

## Fairy penguin fact sheet



Penguins are birds. They use their feet and wings to swim. They cannot fly.

There are 17 different kinds of penguins. The fairy penguin is the smallest of all the penguins. It is also called the little penguin. Penguins only live in cool and cold seas. They do not live in warm tropical seas. All of the penguins live in the southern seas and oceans. There are no penguins in the northern seas. Fairy penguins live in the cold southern seas of Australia and New Zealand.

Feathers keep penguins warm in the cold sea. They have webbed feet to help them swim. They swim on the surface. They dive to catch fish. They use their beak to catch fish which they swallow whole. Penguins must come to the surface to breathe air.

Fairy penguins dig and nest in burrows or between rocks. They nest between July and November. They lay two white eggs. The mum and dad take turns to keep the eggs warm until they hatch. Both adults feed the chicks. Eight weeks after hatching the chicks have adult feathers and are ready to start swimming out to sea.

Sharks, seals and killer whales eat penguins. Penguins starve when the number of fish they like to eat have decreased.

There are many new threats to penguins. Adults and chicks are killed by foxes and cats. Cattle, sheep and people walking over penguin borrows can destroy the nests, eggs and chicks. People catching large numbers of fish could be affecting the number of fish for penguins. Climate change is making the sea warmer and some penguins might need to move south. Sometimes speed boats will hit and kill swimming penguins.

Penguins are an important attraction for overseas tourists.

**Additional teacher notes**

- Depending on the classification system penguins are divided into 17-19 separate species.
- Cool currents go as far north as the Galapagos Islands where penguins can survive.
- Penguins are the second most popular experience for overseas tourists when visiting Australia.
- There is a successful breeding population of penguins at St Kilda breakwater only a short distance from the centre of Melbourne.
- Penguin colonies of any species are noisy and smelly.
- Penguin chicks are fed when the adult empties the contents of its stomach into the chicks' mouth.
- Penguins display to form bonds with their mate.