

LITTLE PENGUIN BREEDING ON SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MAINLAND

I. A. MAY

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In Australia the Little Penguin *Eudyptula minor* nests mainly on offshore islands (including Kangaroo Island and Tasmania). Mrs. Pauline Reilly (*Emu* 74:198-200), an authority on the species, knew of only two districts in which it bred on the mainland — the Twilight Cove-Toolina Cove area of the Great Australian Bight (W.A.), and the Port Campbell district of western Victoria. In both these areas the colonies are at the foot of high sea-cliffs.

It is therefore of interest to record a third breeding district on the mainland, this time in South Australia. This is the coastline from Robe to Beachport, S.A., which consists of rugged sandstone cliff formations separated by expanses of beach and smaller sandy inlets. There are several offshore rocks and islands between these two locations where Little Penguins are known to breed in various sized colonies; however, it appears that there are no records of this species breeding on mainland sites in the area, or in fact from any of the South Australian mainland, before this account.

During January 1977, the author, with Ron Giddings and Colin Potter of Millicent, S.A., was exploring the coastline that borders Beachport Conservation Park, about 6 km north-west of Cape Martin. At this particular location the sandstone cliffs are deeply eroded at the base, from the pounding of the prevailing south-westerly storms and the huge seas that are brought with them. This erosion has formed deep crevices and caves, many of which are inaccessible, except when the tide is very low and the sea is calm enough to allow a person to wade through the entrance. We were fortunate to be experiencing one of those days, and we had just entered through a narrow opening into a cave chamber approximately 10 m by 6 m. The roof was about 4 m above the normal high tide mark. Because the entrance to this cave was restricted, the chamber we were now standing in was in semi-darkness, and it was not until our eyes became accustomed to the dim light, that we could see many holes and crevices around the walls of the cave at various heights from the tide mark. From one of these we could hear movement, but because of the

poor light we could not see what was in the hole. We decided to strike matches near the opening, and when doing so could observe the outline of an adult-sized Little Penguin about one metre inside the chamber. As well as this we could see the outline of a smaller bird, but because of the poor light reflected, we were unable to decide definitely what it was.

We decided to return the following day with a torch, and the weather allowed us easy access to the cave. We immediately investigated the hole, and could see one adult Little Penguin and one grey, downy half-grown chick. Inspection of the remaining holes and crevices revealed one more adult penguin, with a chick, slightly more advanced than the first. Both sites were roughly lined with seaweed, and had obviously been used as nest sites.

Although this is the only location where we saw definite signs of nesting, we were unable to explore much of this coastline, and because of the many similar situations that exist in the area, it could be possible that breeding along this part of the mainland is relatively common and normal, evading detection mainly because of the inaccessibility of the sites chosen.

Canunda National Park, Southend, S.A. 5280.

(Editorial addition — Opportunity is here taken to publish details of mainland breeding that were recorded by John Cox, and sent by personal communication to the editor on June 6, 1978.)

Cape Northumberland, South-East of S.A. A small semi-circular cove enclosed by 20 m high cliffs which are eroded and undercut, and so inaccessible to predators. Bottom of cove rocky, with a general 30° slope from water to base of cliffs. Penguin colony in deep caves undercut in base of cliffs. Estimated 30 pairs.

Colony first discovered on October 17, 1976, when penguins were watched in torchlight. Downy young were seen with adults, and two eggs were seen deep in crevices. Subsequent visits on October 27, 1976, also included sightings of eggs and young; one adult was seen incubating in daytime, young seen at night. Adults were also seen on November 14, 1977 (as no inspection was made at night, no young were seen), and January 21, 1978. The adults were undoubtedly nesting on these last two visits, though no search for breeding evidence was made.