

Oddball

IN CINEMAS SEPTEMBER 17



The amazing true story of ODDBALL is based on the real-life Middle Island Maremma Project based at Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village in Warrnambool, Great Ocean Road, Victoria.

The little penguin once bred in many places along the southern Australian coastline. Due to its coastal position and natural terrain, Middle Island became home to thousands of little penguins. Red foxes, which are not native to Australia, are believed to access the Middle Island by walking over at low tide; however there has been a report of foxes swimming over at high tide.

The first widely reported fox kill on the island was in 1993. After years dealing with fox attacks, the fewest penguin count recorded was in the 2004-2005 breeding season when Deakin University researcher Rebecca Overeem undertook an arrival count and recorded only four penguins returning to the island.



The Middle Island Maremma Project was initiated when a colourful local free range poultry farmer Alan 'Swampy' Marsh suggested that the Warrnambool City Council use Maremma guardian dogs to protect the local little penguin colony from fox attacks on Middle Island. Swampy had been using Maremmas to protect his poultry from fox and feral dog attacks for many years.

Maremma guard dogs were bred in Italy and have been used to protect agricultural stock from predators for several hundred years. The dogs have a natural instinct to bond with a particular territory and the animals that live within it. Maremmas will chase away anything that is perceived as a threat or unusual to the territory.



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A four-week trial commenced in 2006, supported by a project plan. The trial turned into a 12-month project and the Maremma guardian dogs have worked to protect the Middle Island Little Penguin colony ever since.

There have been no recorded instances of fox predation on the island since the dogs were introduced. The peak penguin arrival count in the 2013-2014 breeding season provided an estimate of approximately 100 penguins and growing.

The program currently uses two dogs that live on the island for several days a week during the penguin breeding season. Their names are Eudy and Tula and they're the sixth and seventh dogs to be used in the project. The dogs go to the island for several days at a time before being returned to the mainland for rest and recuperation. There are strict animal welfare protection protocols that are followed to make sure the dogs are safe, happy and not exploited in any cruel manner.



Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village has been tasked with caring for the dogs since 2013. Volunteers from the Warrnambool Coastcare Landcare Group visit the island once every two weeks during the breeding season to assist with penguin monitoring, care of the Maremmas and infrastructure and environmental works.

The program is kept alive through grants secured by the Warrnambool Coastcare Landcare Group, funding from Warrnambool City Council, ticket sales from public programs and merchandise sales.

The public can visit the island and meet the Maremmas through two public programs: the Summer Tour program and Meet the Maremma Schools and Groups program.

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