

# BIRDS I HAVE MET

## 18. The little blue penguin—korora

MY FIRST MEETING with the little blue penguin, face to face, was an unpleasant experience for both of us. She, poor creature, was being held firmly by a fellow bird-watcher and was not in an amiable mood. Nor was I. It was raining. The wind was blowing, our launch was rocking on a choppy sea, and I felt very sick.

We had set out that morning, an enthusiastic party of bird-watchers, to visit several small islands in the Marlborough Sounds.

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By Avis Acres

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When we left, the weather was fair, but a storm blew up and ruined our day. It was too rough for most of us to go ashore on any of the islands. A few hardy souls braved the elements and one kind friend, knowing that I had hoped to sketch a blue penguin, brought one on to the launch.

After being dragged from her burrow she was not inclined to pose gracefully for

her portrait. She was also frustrated. Her kidnapper was an experienced handler of penguins and wore strong leather gloves; so she was unable to peck his fingers.

It was a wonderful opportunity to sketch a penguin at close quarters. I had to work quickly and by the time I finished the sketch my sea sickness was cured. I am certain korora was relieved when her ordeal was over and she was returned to her burrow.

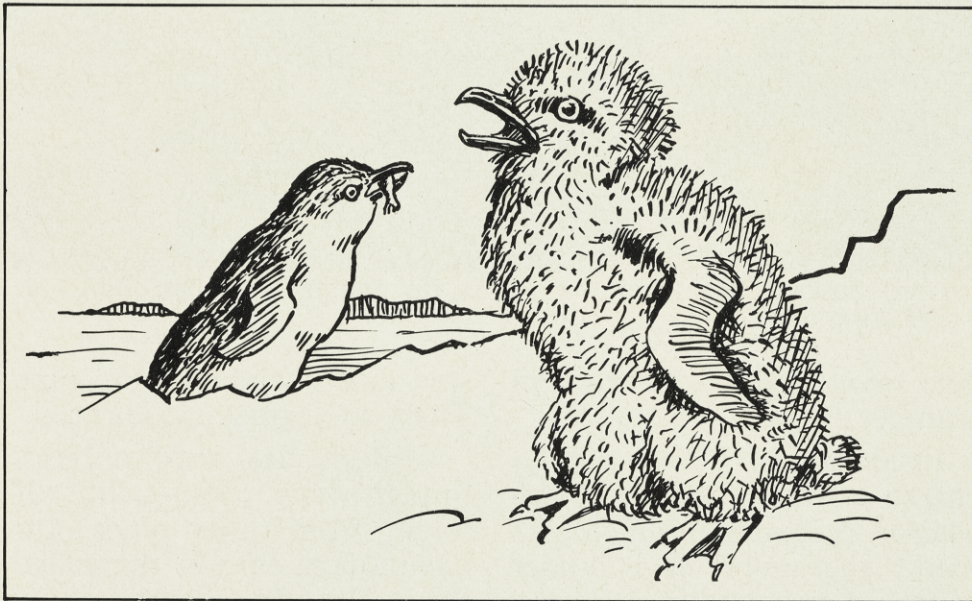
My second meeting with a blue penguin was quite dramatic and gave us both a nasty shock. I was searching for a kiwi's nest on Kapiti Island and eventually found a hollow tree which looked a likely place.

I knelt down and peered inside. Immediately a furious white-fronted figure darted out, shrieking abuse at me. I backed out smartly to avoid being attacked with a sharp beak. I hadn't realised that penguins occasionally nested in hollow trees.

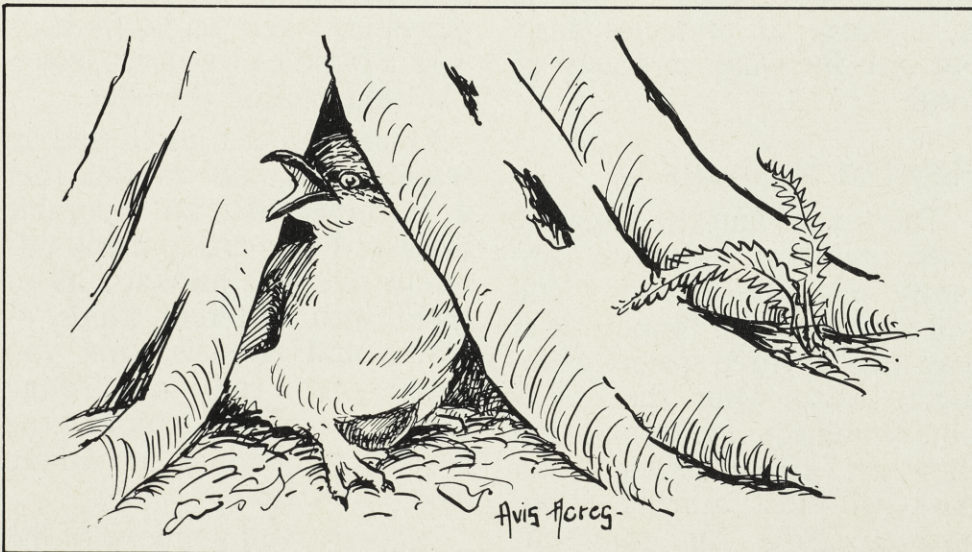
### Extraordinary habits

Penguins have extraordinary habits. They build their nests some distance from the sea, often on top of steep cliffs. The nest I found was a stiff climb up from the beach. I imagined those little birds, with their tiny, short legs, trailing up and down that cliff several times a day with food for their chicks. They sometimes nest in old petrel burrows.

About midnight on my last evening on Kapiti my sleep was shattered by the most hideous racket. It sounded directly under my bed. There



Young chicks are covered with brown sooty down.



The little blue penguin sometimes nests in a hollow tree.