



West Coast Blue Penguin Census August 2011

Summary of results



Thank you to the 80 Coasters who took to the beaches to help in this years blue penguin census. The annual census took place between the 13th and the 16th of August and this year there was a record turn-out of volunteers.

The high number of volunteers meant that we were able to survey areas where penguin prints have never been counted before. While not scientific, these annual surveys provide valuable year on year information about the scattered penguin populations along this significant stretch of coastline. The information compliments the Trust's detailed colony monitoring taking place in Charleston and Punakaiki, as well as monitoring being done by DOC in conjunction with the Trust at Okarito and Hari Hari.

Overall, this years census found blue penguin numbers appear to be down along most of the West Coast but that is not surprising given the weather leading up to the census says Kerry-Jayne Wilson.

“There were weeks of bad weather, and then a horrendous storm around the time the penguins were preparing to breed. Combined with the data we have from our detailed colony monitoring the impression we have is the bad weather means the breeding season was a bit later this year. It looks like 2011 will be a worse than average season.”

Summary of results – North to South

Where multiple surveys were done along the same length of coastline, the highest number of prints are listed.

Buller

Mokihinui to Mussel Rocks was the northern most stretch surveyed but like other years no prints were found. From Mussel Rocks to Granity four prints were counted. None were found between Granity and Whareatea but four were counted at Fairdown, this is the first time they have been recorded there.

A number of locals helped in the Carters beach census. Two prints were counted from Bradshaws Rd to Bulls Creek, down from eight last year and only three were seen between Western Tip Head and Cape Foulwind compared to 15 the year before. Thomas Creek had a healthy 18 compared to ten the year before. One was counted at Omau.

Six prints were counted at Tauranga Bay and one penguin spotted, the surveyors say they have noticed increased penguin movement in this area. Another six were seen at Okari North and at Charleston between Hamptons rock and the Nile River mouth one blue penguin was viewed and six prints seen.

At the Nile River the ranger is monitoring 34 burrows this year.

At Fox River's Woodpecker Bay 11 prints were counted with seven found at Pahautane Beach, locals say they have never seen numbers at Pahautane Beach this low before and sadly there have been reports of at least seven blue penguins killed by vehicles on the stretch of the Coast Road between Fox River and Punakaiki in the last two months.

Three sets of prints were counted at Hatters Bay, five at Sandfly Bay and two at Truman Beach, down from five last year.

Grey district

Only one set of prints was counted at Punakaiki, locals report there had been previous high tides and stormy weather which may have contributed to the low count.

Eight sets of prints were counted at Barrytown between the Hibernia Creek and Barrytown Road, five were counted between 13 and 10 Mile and 14 sets of prints were seen between 10 and 9 Mile. None were found between 9 mile and Point Elizabeth. From Point Elizabeth south to Cobden two prints were found.

From Karoro Domain to Paroa 30 prints were counted, slightly up from last year. 36 were counted from Camerons to the New River Mouth well down from last years 59. There is significant erosion along these beaches which has affected nesting habitat.

Westland District

From Kumara junction to Chesterfield Rd one print was spotted. At Awatuna between Chesterfield Rd and Waimea Creek 11 tracks were recorded, this is a drop from 37 last year. However 31 were recorded from Waimea Creek to the Arahura River which is up from 12 last year so it seems the penguins have moved south. Many cat and dog prints were spotted in this area. From Arahura to Hou Hou Creek 18 prints were counted, about half the number from last year.

The Hokitika Scouts and Guides also reported a lot of dog prints in the beaches north of Hokitika. Numbers here were well down from last year with four counted between Hou Hou Creek and Silver Fern Farms, three towards the Shining Star Lodge and another seven to Sunset Point. This compares to about twenty last year.

From the Hokitika River to the Golf Course five prints were recorded, there were 14 counted from the Golf Course to Mananui. At Ruatapu north two were found and Ruatapu south seven were spotted. At Ross two were counted and at Harihari seven were spotted, the same as last year.

Okarito has had a huge increase in penguin numbers this year. 90 were counted at Little Three Mile, compared to 36 last year. There were 43 seen on the remainder of 3 mile beach and three spotted at Okarito Bluffs. 33 were counted at Waitangi south of the river, nine at North Okarito beach and 48 at 5 Mile.

At Haast's Ship Creek there was one print counted compared to seven last year and none were found at Jackson Head.

Oyster Catchers and Dotterels

This year you were also asked to record sightings of Variable Oystercatchers and Banded Dotterels. The most significant numbers of Oystercatchers were found at Harihari with 50, followed by 15 between 10 and 13 Mile and 14 at Tauranga Bay.

Twelve dotterels were spotted between Kumara and Arahura, seven at Ross and 6 at Carters Beach.

Thanks again for your valuable contribution. Please feel free to contact the Trust at info@bluepenguin.org.nz