

2008 KINGSCOTE PENGUIN CENSUS—STEADY AS SHE GOES

The annual census of the little penguin colony at Kingscote was conducted on 26 October 2008 and the good news is that penguin numbers seem to be relatively stable at this early stage in the monitoring program.

This is the third year of the census, which is jointly coordinated by the KI NRM Board's Coast and Marine Team (Martine Kinloch, Daniel Brock and Kym Lashmar) and the Kingscote Penguin Centre (Jenny Clapson and John Ayliffe) in what is proving to be a fantastic long-term collaboration with the local community.

Little penguin colonies around our state are susceptible to a number of threats such as coastal development, feral and domestic animals, and increasing predation from resurgent New Zealand fur seal populations. Some little penguin colonies, such as the ones on Granite and West Island, have been declining over the last few years.

The aim of the census is to monitor the Kingscote little penguin colony so that we can:

- build a consistent, standardised, community-based sampling program to monitor annual trends in the size of the breeding population of the Kingscote little penguin colony
- develop a better understanding of long term trends in the numbers and distribution of little penguins.

This information will help inform appropriate management actions to protect the Kingscote colony and potentially others around the Island, if things look like they may be going pear-shaped.

Now, if we could just go out and count all the penguins, life would be much simpler. But it is not that easy. Some penguins are out foraging during the day; others will be too deep in their burrows to see. While we may not be able to count all the penguins on a particular day we can generally tell whether a burrow is being used by a pair of penguins or not and therefore

we can use the number of "active burrows" to get the best estimate of the size of the colony.

In addition, while counts of birds may underestimate population sizes, the information collected about the numbers of adults, chicks and eggs is still helpful to determine trends in the health of the colony over time and the timing of the breeding cycle.

It would be impossible to undertake these counts without community volunteers. The Kingscote colony stretches for over 5 kilometres and includes some dense areas of scrub, all of which needs to be searched for burrows.

Each year has seen an increase in volunteers from an initial 40 people in 2006 to 60 in 2008, which is a great effort for such small community (equivalent to 30,000 people in Adelaide!) and it also means that the census takes much less time.

When we can, we also try to arrange a guest speaker to give
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a talk during the pre-census volunteer training session and this year we were lucky enough to have Annelise Wiebkin give a presentation on the diving and foraging behaviour of little penguins.

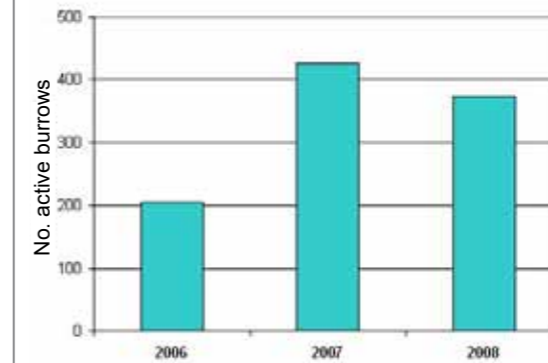
Little penguins regularly perform between 300–500 dives a day to depths around 10–20 m. Occasionally they dive up to 70 m!

Annelise, in conjunction with DEH and the Kingscote Penguin Centre, has microchipped about a 100 chicks in the Kingscote colony which should provide information on movement and survival rates in the future.

Anyway, back to the census results. To date there doesn't appear to be any evidence of a decline in active burrows, adult penguins or chicks (Figure 1, Table 1). For the last two years there have been about 400 active burrows counted. This is good news, but it is early days yet in the monitoring program and these first three years of data can be thought of as providing a baseline estimate of

the size and distribution of the Kingscote colony.

Figure 1. Annual counts for the number of active burrows in the Kingscote colony since 2006



If we assume that each active burrow represents a pair of penguins, then there are currently about 750–850 penguins in the Kingscote colony (excluding 2006 data).

Table 1. Changes in the number of adults and chicks counted since 2006

	2006	2007	2008
Adults	82	76	90
Chicks	34	112	81

The KI Coast and Marine Program and the Kingscote Penguin Centre would like to thank all the volunteers who have helped collect data for the penguin censuses over the years.

The data collected has proved to be of the highest quality and clearly demonstrates that community "feel good" monitoring programs and rigorous science are NOT necessarily mutually independent activities!

We plan to continue to monitor the Kingscote little penguin colony for the foreseeable future so we hope to see some of you in October at this year's census.

For further information please contact the Coast and Marine Team on 8553 4300 or check out the Board's website at www.kinrm.com.au.

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Images below 1. The group of volunteers ready to take part in the 2008 Kingscote Penguin Census. (Image: The Islander)



Images below: 2. An adult penguin keeps its new chicks warm. 3. 8 week old chicks losing their down. (KI NRM Board)

