

TASMANIAN RARE PENGUINS: REQUEST FOR PHOTOGRAPHS AND FIELD NOTES, 1945 TO 2008

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This is an urgent appeal to field naturalists and their friends, professional wildlife workers, eco-tourist guides, bird watchers, council and departmental staff, fishermen, yachties and beach-goers everywhere to help to contribute to a *Catalogue of Rare Penguins in Australia*, a review which has been in progress for some years and is now reaching a point where some respectable statistical analyses can be commenced.

'Rare penguins' (often termed vagrants) are defined here as all species naturally recorded in Australia except the locally breeding Little (Blue or Fairy) Penguin *Eudyptula minor novaehollandiae*. Penguins imported for museum or zoo use are not included.

For continental southern Australia, and from all available sources, I have compiled a list of approximately 400 records of rare penguins over more than 100 years. Unfortunately, *more than half* of these are inadequately documented and/or unreliably identified.

As a life-long penguin scavenger, I like our southern seas to work for me. Tasmania is more closely girt by sea than the rest of Australia and consequently you have the most rare penguin records: about 180. The south-west of Western Australia is only 'girtish', but comes second.

My *Catalogue* lists and, where possible, details a virtual case history of every rare penguin recorded, however inadequately documented. Penguins with a full array of evidence are entered as 'confirmed'. Without sufficient supporting evidence, penguins must be entered as 'unconfirmed'. Many of the latter are mentioned in abbreviated published bird lists, but, as unconfirmed records, they are of much less value for use in future analyses arising from the *Catalogue*.

Therefore I appeal to anyone who has already reported one or more beachwashed or living rare penguins, or who has been responsible for any aspect of care, rehabilitation, transport or release of rare penguins in Tasmania, or has handed bodies to wildlife authorities or museums, to please flipper through your full records, fish out your photos, notes and any press reports, and write to advise me. Did any of your friends take photos ('happy snaps') of an unusual penguin encountered?

I particularly appeal to professional staff and researchers from government institutions, who are often detailed to collect reported rare penguins, and, if they have been taken into care, may also have supervised them until release.

I am also appealing to coordinators of bird reports and listings, past and present. Your published reports may have been backed by further observations or data, and it is these more detailed accounts that I seek. Is such material in your possession and/or where is it stored now? Your help will be invaluable. My request for cold case penguin information is comparable to missing person appeals by police.

The most recent significant listing of Tasmanian rare penguins is that by Eric J. Woehler (1992), with 146 observations. Some others have been reported since. For further general information please see my paper (Simpson 2008, see this volume of *The Tasmanian Naturalist*).

Although Little Penguin records *are not required for the Catalogue*, any discovered dead with flipper bands or fitted with radio loggers on their backs, should certainly be safeguarded and reported or taken urgently to local rangers or research workers so that maximum data can be recovered. Likewise, please report or collect, for research purposes, any other unusual seabirds you may find.

I thank you very, very much indeed for your assistance. Please photocopy this request and pass it around to people who go to beaches.

COLLECTION AND REPORTING: A FEW SPECIFICS

Finding: Fundamental need is **date** (day, month, year) of your first encountering the penguin, its precise **locality**, and your **full contact details**.

Circumstances: Was it alive or dead? Was it apparently fit or obviously injured/sick? Was it moulting?

Documentation: Do you have any photos or field notes? Did you report it to anyone? Who might that have been? Do you know if your penguin was in a local newspaper? Please carefully label (not using biro) all photographs with date, place and your name.

If you are a professional, may I please have full copies of all documentation, including any press reports, veterinary instructions, advice and treatment, your own notes or diary concerning each penguin, photos taken at the time, or anything else of relevance? Do you perhaps recall the weather conditions before and during that time?

Care and Rehabilitation: If you are or have been a wildlife carer, who collected and/or delivered a newly found rare penguin to you? Date you first received it? Was there any sign of moult at that time? Did it moult whilst in your care? Beginning when? Concluding when? Do you have photos of it when first received

and then sequentially through treatment until release or death? If the penguins were released, can you please give me details of time, date, locality, success or otherwise if known. For the future, if you do care for any rare penguins, would you consider taking a few photos for me?

Preservation: If it died on a beach or in care, when, and how? Was it (were any) preserved by a museum, or by anyone else? Is it (are they) in your freezer or possibly a departmental one? I am asking because I do not want to see any of them wasted if they should die. Obviously, they are still relatively rare in Australia, and some species are not very well known. Australia's museums, collectively, just do not have enough specimens.

CORRESPONDENCE

Please send a letter with the basic information and possibly copies of your photos and notes to me at this address PO Box 420, Yarra Junction, Victoria 3797, Australia, and I will respond. Alternatively, email me at: spinebill4@bigpond.com with jpegs of your photos if available.

REFERENCES

- Simpson, K.N.G. (2008). The 'Mystery Penguin': an additional Snares Penguin *Eudyptes pachyrhynchus robustus* for Tasmania. *The Tasmanian Naturalist* 130: 42-51.
- Woehler, E.J. (1992). Records of vagrant penguins from Tasmania. *Marine Ornithology* 20: 61-73.