to meet in the lounge area next to Reception in the main Resort building just before the assigned time. One of our staff will then escort you to our penguin viewing platform at the bottom of our property, just before the sand dunes/vegetation separating us from the beach. The platform is built just next to the path the penguins use to come from the beach and onto the adjoining properties where they have burrows.

You are welcome to take as many photographs as you like, but we ask that you refrain from using your flash, or other white light, which can harm the penguins' eyes. Yellow or red light is acceptable, and the staff member accompanying you will have appropriate lights to illuminate the penguins for photos. In accordance with Parks & Wildlife requirements, on no account should you seek to touch or feed the penguins.

We conduct our escorted penguin viewing roughly at nightfall because that is when we can be most confident of seeing penguins. However, they do continue to come up during the night. If you would like to continue viewing after the tour concludes, you are welcome to borrow one of our torches to do so (subject to availability). If you decide to do that, we ask that you return the torch to Reception the next morning (e.g. when you check out).

The number of penguins to be seen varies greatly at different times of the year. Sometimes only a couple might be seen, whereas during the "busy season" between about November to February up to 30 or more per night might be seen. Very rarely, we don't see any. The birds we see are wild, and in their natural habitat, so we are subject to the vicissitudes of nature.

## LITTLE PENGUIN FACTS & TRIVIA

- Penguins are seabirds that don't fly. They have a beak, feathers and lay eggs. Penguins have modified wings called flippers that they use for swimming in the ocean.
- There are 18 penguin species around the world in total. All penguins are found in the southern hemisphere (Australia, New Zealand, Antarctica, sub-Antarctic islands, South America and South Africa).
- Little penguins (*Eudyptula minor*) are the smallest of all penguin species.
- Little penguins are only found in southern Australia and New Zealand. In Australia little penguin colonies are scattered around the coastline from near Perth on the west coast, to Sydney on the east coast, and around Tasmania.
- Birds mature at about 3 years of age, and live for about 6 or 7 years. The oldest recorded little penguin was 25 years and 8 months of age.
- Fully grown, they average 33cm in height and 43cm in length and weigh around one kilogram, with males weighing slightly more than females.
- Little penguins do not mate for life. If breeding success is low, penguins may look for a new mate. An annual divorce rate for little penguins of between 18 and 50% has been recorded.
- Two white eggs are laid during autumn and winter, two or three days apart. The incubation time is 36 days. The male and female bird take turns in incubating the eggs, their shifts can be up to ten days long. Hatching is a very slow process taking up to three days. Hatching success is about 60%.
- Breeding success is largely determined by food availability and in poor seasons very few chicks may survive. In very good seasons up to three clutches of eggs may be laid consecutively, 1 clutch of two eggs is 'normal', with usually only 1 chick surviving to moult.
- Hatchlings are covered in black down, have eyes closed and are unable to raise their head. They are able to raise their head at one day old and their eyes are fully open at seven days old. The black down is replaced

by chocolate brown down at two weeks of age. The upper surface of their feet turn black at about three weeks old. The juvenile moults the brown down and becomes free living after about 57 days.

- Both parents feed their chicks by regurgitating fish and squid caught at sea. Chicks leave their parents and head out to sea for the first time at around 7 - 11 weeks of age. Their parents do not teach them to swim or fish, they know how to do this instinctively.
- The juveniles may leave the colony and not return for up to 12 months. In the first year after fledging it is not uncommon for Little Penguins to travel over 1,000 km.
- They used to be more commonly known as "Fairy Penguins", at least in Australia. Some say that the name was changed to "Little Penguins" for reasons of political correctness, although it is noted that the birds' scientific title (*Eudyptula minor*) is closer to "Little" than "Fairy", so that may just be an urban legend.
- Little penguins spend 80% of their lives at sea swimming and foraging for food and return to their nesting burrows to breed, raise chicks, moult and to take a break after days or weeks spent at sea.
- Depending on the season, a little penguin may spend between one day and one month at sea. When little penguins are breeding they will regularly return to incubate the eggs and feed their chicks. During winter little penguins spend more time at sea chasing fish and only return to rest and renovate their burrows.
- Little Penguins consume about their body weight every day. Major food items are small schooling fish (76%), squid (24%) and occasional krill (<1%).
- Penguins have many adaptations for a life at sea, including:
  - Modified wings called flippers to 'fly' through the water
  - A gland to spread an oil like substance over their feathers when preening to help keep them waterproof
  - A streamlined shape
  - Waterproof feathers (outer layer)
  - A layer of down next to their skin to trap air and keep them warm
  - A salt gland above their eyes to filter salt from seawater, providing penguins with freshwater.
- There are somewhere in the vicinity of 600 little penguins around Bicheno. The total estimated little penguin population throughout the world is about 1 million.
- Adult little penguins are the only penguins in the world with blue and white feathers instead of black and white feathers. They are 'countershaded', the dark blue back of penguins blends in with the water to camouflage against any predators flying or swimming overhead, and the light stomach blends in with the sky to camouflage against any predators swimming underneath.
- Predators include large seabirds like petrels, certain species of seals and, unfortunately, feral cats and dogs.
- Little penguins only move around on land after sunset when their land predators are sleeping.
- They nest in burrows, up to 1.6km inland. However, they are perhaps not the best, or at least not the most enthusiastic builders. They are happy to make use of any shelter they can find. They happily make use of a number of nesting boxes constructed around Diamond Island Resort, as well as the penguin viewing deck and the decks around the main Resort building.
- They have excellent vision both in and out of water. Little penguins depend, upon their vision, to locate and catch their prey. A third eyelid protects the eyes underwater and on land is used like a windscreen wiper to clear sand from the eyes. Penguins have excellent night vision.
- Their hearing is good, but better in water than on land. This is simply a physical property of water- it transmits sound better than air.
- The voice is complex and serves many purposes; the display call could be described as a 'raucous throaty wail' and is accompanied by vigorous body movements, it is best appreciated from a distance. Different calls are used for attracting mates, aggression, pair communication, alarm/danger, location, and other purposes. Short sharp 'quak' sounds are used when at sea.