



ROCKHOPPER

Eudyptes crestatus

Background Information

Rockhoppers are often considered the favorites of many people. *E. chrysocome moseleyi* is the variety everyone likes to think about when they think of Rockhoppers - the crested penguin with very elaborate crests. However, most Rockhoppers are more simple than that. Generally, Rockhoppers are about 3 kilograms (approximately 6 pounds) and are about 55 cm tall. They can be differentiated from other crested penguins by either their distinct lack of colored crests or their very elaborate crests. They are known to have bright orange-red bills and red eyes. And, of course, they can be seen locomoting in a very stereotypical manner: hopping.

Rockhoppers roam the Periantarctic, cold and warm Subantarctic waters and breed throughout Heard and Macdonald islands, Iles Kerguelen, Crozet, the Antipodes, Campbell Island and Macquarie. They are estimated to achieve a density of 850,000 breeding pairs. When they do breed, it is typically from October to April. Although two eggs are typically laid, only one is incubated. Rockhoppers are considered vulnerable to ecological and commercial trends. They are not considered migratory.

The primary predators of the Rockhopper are blue sharks, leopard seals and fur seals, while the eggs and chicks are preyed upon by skuas, petrels and Dominican gulls.

Rockhoppers subsist on crustaceans and small fish.

Author Bernard Stonehouse

Rockhopper penguins *Eudyptes crestatus* are widely distributed on warm temperate and cold temperate islands of the Subantarctic zone, including islands close to Tierra del Fuego, the Tristan da Cunha group, the Falkland Islands, Marion Island and Iles Crozet, St. Paul and New Amsterdam, and most of the cold temperate islands (including Macquarie Island) south of New Zealand. They breed also on Iles Kerguelen and Heard Island south of the Convergence. Rockhoppers of the northernmost breeding islands (the Tristan group, New Amsterdam and St. Paul) and islands off the New Zealand sector have longer crests than other stocks and may form a distinct subspecies *moseleyi*; my own measurements of museum skins do not support this conclusion, but further information from a wider range of specimens is required. Rockhoppers are small penguins with long drooping crests and bright red eyes. They nest on tumbling scree slopes, usually in very large colonies. In their northernmost breeding grounds they tend to seek shade by nesting under tussock grass or in rock fissures. A comprehensive account of their breeding is given by Warham (1963).



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