



Little Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*)

This overview provides information about the little penguin, a species identified as a priority for H5 bird flu preparedness and response in Western Australia.

About the species

Little penguins are the world's smallest penguin species and are found across southern Australia and New Zealand, including the Chatham Islands. In Western Australia, little penguin colonies occur on islands near Perth and along the south coast, from Augusta to the Recherche Archipelago and the Baxter Cliffs on the Great Australian Bight.

Little penguins spend most of their lives at sea, foraging for fish, squid and small crustaceans, and return to land to breed, moult and shelter.

They nest in burrows, rock crevices and other sheltered locations, most commonly on islands, and often return to the same breeding colonies each year.

During their annual moult, little penguins remain ashore for several weeks while replacing their feathers and are unable to swim or feed, relying on energy reserves accumulated at sea.

Conservation status and H5 bird flu risk

EPBC Act status (Cth)	Not listed
BC Act status (WA)	Not listed
IUCN Red list status	Least Concern
WA H5 Bird flu risk rating	High

EPBC Act = *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth); BC Act = *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (WA).

Why is this species a priority?

Little penguins are highly charismatic and are an iconic part of Western Australia's coastal environment. They are highly valued by the community and hold significant public interest. Although they are not listed as threatened and are considered Least Concern globally, some Western Australian colonies have experienced severe declines. Little penguins have also been identified as having a high risk of impacts from H5 bird flu.

Why might little penguins be vulnerable to H5 bird flu?

Little penguins may be vulnerable to H5 bird flu because they breed in colonies and congregate during moulting periods, resulting in close and prolonged contact with one another.

They also share parts of their coastal habitats and offshore islands with seabirds and marine mammals, including seals and sea lions, that have demonstrated susceptibility to H5 bird flu internationally.

Overseas experience has shown that H5 bird flu outbreaks can have significant impacts on colonial seabird species. For some populations, impacts from H5 bird flu may occur alongside other pressures already affecting population health and breeding success.



AVOID



RECORD



REPORT 1800 675 888

Current conservation and management actions

Little penguin colonies in Western Australia are supported through a range of conservation and management activities. These include:

- research and monitoring of nesting habitat, breeding success and population trends, including the use of artificial nest boxes as a monitoring tool
- management of human disturbance at breeding and moulting sites.
- protection and management of important breeding areas, including many areas located within parks and reserves.

At Penguin Island, management actions also include:

- seasonal and hot weather island closures
- boardwalks to reduce disturbance of nesting habitat
- vessel speed limits to reduce boat strike risk
- monitoring to maintain the island's rat-free status.
- measures to reduce heat stress in little penguins, including habitat improvement through weed control, cooler nest boxes and the provision of water bowls.

What response actions may be implemented?

If H5 bird flu is detected in areas inhabited by little penguins, response actions may be implemented based on a risk assessment of the situation.

Actions may include:

- temporary restrictions on public access or activities involving wildlife to minimise biosecurity risks, reduce disturbance to wildlife and support response activities
- removal and disposal of wildlife carcasses where required
- additional biosecurity measures, including cleaning and disinfection of footwear and equipment
- increased surveillance and monitoring of birds and other wildlife
- investigation of reports of sick or dead wildlife, including collecting samples where required
- supporting the welfare and protection of affected wildlife
- providing information and updates to increase awareness.

What additional actions may help little penguins?

A range of actions may help reduce disease impacts and improve the resilience of little penguin populations. Supporting healthy populations, reducing disturbance and addressing key threats may support little penguins to better withstand and recover from H5 bird flu outbreaks.

Actions may include:

- protecting and restoring natural nesting habitat
- minimising disturbance at breeding and moulting sites
- maintaining strong biosecurity practices
- monitoring populations and disease occurrence
- increasing shade and shelter around nesting areas to reduce heat stress
- maintaining the rat-free status of Penguin Island and reducing the impacts of invasive rodents where present
- considering vaccination opportunities for little penguin populations, including managed colonies such as on Penguin Island, where feasible and supported by relevant approvals
- investigating options to establish or support insurance populations and other conservation measures that may help safeguard little penguin populations from significant disease impacts.

How you can help

AVOID. RECORD. REPORT.

If you see sick or dead wildlife:

- Avoid contact with wildlife and do not touch sick or dead animals.
- Record what you see, including the location and take photographs where safe to do so.
- Report unusual wildlife illness or deaths to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888.

You can also help little penguins by following signs and management advice at nesting and breeding sites, observing wildlife from a distance, reducing disturbance during breeding and moulting periods, keeping dogs away from wildlife, and cleaning footwear and equipment when moving between wildlife areas.

Important: This document describes how authorities may prepare for and respond to H5 bird flu in Western Australia. Response measures will depend on the circumstances and may change over time. Additional measures may be implemented where required to protect wildlife, livestock, people and the environment.

