

Kororā chicks huddle together.
Photo: Mike Rumble



The crane sits on sanctuary land while it drops a concrete wall for Phil's house into place. Photo: Bruce Sedcole

A NEW HOME FOR KORORĀ

By Robyn Cooper

Imagine waking on a stormy night to discover wild seas destroying your home. This is what happened to the kororā (little penguins) at their sanctuary in Days Bay, Lower Hutt, on June 20th, 2013. Meanwhile, next door, a massive wave smashed through the home of a human – Phil Morris.

Phil was lucky to escape as angry seas surged through his house and demolished it.

After the storm was over, he decided to build a new house, of concrete. But there was a problem. He'd need a crane to deliver the concrete walls. The only access was across the kororā sanctuary's land – a Council reserve. The storm had reduced the land to rubble, but a few brave penguins remained.

Phil had an idea. He told the Hutt City Council that if they let him use the land for his crane, he'd restore the sanctuary. The Council agreed.



More help arrives

An expert digger driver, Roger McMillan, offered his services for free. Excitement grew as quarry and trucking companies donated transport and 50 tons of rocks.

Will Bearman carted endless rubble and rocks in his wheelbarrow. The Days Bay MenzShed built kitset nesting boxes for the birds, and conservationist/penguin advisor Mike Rumble showed Wellesley College students how to nail them together.

It's a huge job, and Phil and his friends are still shifting rocks and rubble, and planting bushes. But everyone has loved being part of a community effort – and the kororā are more than happy in their smart new sanctuary.



Photo: Mike Rumble

Penguin patrol

Wellesley College students are now learning how to monitor the kororā. Sticks propped up in their doorways that have been knocked down or smelly poos around the doorways warn them that penguins are around and mustn't be disturbed. One student, Toby, says, 'First, it was exciting making the boxes, then we got to see the penguins using them, then they started making nests, then laying eggs, and soon there will be chicks.'



Wellesley College students, Judd and Toby make a nest box. Photo: Chris Parker



A finished nest box. Photo: Chris Parker

Want to help kororā?

See: www.forestandbird.org.nz/places-for-penguins

A kororā's story

By Sarah Harpur

We spend our days at sea and come ashore at night – our bellies full of fish.

There are kororā colonies all over New Zealand and Australia, but I'm from Days Bay. Some kororā make homes by digging burrows in sand, but at Days Bay we live in our very own sanctuary, complete with luxurious nesting boxes.

The boxes were put here by the humans – they come out in the day, then at night they hide in their own giant nesting boxes nearby.

During the terrible storm of 2013, we torpedoed out to sea. We swam back after the wind and waters calmed, but our homes had been swept away, or buried.

Some of us dug new burrows in the ruins, but they were leaky, and flooded.

One evening, we discovered a digger-monster on our land. The humans complain about our squawks and smells, but you should have seen this creature. It rumbled, and grumbled, and shoved mud. It feasted on rocks and rubble and spat them into piles.

We escaped into the sea, as our land grew new shapes. Rumble, grumble, shovel, shove.

Then one day a brand new nesting box turned up.

Then another, and another.

New paths and hide-outs appeared. Our sanctuary was becoming better than ever. We made nests, and I'm sitting on two eggs now.

The digger monster is still around, but it's surprising what you get used to. We probably should thank it.

Pity it doesn't sit on eggs.

Rebuilding the sanctuary became a huge community project with Hutt City Council, Phil Morris, Roger McMillan, Mike Rumble, Wellesley College, DOC, Horokiwi Quarry, Winstone Aggregates, Dixon & Dunlop, C & M Transport, Quarry Demolition, the MenzShed, Placemakers, Will Bearman and other supporters all generously donating goods and services.