

## LITTLE PENGUIN

BY RICHARD P. GROSSENHEIDER

THE Little Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*), also known as the Blue, Fairy, or Little Blue Penguin, is 14 to 18 inches long, the smallest of its singular group. During a furlough in Australia in November, 1943, I regretted greatly that I could spend only two days and nights with these birds in the rookeries on Phillip Island, Bass Strait, Victoria. Fortunately the breeding season was in full swing. Nesting sites varied, with few more than 180 yards from shore, and all above reach of high water. Some nests were scooped out under tussocks of vegetation, some in holes under or between rocks, others in sandy areas, and one was located in Stygian darkness beneath a guest house on high ground. *Mesembrianthemum* (pictured) formed extensive mats in rocky nesting areas and was quite slippery underfoot. A few penguins nested in burrows in the sand in an area where Short-tailed Shearwaters (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) also had nest holes.

During the nesting season, from September to March, the Little Penguin occurs along the coasts from southwestern Australia to southern Queensland, and in Tasmania and New Zealand. The remainder of the year is spent in adjacent marine waters. My observations on nesting add little to the extensive information compiled by L. E. Richdale (1940. *Emu*, 40:180-217), A. J. Campbell (1901. "Nests and eggs of Australian birds," part 2: 1010-1013, privately published), and others. Available dry vegetation is used for nest lining. Two roundish eggs, measuring about 2.2×1.6 inches, are laid. The shells are slightly coarse, with some gloss, and are white with a faint touch of green when freshly laid (Campbell, *op. cit.*). The incubation period is about 39 days. Young begin coming outside the burrow at four weeks of age. The chicks pictured were probably about 28 days old, as the egg tooth is lost at that age (Richdale, *op. cit.*).

Domestic duties, from nest-building to rearing the young, are shared by both parents. When one parent is in attendance at the nest, the other is usually at sea. That is, until after the young are four weeks old, when both parents are simultaneously in the water or with the young. The birds are nocturnal on land.

During my stay, adults returned after dark from marine excursions, in groups of about 30 to 60. A compact gathering or two would be seen by flashlight to bob to the surface 100 yards out. Again submerging, they would reappear in the shallows and walk up on the landing beach beyond reach of the surf. There they shook off water and preened for about 10 minutes. Then one or more started up a main trail toward the nesting sites and the rest followed closely. The characteristic posture is not as upright as in other penguins.



**LITTLE PENGUIN**  
*(Eudyptula minor)*

Adult and young at nest cavity on Phillip Island, Victoria, Australia.  
Sketched from life in watercolor by Richard P. Grossenheider,  
November, 1943.

Above one well-used landing spot was a rising sandy beach with large, scattered tussocks of grass. The main route up this slope was a well-worn penguin path five to seven feet wide, and eight to ten inches deep. What a strange experience it was to sit very still with my feet out in this aisle, and have these startlingly man-like creatures scrambling over my ankles and legs! The penguins paid little attention to the new obstacles.

The penguins turned off along smaller pathways which led to their respective nesting areas. They soon relieved their mates and fed offspring by regurgitation. From then till daylight their "conversation" could be heard—a weird mingling of resonant groans, inspiration and expiration noises, sharp barking sounds, and pleasant piping notes.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN MUSEUM OF ZOOLOGY, ANN ARBOR, APRIL 10, 1952