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## URBAN PENGUINS

### Stories for Lost Places

Once penguins have bred at a site it is unusual for them to shift far from there in subsequent years regardless of how much they are disturbed. . . . Little penguins are extremely robust both mentally and physically, and when confronted with human activities, even if adverse, they are unyielding.

CHRIS CHALLIES

*There is something remarkable about a shoreline, a place where water meets land and gives rise to a sense of productive confusion between two worlds. For most humans, one of these worlds—the place of earth, of firm land beneath our feet—is home. The other is a place for occasional visits, where we cannot really expect to live our lives, to survive for long periods of time. For penguins, this littoral zone must surely also mark a transition between two worlds, each with its own threats and possibilities. But while penguins are undoubtedly more comfortable, more agile, less vulnerable in the water, they remain utterly tied to the land as well, required to live their lives between these two worlds. Since their distant ancestors abandoned the skies for a life beneath the waves, penguins have maintained a connection to the land, drawn out of the sea each year by their own avian biology and the desire to breed and reproduce.*

As biologists Lloyd Davis and Martin Renner (2003) have noted, perhaps if penguins had been marine mammals they would have evolved internal gestation: “the key to the totally aquatic existence of cetaceans and dugongs” (88). But as birds, as egg layers, they need the land to reproduce. Perhaps if they had been marine reptiles like sea turtles, they

A Little Penguin coming ashore at night. (Richard Fisher; CC BY 2.0)

would have been able to come up onto the beach in a single night, deposit their eggs, and then disappear back into the ocean. But as birds, penguins are homotherms, and so “their eggs must be kept warm for development to take place” (Davis and Renner 2003:88). Finally, unlike many other seabirds—for example, the albatrosses discussed in chapter 1—penguins cannot fly great distances between their breeding and feeding places. Thus in addition to all the other requirements of a breeding site, penguins need a place where there is close access to a steady supply of food (Davis and Renner 2003:88). And so it is as a result of the unique biology of this bird that lives much of its life under the water, that penguins have developed their own particular relationships with the land—or, more accurately, with the very few specific places that they come ashore each year to reproduce. For, as we will see, these are *specific* places, not at all interchangeable, but deeply storied, carrying the past experiences of individuals and the generations before them.

The subject of this chapter is one such penguin place: a thin band of rocky foreshore at Manly, just inside the mouth of Sydney Harbour, Australia. Here, among the sandstone crevices, under waterfront homes and boats, and in a range of other strange locations nests a tiny colony of Little Penguins (*Eudyptula minor*). Each year, these penguins return to this place to breed and molt. Members of the world’s smallest penguin species, they stand roughly 1 foot (30 cm) tall and weigh around 2 pounds (1 kg). While others of their kind continue to form large colonies on islands off the coast of Australia, the same is not true for the mainland. Only fifty years ago, Little Penguins could be found nesting at several sites in the harbor, as well as at various locations farther south along the east coast of Australia. In recent years, however, all these colonies have been lost. The tiny Manly colony, composed of around sixty breeding pairs, is now thought to be one of the last three on the Australian mainland and the last in the state of New South Wales.

As a result, in 1997 the colony was listed as an “endangered population” under the state’s Threatened Species Conservation Act (1995). Despite its protected status, however, this colony continues to suffer from a range of threats. Perhaps most significantly, the shoreline that they rely on for nesting is being transformed and lost to them. While some of the penguins nest on land that is part of Sydney Harbour National Park (North Head), many of them are to be found on a thin strip of the shore lined by water-

front homes that often have made penguins' presence either impossible or much more difficult (for example, through increased noise, light, and disturbance, including predation by pets).

This loss of nesting places was made all too apparent toward the end of the 1980s when the owner of a little house on Manly Point built a seawall along the edge of his property. He claimed that despite his efforts to encourage them, penguins had not been present on his land for several years. Almost immediately, however, the wall attracted the attention of local activists who claimed that penguins had been deliberately discouraged from the site: the wall had blocked their access to their nesting places, and after the persistent little birds had found a way through the wall—by way of a drainage pipe—even this path had been blocked. But penguins do not give up easily when obstacles are placed between them and their burrows. Even if the place has not been used in any one year, Little Penguins know where they bred last, and in most cases they will attempt to return: in the language of biology, Little Penguins possess a strong “site fidelity.” After this particular seawall was built at Manly Point, locals reported penguins coming ashore farther along the coast, making their way across a small beach, up a flight of stairs—which is no small feat for a Little Penguin—along the street, down another flight of stairs, and under the house that they had been so unceremoniously evicted from (NPWS 2000:12). But the land is not a safe place for penguins, and throughout the breeding season several are thought to have been hit by cars or taken by dogs (NPWS 2000:24).

While this seawall attracted a great deal of opposition, it was not the first such structure in the area, and it will not be the last. As I stood on the foreshore of Manly Point in early 2010, this little seawall seemed to me to be remarkably unremarkable. Far from being one of a kind, the wall actually filled what would have been a tiny gap in an uninterrupted patchwork of seawalls that continued on steadily in both directions.<sup>1</sup> Almost all the houses along this stretch of the harbor have similar walls, separating private land from the water in a way that undoes any of the ambiguity of—and, with it, penguins' easy access to—the shoreline. But seawalls have been being built here for almost as long as houses have.<sup>2</sup> Since at least the early twentieth century, those homeowners who could afford to have built seawalls: to claim land from the harbor for a backyard or, more commonly, to moor a boat or build a swimming pool. While sandy spots have been

prized as beaches, the far more common rocky shoreline—once used for penguin breeding—has very frequently been covered over by a wall. Neither is Manly exceptional in this regard; an estimated 50 percent of the shoreline of Sydney Harbour, hundreds of miles in length, is now composed of seawalls or other built structures (Chapman and Bulleri 2003). But these seawalls are just one small part of the problem for penguins in this urban environment that each year becomes a little more built up, a little more noisy, a little more dangerous.

And yet, year after year, the penguins keep returning.

I am captivated and unsettled by a singular image, and it is to this image that this chapter responds. It is the image of a penguin returning to a burrow, to a breeding place, that is no longer there or has been transformed so dramatically that it is no longer habitable. Of houses and swimming pools lining the shore of a harbor: people pulled to be closer to “nature,” but in a way that makes life for penguins and other harbor dwellers impossible. But this story of returning to lost places is not solely about penguins or even coastlines.<sup>3</sup> The returning penguin could just as easily be any number of other migratory or nomadic birds, a sea turtle, or even a seal looking for a haul-out spot on the shore. The beach could be a mangrove, a wetland, a tidal flat, or a range of other settings. All over the world, animals are drawn to return faithfully to places that no longer exist. Often they return to these places to breed, and often this is when they are at their most vulnerable—as with penguins returning to dry land. All these animals are in the background of this multispecies story about penguins and people along an urban shoreline in Australia. While each of them has their own unique story, my hope is that this singular account may open up some general lines of inquiry about those many others that are fatally tied to disappearing or lost places.

## STORIED-PLACES IN ANIMAL WORLDS

Places are not at all abstract or interchangeable; rather, they are nested and interwoven with layers of attention and meaning.<sup>4</sup> In this context, a place is more than the “raw” biophysical landscape: in Edward Casey’s

(1996) terms, “a place is not a mere patch of ground, a bare stretch of earth, a sedentary set of stones” (26). Rather, “place” must be understood as a material-discursive phenomenon. Denis Byrne, Heather Goodall, and Allison Cadzow (2013) make this point succinctly when they note that “humans make places out of spaces not just by physically altering them but also via the social and mental process of making them meaningful” (26).<sup>5</sup> This understanding of place highlights its “storied” nature: the way in which places are interwoven with and embedded in broader histories and systems of meaning through ongoing, embodied, and inter-subjective practices of “place-making” (Byrne, Goodall, and Cadzow 2013; Casey 1996:2001; Malpas 2001).

But it is not only humans who have the capacity to “make” places in this way. Many nonhuman animals are also “generators of meaning” (Lestel and Rugemer 2008:9). As Eduardo Kohn (2007) notes, “[T]he biological world is constituted by the ways in which myriad beings—human and nonhuman—perceive and represent their surroundings” (5). In a host of different ways—differences often covered over by that abstraction called “the animal” (Derrida 2008; Peacock 2009)—these other living beings constitute their worlds as places richly meaningful, historical, and storied. As Barbara Noske (1989) puts it: “[I]t is not just human subjects who socially and collectively construct their world but . . . animal subjects may do so too. The animal constructs are likely to be markedly different from ours but may be no less real” (157–58).

The work of the early-twentieth-century Estonian biologist Jakob von Uexküll ([1934, 1940] 2010) is central in the history of scientific attempts to take seriously the meaning-making abilities of various nonhumans. In this context, von Uexküll described an organism’s *Umwelt*: the experiential world that a being inhabits, its perceptual surrounds. Living beings perceive their surrounds differently as a result of their particular embodiment—sight, smell, and other senses—as well as through their specific needs, desires, and own life histories. As a result, they occupy different *Umwelten*. In taking up this approach, von Uexküll rejected the notion of animals as “physico-chemical machines” whose movement through the world can be explained by simple “instinctual, mechanical responses” (Buchanan 2008:7, 31). Instead, he described a “biology of subjects” in which, in Brett Buchanan’s (2008) words, organisms are understood to

“actively interpret their surroundings as replete with meaningful signs. They are not merely passive instruments or message bearers, but actively engaged in the creation of a significant environment” (28, 31–32).

The experiential worlds of these animal subjects are invariably difficult, and to some extent impossible, for us to grasp, in part at least because our access must occur through our specifically hominid embodiment. For example, the acoustically mapped worlds of dolphins using echolocation are probably impossible for humans to comprehend on a range of levels (Noske 1989:159). Similarly, as Dorion Sagan (2010) notes when discussing the capacity of blue whales to communicate by song over vast distances: “They may, in their giant *Umwelten*, have fabulous multisensory pictures of major portions of the ocean, images that, even if we had direct access to them, we couldn’t process, because our brains are too small” (23). But this lack of access on our part should not stop us from attempting to describe the kinds of worlds that these beings inhabit—however imperfectly—and it certainly should not lead us to deny that they inhabit meaningful worlds at all.

And so my focus in this chapter is the experiential world of Manly’s Little Penguins. In particular, I am interested in their relationships with the shoreline that provides their nesting places. As is perhaps clear, I am interested in more than the ecological requirements of appropriate nesting “habitat.” Specifically, I am interested in how these penguins “story” these places, how breeding places are rendered historical and meaningful to penguins. In using the term “story,” my claim is not that penguins know and “do” places in the same way that people do, but simply that their relationships with place might also be productively understood through this conceptual lens. While a great deal has been written on the subject of human “place-making” in recent decades, less attention has been paid to the complex and diverse ways in which nonhumans might also story their places.

The notion of “story” at work here is a basic but foundational one: the ability to engage with happenings in the world as sequential and meaningful events. The environmental historian William Cronon (1992) has drawn an instructive distinction between “narrative” and “chronology” (1351). He notes that a chronology is a simple listing of events in their order of occurrence. In contrast, a story, or narrative, weaves those events

together in a way that generates context and meaning. Connection and relationship are central to narrative. Events do not just happen one after the other in a random sequence; rather, they are connected to one another, and they affect or cause one another in a range of ways. Story is about the weaving of those connections, either in the recounting of events (story-telling) or simply in one's own "storied experience" of the world.

Although cast in a different language, it is precisely this distinction between chronology and narrative that is at issue in many discussions of "animal mind." In her account of the history and philosophy of ethology, Eileen Crist (1999) distinguishes between an experience of events in the world as "sequentially connected" or merely "serially placed" (170). She notes that many of the more reductive and impoverished approaches to behavior and cognition have tended to present animals as though they have no *cohesive* experience of the world. Rather, their actions are understood as things that happen *to* them—driven largely by "instinct" or "stimulus–response mechanisms"—not the result of any overarching reasoning or understanding on their part of the way in which these actions or broader events in the world connect to causes and outcomes. The result is an image of animal life as a fractured and disjointed set of "serially placed" experiences, occurring one after the other, but lacking any meaningful organization for the animal itself (a "chronology," not a "narrative," in Cronon's [1992:1351] terms).

But as work in ethology, cognitive science, and related fields has made increasingly clear over the past several decades, this is not the way that many animals (in addition to human animals) experience their worlds (Allen and Bekoff 1999; Goodenough, McGuire, and Jakob 2010; Wynne 2002). As Darwin (1871) noted far too long ago for it to remain a surprise, evolution demands an understanding of humans' mental and emotional capacities as continuous with those of the other members of the animal kingdom: "[T]he difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, certainly is one of degree and not of kind" (101).<sup>6</sup> It was with this understanding in mind that Darwin, and many others since him, presented an image of animal experiences as "sequentially connected": a world in which behaviors and events are placed in a meaningful context by virtue of their relationships with one another. As Crist (1999) notes, it is precisely because of their dwelling within a "cohesive" and "continuous"

time—one that enables the experience of events and actions as significantly connected to one another—that animals inhabit “a meaningful world” (170), what I am here terming a “storied experience.”

And so this chapter is an attempt to draw recent work on the biology, ecology, and ethology of Little Penguins into conversation with previously human-centered work in the humanities and social sciences on story and place. In so doing, we are able to explore what it might mean to take seriously the very different ways in which various nonhumans understand their places and render them meaningful. What kinds of competing claims to places might emerge from an account of storied-places as genuinely and pervasively *multispecies* achievements? More concretely, what would it mean to take seriously the way in which the penguins of Manly story their specific breeding places?

#### PENGUINS-STORIES-PLACES

Little penguins are philopatric, a term that literally means “love of one’s home” and in biology describes a process in which an animal returns to its place of birth or hatching to reproduce. It is not clear how, or precisely when, this attachment to a natal place develops. For roughly the past half century, curious biologists have moved seabird hatchlings of different ages between colonies to see which site they would return to. What seems to have emerged out of all this geographical confusion is that philopatric attachment develops at some point between hatching and fledging. If chicks are moved before this magical time, they can be expected to return to the new site to breed in roughly the same numbers as birds that actually hatched there (Serventy et al. 1989). Chris Challies’s (pers. comm.) detailed research with Little Penguins in New Zealand over the past thirty years indicates that translocation has to occur before a chick goes to sea for the first time—which happens at around fifty-five days of life.<sup>7</sup>

However it develops, this strong philopatry means that when it comes time to breed, most Little Penguins find their way back to their natal places, often traveling long distances to do so. In fact, even before they are sexually mature, many penguins return to these sites and come ashore at night during the breeding season (Challies, pers. comm.). While a few individuals do opt to visit and eventually breed in a colony other than

the one in which they hatched, once they have bred in a place for the first time—irrespective of whether they hatched there—penguins have a very high degree of fidelity to that place (site fidelity). So strong is this connection that it has on occasion been taken advantage of by biologists trying to remove Little Penguins from an unsafe area. For example, in 1995 penguins were translocated hundreds of miles from their breeding area during an oil spill off the coast of Tasmania (after the cargo ship *Iron Baron* ran aground). The long period required for the return swim provided time to begin the cleanup of the area, while minimizing the risks of disease and stress to the penguins that might have resulted from their being held in captivity (Hull et al. 1998).

Interestingly, this fidelity to a breeding site is often very spatially specific, with Little Penguins returning not only to the same general area, but usually to the same burrow or nest each year (Rogers and Knight 2006). But this fidelity is also not absolute. Several of the detailed studies on Little Penguin colonies in Australia and New Zealand have found that birds are significantly more likely to change nests if they were unsuccessful in their previous breeding attempt (Bull 2000; Johannesen, Perriman, and Steen 2002:245; Reilly and Cullen 1981:81). In addition, a study by Edda Johannesen and colleagues (2002:245) suggests that this willingness to change nests may be, to some extent, dependent on the availability of a superior nesting site nearby.<sup>8</sup>

Various explanations have been offered for this site fidelity, including the suggestion that it enables birds to retain high-quality nests and ones with which they are familiar. It may also minimize the time required to prepare a nest or burrow and increase a penguin's chances of reunion with a past mate (in addition to site fidelity, Little Penguins display fidelity to their breeding partners, perhaps especially partners with whom they have bred successfully in the past [Rogers and Knight 2006]). It is also possible that the other penguins that live in a colony may be of significance to any individual, with some studies showing that Little Penguins may preferentially associate with specific others at sea—a behavior that, among other things, may increase their chance of success in the all-important search for food (Daniel et al. 2007).<sup>9</sup>

Wherever they go to breed, however, for Little Penguins the presence of the colony is all important. As with many other seabirds, it seems that Little Penguins will not nest in a place where other birds of the same

species (conspecifics) are not present. In this context, the sight and sound of other birds seems to play an important role in penguins coming ashore—indeed, even after establishing nests in an area, penguins usually gather in a group out at sea (called a “raft”) and come in to the beach as a group. If juvenile birds return to their natal place and find it abandoned, it is unlikely that they will attempt to breed there. The importance of the presence of conspecifics has been reaffirmed in experiments in which recorded bird sounds and bird models have been used, with some success, to lure juvenile penguins and other seabirds to potential new breeding sites (Gummer 2003; Podolsky 1990).

These comments point to a general pattern of terrestrial behavior for Little Penguins. While there is likely a great deal of variability among individual penguins in breeding and site fidelity, in general terms it seems clear that a range of complex factors are at work in the formation of any penguin’s relationship with its nesting place. Places emerge here as storied landscapes: remembered, reinterpreted, and imbued with a changing value and significance through the course of a penguin’s life. Initially, there is a pull to return to a natal site; that pull is then influenced by some specific changes in the site, especially with reference to other penguins’ presence, as well as the individual’s own experiences (perhaps, in particular, past breeding success or failure).

But these stories are not just layered over an existing world. Rather, they emerge from and influence the way in which places and those that dwell in them come to be. A storied shoreline and a colony of penguins emerge here in a process of entangled becoming, where none of the relata (at least in their current forms) preexist their relationships (Barad 2007). While only some shorelines offer an appropriate environment for nesting penguins, once these birds settle in, they physically alter the terrain in a range of ways, especially through ongoing burrowing, breeding, hunting, excreting, and more. In fact, guano from penguins and other seabirds is often a particularly important component of the nutrient cycles of coastal regions and small islands, depositing much-needed nitrogen and other nutrients (Gill 2012; Muller-Schwarze 1984:26; Stearns and Stearns 1999:9–10).

But at the same time that penguins change the shoreline, they themselves are remade through this relationship. Over the years, perhaps centuries or longer, the penguins in the Manly colony have adapted their breed-



A Little Penguin. (Kenneth Fairfax; CC BY 2.0)

ing behavior to the unique local environment: in the absence of tussock grass and sandy soils, into which in other places penguins dig burrows, members of this colony, located in sandstone country, have had to utilize primarily rock crevices for their burrows (Bourne and Klomp 2004:131). In recent years, they have been required to again adapt their breeding behavior, this time to make use of, as well as gain protection from, a changing urban environment. Local penguins are sometimes to be found nesting in the dark and dry places underneath houses, sheds, boats, and other structures and vehicles. As Julie Bourne and Nicholas Klomp (2004) note: “These modifications to their nesting behavior have enabled Little Penguins to persist in the densely urbanized environment of Sydney Harbour” (131).

But, as we have seen, this is the only spot in a harbor once rich with penguin life that survival has been possible at all: a single, tiny colony—likely greatly reduced in numbers—and even now only just hanging on. Thinking through the lens of storied-places enables us to appreciate some of the ways in which penguins, places, and the stories that connect them are all at stake in one another, all reshaped through ongoing patterns of attachment and relationship.

LOVED AND LOST PLACES

We do not really know how long the penguins have been returning to Manly, although they are widely thought to have been there since well before British settlement of the colony of New South Wales. By the mid-nineteenth century, not too long after this settlement, Manly's beaches had already become an important recreational site for Sydney's residents. Initially accessed by ferry, the seaside destination boasted that it was "seven miles from Sydney, and a thousand miles from care" (Curby 2001). Over the intervening decades as Sydney expanded, Manly was slowly subsumed within the greater city limits, giving rise to a variety of new problems for penguins. The earliest documentary evidence of penguins' presence in the area is from 1912, and it mentions only a large group of penguins arriving in Sydney Harbour near Manly, not any breeding activity (*Evening News* 1912). Occasional newspaper articles from the 1930s and 1940s refer to penguins in the harbor (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1936, 1948), and one notes that they were breeding at Quarantine Point at this time (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1931), where a small number of them can still be found.

An article from the mid-1950s again mentions breeding penguins around Manly (*Sunday Telegraph* 1954). From this piece, it is clear that the colony was once considerably larger than it is today. Unfortunately, this fact is communicated to us through a report that more than 300 penguins were shot dead in one night on a single beach in an act of "vandalism." While the newspaper reporter deplores this act of violence, it is clear that many other Sydney-siders in the 1950s did not enjoy sharing their space with Little Penguins (in a similar act of violence two months later, thirty penguins were killed by "hoodlums" in Terrigal Beach, north of Sydney [*Sun-Herald* 1954]). An article in the *Australian Women's Weekly* in December 1956 highlights this situation clearly in a short photographic spread: images from Narrabeen, about 6 miles (10 km) up the coast from Manly, show residents boarding up the gaps underneath their houses to prevent penguins from nesting in these spaces. It seems to have been primarily their noise—described as a "nightly 3 AM party on the beach"—that caused the most difficulty for the locals. The article notes that "as daytime guests they're welcome, but at nightfall they head down to the sea for food—making noises that keep everyone else awake, too." It ends

by conceding that, as the penguins are a protected species, the residents can work only to deter their presence and must “resign themselves to a trying time while the penguins . . . are in charge” (*Australian Women’s Weekly* 1956:22–23).<sup>10</sup>

A lot has changed in the intervening years. Like almost all the other penguin colonies on the mainland of New South Wales, the penguin colony of Narrabeen is no more. As with the builder of the seawall mentioned earlier, some residents of Manly continue the long tradition of discouraging protected penguins from taking up residence on “their” property. On the whole, however, these *deliberate* efforts to discourage the penguins’ presence are probably few in number and are far less significant than the widespread loss of breeding sites that has resulted from the relentless densification of the area. The number of human visitors to and residents of Manly, one of Australia’s most iconic beachside suburbs, has steadily increased over the past several decades and can only be expected to continue to do so. Steadily rising land prices have ensured that blocks of land have been subdivided, and the human footprint has crept closer to the water’s edge. Even the increasingly popular harbor-side swimming pools in this area have often been fatal for Little Penguins, with several being trapped and drowned in them each year.

It is into this density of human habitation that the Little Penguins must return each year. Sometime around July, they enter the mouth of the harbor. Looping around the bottom of North Head, they make their way to the shoreline and their burrows beyond. For roughly the next eight months, they move back and forth between burrow and water, usually under cover of darkness. For the first few months, they are occupied with breeding: nest preparation, copulation, incubation, and then chick protection and feeding. When the chicks are finally ready to fledge, the adults return to the sea for a few weeks of fattening up, before coming back ashore for their annual molt. During this molting period of roughly two weeks, they are on a starvation diet, unable to go to sea to feed without the protective warmth of their feathers.

As any, even casual, observer of penguins knows, they are not ideally suited to this terrestrial portion of their lives. While the water is certainly not free from danger for penguins—in the form of marine predators, as well as boats, fishing lines, and other forms of pollution—on land their

slow and awkward waddle makes them easy targets for predators, including, in Australia, dogs, foxes, cats, birds of prey, and occasionally people. This situation is only made worse by the long periods of time out of the water required for breeding and molting. In both cases, a dry and secure burrow is a necessity. It is, therefore, at their most vulnerable times that penguins make their way onto the shore—returning to the places where they were hatched, the places where they have perhaps hatched their own young, the places that should be safe at this most precarious of times.

The ongoing urban development in the area impinges on the colony in a range of ways. The increased number of people living near or along the shore means more human presence at the water's edge, more dogs moving around to disturb and attack penguins, as well as increased light and noise along the water. In addition to direct penguin mortality, all this activity functions as a strong deterrent for penguin parents to return to their burrows to feed their chicks—likely resulting in reduced chick health and survival (NPWS 2000:24). Finally, urban densification, of course, also leads to the *direct* loss of nesting sites in the area, as suitable sites are transformed into swimming pools or houses, or as penguins' access to them is simply blocked by a wall or another structure. All these pressures have worked together to significantly reduce the availability of breeding sites. According to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the organization tasked with conserving this endangered population of penguins, the loss of suitable breeding habitat is a “major threat” to this colony and now also “seems to be the main factor limiting the[ir] distribution” (NPWS 2002a:13).

And so it is here, in this narrow, and highly valued, littoral zone—a rocky foreshore squeezed between the water and a growing number of buildings—that penguins and people have been thrust together. This is a space that is prized by its human inhabitants primarily for its harbor views and water access. But the unwillingness or inability of the local community to genuinely hold open space for penguins highlights a disturbing and all-too-frequent dimension of life along the coast, in Australia and elsewhere. While Sydney Harbour is highly valued by people, it is imagined first and foremost as a site of human amenity—calm waters lapping against a bank (or, more commonly, a seawall)—not as a place that is vitally important to the lives of a variety of nonhuman others that make their homes on the watery edge of the city (NPWS 2002b).

Underlying this tangible loss of penguin nesting sites is a discursive framing that effaces the penguins' presence and refuses to recognize any significant claim by them on this place. This situation is readily apparent in the language of "unwanted guests" and "reclaimed" shoreline. The "re-" in "reclaiming," of course, implies a prior ownership or entitlement to something. In this context, the shoreline is not appropriated, or taken, so much as it is "returned" to its rightful owner. But there is another important dimension to reclamation, that of "improvement." In its application to land and resources, the term "reclaiming" is usually used to indicate a redirection or transformation of something that is otherwise wasted. The *Oxford English Dictionary* makes this point succinctly, defining "reclamation" as "[t]he conversion of wasteland, esp. land previously under water, into land fit for cultivation or construction." In the context of Sydney Harbour, the prior configuration of this place—its rocky shoreline providing safe burrows for penguins and access to the land beyond—is cast as wasteful and irrelevant. The only meaningful use is human use: an extended backyard or an "infinity pool" hanging out over the harbor.

There is a similar dynamic at work in the positioning of penguins as "guests," especially of the unwanted variety, as in Narrabeen. Here, humans are cast as the rightful inhabitants of this place. The shoreline is "our land," and we may or may not extend hospitality to others. This framing of claims to the shoreline is "infected with a selective forgetting" that renders invisible a prior "taking" (Diprose 2002): our various arrivals and radical transformations of a shoreline (and, indeed, a country) in a way that covers over and undermines the ongoing presence of others and their claims to these places. As Rosalyn Diprose (2002) notes, acts of giving are often, perhaps always, premised on prior takings and enclosures, many of which are unacknowledged or deliberately rendered invisible. There are obvious connections here to the treatment of indigenous people and more recent immigrants and refugees, who are often similarly positioned as lacking any legitimate claim to places in Australia.

My primary interest, however, is in the effacement of the presence of penguins and a range of other species that once lived in and along the harbor. Excluded in the past—through either neglect or deliberate, and often violent, action—some of these animals are now making their way back or having their continued presence more actively acknowledged and supported by some people. But on whose terms is this happening; who is

required to make room for whom? Equally important, how is the language of “the guest,” which is often used in reference to these animals, complicit in erasing a past displacement and claim while also creating an unstable future, where residence can only ever be temporary and on “our” terms (Thomson 2007; van Dooren and Rose 2012)? In short, the questions is: Who are we to welcome penguins to this shoreline as guests? As Jacques Derrida (1999) notes: “To dare to say welcome is perhaps to insinuate that one is at home here, that one knows what it means to be at home, and that at home one receives, invites, or offers hospitality, thus appropriating for oneself a place to *welcome* [*accueillir*] the other, or, worse, *welcoming* the other in order to appropriate for oneself a place” (15). In the case of Little Penguins and many other nonhuman inhabitants of urban places, however, the “guests” are not even welcome—and so their presence and their claim are doubly effaced.

#### SHELTERING GENERATIONS

In this context, paying attention to penguins is about honing our skills at listening for alternative and often “unspoken” stories; it is about learning an appreciation for more-than-human practices of meaning and place-making in a disappearing world. I agree with William Cronon (1992) that “narratives remain our chief moral compass in the world. Because we use them to motivate and explain our actions, the stories we tell change the way we act in the world” (1375). But living well with others can never be about just learning to *tell* new stories; it must also involve learning new kinds of attentiveness to the stories of others—even if they are unspoken or are told in other-than-human languages. In taking up this approach, I am explicitly rejecting the common notion that narrative is an essentially, and perhaps constitutively, human capacity (Kearney 2002:3). Cronon (1992) seems to hold this view when he asserts that narrative is “a peculiarly human way of organizing reality” (1367). But experiencing beings like penguins “represent” the world to themselves, too (Kohn 2007:5); they do not just take in sensory data as unfiltered and meaningless phenomena, but weave meaning out of experiences (van Dooren and Rose 2012), so that they, like humans, “inhabit an endlessly storied world”

(Cronon 1992:1368). These diverse multispecies perspectives play havoc with the simple notion that “nature is silent,” an un-storied landscape awaiting the human inscription of meaning.<sup>11</sup>

In being attentive to the stories of penguins and others, we help to challenge the closure of human-centric narratives, narratives that along our coasts all too often cover over nonhuman needs and voices. In so doing, we also begin to undermine the obviousness of human understandings and meanings in these shared places, a project that is an essential first step toward ethical relationships. As Val Plumwood (2002) succinctly put it: “Recognising earth others as fellow agents and narrative subjects is crucial for all ethical, collaborative, communicative and mutualistic projects” (175).

While human understandings of the area of Manly tend to focus on the larger city of Sydney, which spreads out from the coastline, penguins surely inhabit an entirely different geography and possess an entirely different sense of what this place means and of the way in which it fits into and relates to the places around it. They likely have little sense of the city that lies beyond the foreshore, but instead know it as a thin strip of land connected to an ocean and a harbor that is rich in the fish and squid so necessary for successful breeding. It is a rocky place, one that provides unconventional but solid burrows for protection from predators. But, perhaps more than any of the current advantages or disadvantages that it offers, Manly is a place intimately known, used for generations, and as little as we understand about the impulses or mechanics of avian fidelity, it is clear that it is a place that calls out in some way to be returned to.

As previously noted, this is a relationship that goes well beyond what we ordinarily mean by “habitat,” a concept that usually refers to a purely physical set of features and relationships. In this context, habitat emerges as a largely interchangeable place, as is clear in the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of the term, which notes that it is “chiefly used to indicate the *kind* of locality, as the sea-shore, rocky cliffs, chalk hills, or the like” (emphasis added). As long as a locality possesses the requisite ecological and biological characteristics, it will be “suitable habitat” for a particular species. For example, in the case of Little Penguins, breeding habitat cannot be too warm (because they overheat easily on land); it must be close to a suitable food supply (because they cannot swim too great a distance

while incubating eggs and guarding chicks); it must provide dry and secure burrows within easy reach of the water; and it must be home to a significant number of other Little Penguins.

While all these characteristics are important, as we have seen they are far from being all that there is to the ways in which Little Penguins know and value their breeding places. Any piece of land that meets these requirements is not just as good as any other. Only one colony is “home” and, within it, likely only one burrow. More than the sum of their ecological parts, these places carry penguin histories and stories. In focusing exclusively on “habitat” in accounts of penguin breeding places, we provide a framework of thought in which it is far easier to deny, or conveniently forget, both the real significance of penguins’ relationships with these *particular* places and the fact that penguins inhabit their own richly meaningful and storied worlds. It is precisely this inability or unwillingness to recognize penguins’ relationships with local places as significant—as meaningful and vital—that enables us to so blithely evict them from a shoreline. In this context, what has been usurped is not a home, not a meaningful and important place, but a piece of interchangeable “habitat.” And so the inability or refusal to recognize how penguins relate to *particular* places undermines the significance of their relationships to these places and, in so doing undermines the importance of the claim that they make on them. But penguins do not occupy “habitats.” Rather, they inhabit experiential worlds in which a burrow might meaningfully be understood as a “home.”

Through this unique relationship, these particular places carry and shelter the possibility of the continuity of penguin generations. In this context, the loss of these places will have a profound impact on the possibilities of future generations. As a breeding area becomes unsafe or disappears, penguins are unlikely to evaluate the site as no longer appropriate and simply move on. As noted by Chris Challies (pers. comm.) in the epigraph to this chapter, Little Penguins tend to return to and remain at their general nesting site after they have bred there for the first time: “Little penguins are extremely robust both mentally and physically, and when confronted with human activities, even if adverse, they are unyielding.”

While there have been a very few examples of other penguin species that may have moved their breeding sites when threats became too great,

this is at best a very infrequent behavior (Gummer 2003:17). Instead, they stick it out, perhaps changing burrows if a mate is killed or a site becomes too full, but otherwise being largely unresponsive to serious changes. And so as places become increasingly degraded, most penguins will return and be killed. Or, at best, be unable to successfully reproduce at the levels that are necessary to ensure the continuity of the population.

The extreme form of attachment that penguins exhibit may lead some people to regard them as dim or even unthinking. But the intelligence of penguins, like that of all animals (including ourselves), is a product of a long evolutionary history that has determined the kinds of phenomena and environmental change that a being has to be sensitive to. While, as we have seen, penguins are responsive to a variety of factors in their evaluation of a breeding site, the kinds of large-scale change now commonly brought about by people have often not registered for them—just as they have not for albatrosses and many other colonial seabird species (chap. 1). And so we need to develop ways of thinking about animals and their experiential worlds that are respectful of these diverse sensitivities, without always regarding seemingly illogical behavior (from a human perspective) as a sign of stupidity or, worse, the complete absence of mind and any meaningful relationship with the world. This is not a question of more or less intelligence, but of a “diversity of sensitivities,” each appropriate to the life way of a given species. Along similar lines, Roberto Marchesini has suggested that we might understand these as “multiple intelligences” (Bussolini 2013). In the case of Little Penguins, the important point is that they simply are not sensitive to many of the perilous changes now occurring in the places where they nest.

In an important sense, we might understand these storied-places as intergenerational gifts. While they take form through the lives and experiences of individual birds, they are not the product of any single penguin. Rather, the cumulative experiences of a penguin’s forebears are passed between generations when a hatchling inherits its nesting site from its parents. Here, a vital connection with a specific place that has been found to be productive and safe is maintained and passed down. If all goes well, it will ultimately be passed down again, perhaps in a slightly different form. In this context, these storied-places are themselves deeply entangled in the evolution of the species and the history of specific colonies: both the

ability to understand and relate to places in this way (through the evolved capacity of philopatry) and the specific places identified to new generations through their hatching form an important inheritance.

This intergenerational gifting highlights another important aspect of the way in which penguins and their nesting places are enfolded into each other. In both their individual lives and the life of the colony and species—stretched across evolutionary time frames—penguins and places are at stake in each other, unable to be neatly teased apart. Penguin reproduction, like that of all living things, is never simply about the transmission of genes between generations. Genes sit within cells; through ontogenesis, cells slowly become bodies. But in avian worlds, this happens only if those bodies are cared for: if eggs are laid, incubated, and hatched and if chicks are fed, reared, and fledged (chap. 1). In addition, Manly's penguins remind us that this work does not happen in a vacuum, nor does it happen in any old environment. Alongside inheriting genes, organisms also inherit environments (at multiple scales and with a range of significances). In this context, the shoreline is part of what Meredith West and Andrew King (1987) have called an "ontogenetic niche": the broader biophysical environment of cells, bodies, eggshells, and external environments like shorelines that make reproduction possible at all. As Susan Oyama (2000) notes, with particular relevance for those who tend toward genetically reductive accounts of reproduction: "[T]he niche that the genes 'are inside of' is an indispensable bridge between generations" (62).<sup>12</sup>

Storied nesting places are at the heart of the Little Penguin's ontogenetic niche. They are a key part of the inheritance that makes the ongoing life of the colony and the species possible at all. Again, penguins and their places cannot easily be teased apart. The nature of their entanglement means that destroying these places and excluding penguins from them leads inexorably not just to the loss of a few individuals, or a single generation, but to the loss of the possibility of the continuity of generations as such. Whole family lines will be ended here. This is the work that fuels species extinctions, that undermines the ability of populations to sustain themselves into the future, to gift both life and a successful way of life to the next generation.

But, as we have seen, Manly's penguins continue to be threatened in precisely this way. Rich practices of more-than-human gifting are overridden or ignored by a "taking of places" that fails to recognize the vitality

and significance of other species' practices of place-making—of individual, collective, and intergenerational attachment and inheritance. While it might be hard to fully comprehend their significance, it is ultimately in little unassuming places like this short stretch of urban coastline that the ongoing possibility of generations is sheltered.

Taking penguin stories seriously opens our world into an attentiveness to this very particular and consequential relationship between a bird and its place. It opens up new possibilities for understanding the loss of coastal places (and many others as well). This is an approach that takes seriously Donna Haraway's (2008) injunction to genuinely get to know the organisms that we philosophize about: "Caring means becoming subject to the unsettling obligation of curiosity, which requires knowing more at the end of the day than at the beginning" (36). Knowing more matters, not least because it can and does enable us to see differently, and so to be drawn into new kinds of relationships, new ethical obligations. In this context, getting to know penguins and their philopatric ways must give rise to an appreciation of the actual ethical weight of our destructive actions in littoral places. An appreciation of the entangled intergenerational fates of penguins and their storied-places makes clear that destroying and usurping these places is very definitely "extinction work"—perhaps not today or tomorrow, but certainly in the all-too-immediate future. In this context, it becomes hard to overstate the significance of these places and the wantonness and severity of the act of quietly destroying them as though there were plenty more available coastline elsewhere.

And yet all over the world, other birds and animals are also returning to these kinds of lost places, to inter-generationally gifted places that are changed or that no longer exist at all—to tidal flats where land has been reclaimed and buildings now spill out into the water, to beaches now covered by people or bathed in city lights (Oldland et al. 2009). In other places, it is "coastal armoring"—seawalls, revetments, and other mechanisms constructed to protect houses built right along the water—that is causing problems, as with nesting sea turtles on Florida's beaches (a state that hosts 95% of all sea-turtle nesting in the continental United States [Mosier and Witherington 2001]). In yet other places, demands for land for agriculture and industry are driving this loss. The tidal flats of the Yellow Sea offer a tragic example of this situation (MacKinnon, Verkuil, and

Murray 2012). These areas are a vital staging ground for at least 2 million birds on their annual migrations—providing food and rest halfway through a mammoth migration of sometimes well over 6,000 miles (10,000 km) each way. And yet when these birds arrive, these areas are now often gone: almost 50 percent of the intertidal areas in China and Korea have been “reclaimed” or otherwise lost over the past three decades (Oldland et al. 2009:2–5). But in addition to growing human pressures on the landward side of many coastal areas, in some places sea-level rise may well be reducing this thin band of space from the seaward side, producing intensified patterns of “coastal squeeze” (Oldland et al. 2009:5).

Back in Manly, for all the difficulties faced by the Little Penguins, there are still grounds for hope. This colony has not yet gone the way of almost all the others on the Australian mainland. In this context, while the urban environment clearly poses a range of significant challenges for penguins, it is also important to note that it does offer some advantages, too. Living at close quarters with people brings houses and swimming pools, dogs, lights, and jet skis, but also vocal and organized advocates. Foremost among these people are the Penguin Wardens, a group of volunteers who spend their nights checking that no harm comes to those birds nesting under the busy ferry wharf. In addition, some members of the wider community have been actively involved in efforts to ensure that the National Parks and Wildlife Service does everything in its power to look after the penguins. In some cases, this has meant an active campaign of fox baiting to reduce the population of these (possible) predators. In one case, after several penguins were killed in a short period of time by dogs and foxes, it even involved the use of infrared cameras and the hiring of a sniper (van Dooren 2011a). And so the city also brings with it some advantages for struggling penguins (even if not for foxes). It is perhaps no coincidence that two of the remaining three mainland Australian colonies of Little Penguins are found in large cities: the Manly colony in Sydney and the St. Kilda colony in Melbourne. This fact gives me some hope for more sustainable human–penguin relationships in urban environments. But many of these places have already been lost, and those that remain are threatened. In short, there is much to do.

At this time in Earth’s history, there are numerous different paths to extinction, numerous ways to end the possibility of life for generations of a kind. For many creatures, for many populations and species, it is the loss

of an important place that leads inexorably to their end. In this context, perhaps the very least that we can do is begin to learn a new sensitivity to the storying and place-making practices of these nonhuman others, a sensitivity that just *might* provide an avenue to more sustaining possibilities of life, across species and generations.