

Penguins, there aren't many left in Manly

By Hamish Year 1

Australia's Little Penguins are being preyed upon by Manly's predators. Why is this happening? Read on to find out.



Taronga Zoo's Little Penguins are part of a larger picture to save their endangered species in Manly.

Photograph: Lorinda Taylor

The Manly Colony of Little Penguins is losing more and more of their numbers every year and whilst Little Penguins in general aren't endangered, this unique mainland population is. "There used to be approximately 500 birds and then over the last... few years there's been quite a few deaths and pollution... that have caused their numbers to get smaller," said Emily from Manly Sea Life Aquarium.

Introduced species are a major threat to Manly's Little Penguins, causing them terrible injuries. "Probably the top three are foxes, cats, [and] dogs," said Emily from Manly SeaLife Aquarium. They bite, scratch and even kill the penguins. However, it's not just that they can kill them, these predators can also scare them from their mainland habitat and "push them off to island communities," Taronga Zoo Keeper, Ben said.

In particular, foxes are very good hunters, especially on the Little Penguins. In one bite they can take a whole chunk out of them. “We had a big problem with foxes so we had our volunteers looking after the penguins at Collins Beach,” Eira said. In November this year, there was a horrendous attack on the Little Penguins at the Melbourne Zoo. A lone fox broke in to their enclosure overnight killing ½ their Little Penguin population. The zoo keepers found 14 bodies the next day on the 4th of November, 2015. There was a big problem with foxes at the volunteer penguin warden.

Common pets such as cats and dogs also pose a threat to Little Penguins. On one occasion an off-leash dog has scared the penguins while they were mating and sadly the penguins drowned. This occurred because mating penguins turn their waterproof feathers into down feathers so they can keep their babies warm. Unfortunately, when they have these down feathers they are unable to swim making them easy prey for other creatures but if they are lucky the penguins can make it.

Cats are just as bad as foxes and dogs when it comes to Little Penguins. Cats use their whiskers to smell, giving them a better chance of finding and killing the Little Penguins. In past years, there was a cat who stole 10 little penguins while they were quietly sleeping.



These cute and cuddly Little Penguins are being watched over by the Volunteer Penguin Wardens. Photograph: Lorinda Taylor

With the Little Penguin population growing smaller from numerous injuries and death along the Manly beaches, the Volunteer Penguin Warden Program was started in 2005. “There were some concerns regarding unleashed dogs on the beach and the public getting too close to the little penguins,” said Eira, a Volunteer Penguin Warden. 10 years later, there are 20 to 25 volunteer penguin wardens patrolling Manly beaches looking out for the predators of Little Penguins and warning people to stay a safe distance from the penguins. One of the goals of the Volunteer Penguin Warden program is to educate and inform the public enjoy Manly without disturbing the penguins. Sometimes people don’t follow the rules put in place to protect the Little Penguins. “If we worry about the public going too close to the penguins or doing the wrong thing or people don’t leash their dogs then we can call the local Police or the Manly Rangers,” said Eira.

Every sunset the Volunteer Penguin Wardens close off the gates along the Manly foreshore. “We put up signs saying you can’t go past those gates and we ask people very nicely if they would please move off the boardwalk, beach and the majority of the people are really good,” said Eira. This is the time when the Little Penguins come back from their long day of fishing. Their job then is to look out for the Little Penguins and record when they come in and see if they go straight to their burrows or decide to walk along the beach.

People visiting Manly can help protect these amazing creatures by keeping their dogs on a leash and staying away from Manly's wharf. "If you see a Little Penguin watch it from a safe distance and don't disturb them," said Ben. People are encouraged to avoid feeding the Little Penguins food because they will start eating it and forget how to hunt. "We don't want them to start looking at people for food," said Taronga Zoo Keeper Ben.