

Census result no need to panic

The 2011 blue penguin census has suggested a fall in blue penguin numbers throughout the West Coast but there is no need to panic at this stage says Trust Chair Kerry-Jayne Wilson.

A record number of volunteers took part in this years blue penguin census with 80 people getting up at dawn to count penguin print over four days from the 13th to 16th of August. The high turnout meant we were able to survey areas that have not been surveyed before. The only significant area not scrutinised was Karamea due to a lack of volunteers, it is hoped this can be rectified in 2012.

Disappointingly numbers were down in areas where there have historically been significant penguin populations like Camerons and the Coast Road. However Kerry-Jayne says this is not surprising given the weather leading up to the census.

Continued on page 3



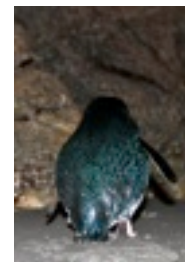
Fern Davis looking for prints on Hokitika beach



Rare penguin does a runner

A rare Fiordland Crested penguin recuperating after being found injured near Westport has disappeared from its enclosure. It is thought it sniffed the ocean air and decided to make a break for it.

Story page 4



Vote for your favourite sea bird

This year has been a tough one for seabirds with the largest ever wreck of prions in June when up to 350,000 died in a massive storm. More recently at least 1,400 seabirds, including blue penguins, have been killed in the oil spill from the stranded ship Rena. Voting for Forest and Bird's annual 'bird of the year' poll closes on 25 November. Show your support for seabirds by casting your vote on www.birdoftheyear.org.nz or <http://www.forestandbird.org.nz>.

Farewell to Bec's

It was with sadness the Trust said good-bye to Rebecca Gibson in October. Our loss is Great Barrier Island's gain as she has taken a job on the island with DOC.

"Bec's has been a very active Trustee and made some huge contributions over her three year involvement," says Trust Chair Kerry-Jayne Wilson.

"She has donated time, enthusiasm and energy and will be missed."

In her last job for the Trust Bec's represented us, and DOC, as an expert on the LEARNZ field trip to the West Coast. 120,000 school children had the chance to tune in on-line to see Bec's and Helene Roehl monitor penguins and talk about the five years of data and research the Trust now has on the colonies near Charleston.

Moving north will be a big change for Bec's as she has had a lifetime association with the West Coast through her family bach at Okarito.

She will still get to see blue penguins as there are populations around Great Barrier.

"I'm yet to see any penguins on the island but they are definitely around. We have banded rails and kaka's outside the office which is great. It is only just November but already I have been swimming and the seafood is amazing – no whitebait though," she says.

The Trust wishes Bec's, Geoff and Sonny all the best.



Bec's and LEARNZ's Shelley Hersey with mascots

Cape Foulwind update



Photo - Westport News

Progress is going well at Cape Foulwind where the Trust is working on a project which will ultimately see free public viewing of Blue Penguins and Sooty Shearwaters in three to five years.

Kerry-Jayne and temporary ranger Helene Roehl (pictured) have installed new penguin nesting boxes and relocated others.

While they were installed too late for this season one has already been visited which is very positive for next breeding season.

Next step is installing a sound system which will broadcast Penguin and Shearwater calls to attract more birds to join the small colony already nesting above the walkway. Predator control will be undertaken to help the birds breed successfully.

Thanks very much to Solid Energy which has committed to funding the project for the next two years and DOC to its support.

Census result no need to panic..... continued

"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. However it does look like 2011 will be a worse than average season," she says.

Vehicles and dogs continue to be the biggest threats to penguins on the Coast. Many volunteers noted dog prints in areas where penguins were and at least 15 blue penguins have been reported killed by vehicles between Fox River and Punakaiki so far this year.

On a more positive note there was a significant increase in penguin numbers at Okarito with 226 prints counted.

"Okarito now appears to be home to the largest colony we know of on the West Coast. It is a remote area away from dogs and traffic, the penguin population seems to be doing well," says Kerry-Jayne Wilson.

These annual surveys provide valuable year on year information about penguin populations. The information compliments the Trust's detailed colony monitoring taking place in Charleston and Punakaiki, as well as monitoring being done in conjunction with DOC at Okarito and Hari Hari.

The full 2011 census results can now be found on the website. <http://www.bluepenguin.org.nz/wp-content/>



Jude Moss on Carters Beach

In brief.....

Signs

More "Don't let your dog run wild" signs have been printed thanks to support from the Biodiversity Fund. If you know somewhere where a sign should be erected please contact Robyn at info@bluepenguin.org.nz



Help

The Trust would love to borrow a thermal imaging camera or scope to look for blue penguin activity in the Cobden and Karoro areas. If you can help or know of one please contact Robyn at info@bluepenguin.org.nz

Congratulations

Trustee Ian Davidson-Watts and wife Diane welcomed baby Phoebe recently. She is a younger sister to Amy.

To join or not to join

Trustees are discussing whether to offer membership to the Trust at a cost of \$5 - \$10 per annum. Presently those on our mailing list are known as supporters. Membership would help us raise funds to protect blue penguins and also give members some additional benefits. We would like feedback on this proposition so please contact a Trustee or Robyn to share your views.

Meeting

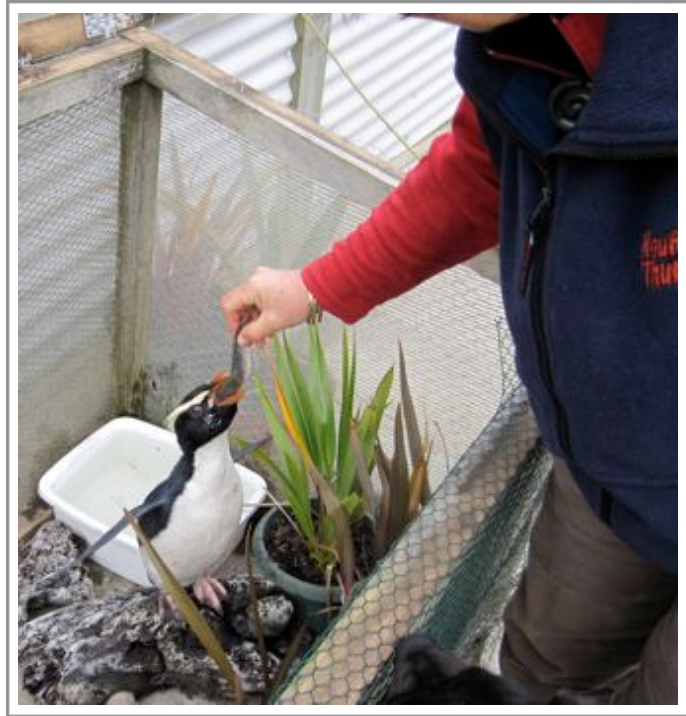
The next meeting of the supporters group is Friday 18 September at DOC in Hokitika. All are welcome.

Rare penguin does a runner

After weeks of tender loving care, far away from home, a Fiordland crested penguin has sniffed the ocean air and done a runner.

Ex-army medic Julie Leighton found the injured penguin on Nine Mile beach near Westport's Tauranga Bay back in July. It was a long way from its usual stomping ground as Fiordland crested, which are the world's rarest penguins, don't usually venture north of Bruce Bay near Haast. Interestingly, two others were spotted near Charleston around the same time.

After a week at the vets DOC asked Julie if she would look after the penguin while he recuperated. The penguin, which Julie's son named Thornton, quickly settled into a make-shift enclosure on the balcony, eating fish offered by hand.



Julie feeding Thornton

"He was just such a character, he'd bark at you if he was hungry and when I let him out he followed me round the kitchen. By then end he was giving me the evil eye a bit though so maybe it was time he left," says Julie.

His departure was unexpected though as he was not completely healed. "He obviously decided he was well enough and decided to liberate himself. We heard a bit of a crash about 11.30pm one night and when we got up the next morning the netting had been forced from his enclosure and he was gone. When I found him he had an infection on one leg, which was swollen, cuts on his back and was lame, something had obviously grabbed him from behind. By the time he left he was mobile, all his wounds had healed, but his feathers weren't completely repaired."

Julie had always planned to return him to the wild where she found him which was only 500 metres from her home. "It was a moonlit night, the ocean obviously called him. We gave him a chance, and he hasn't turned up again so hopefully he has headed home. I miss him hugely, it was a privilege to look after him, but I am glad he has gone back to the wild, he shouldn't be in captivity," she says.

Life as a surrogate penguin mother is not over yet though. Julie is now looking after a little blue penguin with a broken beak.

A day in the life the chicks. We've been at home eating and sleeping for weeks now but Mum and Dad say we're getting so hungry they'll both have to go to sea soon to get us enough food so we keep growing. It's a bit scary that we'll be in the burrow by ourselves especially when we hear Weka's and dogs sniffing around outside but Mum says we'll be ok as they've built a good nest with a long entrance so nothing else can get in. In about six weeks we'll be going out to sea too that will be an adventure.



Photo Helene Roehl

Talks ongoing about penguin proof fences on parts of SH6

The Trust is in discussion with NZTA after worries from locals about the excavation near Limestone Creek on State Highway 6 north of Punakaiki.

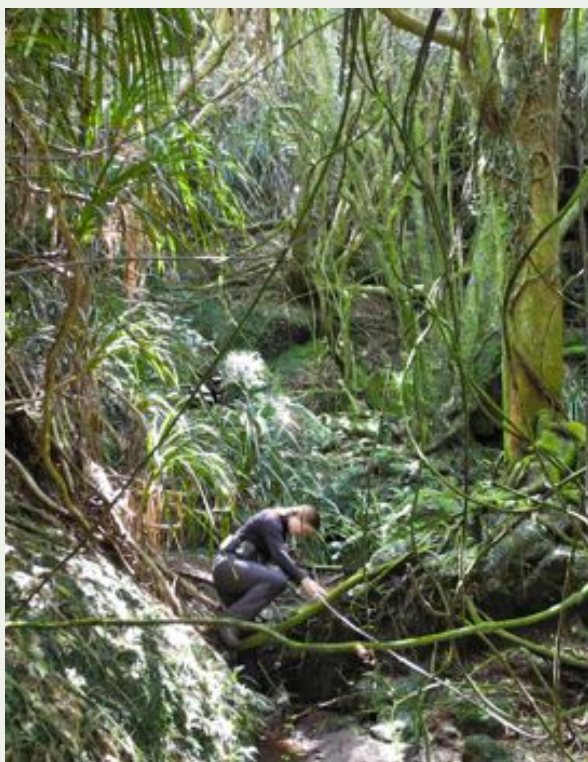
Locals fear the quarrying is damaging the scenic coastal highway and worry about the fate of penguins in the area. The Trust has concerns about the ongoing effects on the blue penguin population from quarrying and blasting and also the increased potential for penguin deaths as cars travel faster on the new improved road.

Vehicles are the single biggest cause of death

in the West Coast penguin population and a 9km stretch, which includes Limestone Creek, is the deadliest on the Coast. In the last six years 109 blue penguins have been reported killed from north of Punakaiki to Fox River this compares to only 10 other vehicle deaths on the entire West Coast.

The Trust is pleased NZTA has put quarrying on hold while discussions continue and is finalising a landscape plan for the area. Talks have begun about the potential of fencing a portion of the road to stop penguins crossing and NZTA's Mark Pinner will attend the Trust's supporters meeting on Friday 18 November.

Thanks Helene



Monitoring near Charleston

Thanks so much to Helene Roehl who has spent three months with the Trust for her internship. Helene is a 4th semester student studying conservation at Georg-August University in Germany.

Helene monitored penguin colonies at Charleston, Fox River and Punakaiki while Reuben has been away. She was monitoring 124 burrows and saw her first penguin chick on the 8th of October, meaning it is a slightly later than usual breeding season this year.

"I found my time on the West Coast great! I did really enjoy the nature and the work. Thanks so much to Kerry-Jayne for all her time and expertise.

As well as blue penguins Helene also got to see some Rowi and Westland Petrels up close.

She's now back in Germany finishing her Bachelor degree.

Thanks to sponsors below and Kea Tours, Punakaiki Resort, Hokitika's Shinging Star, Birds Ferry Lodge, Rimu Lodge, Beachfront Hotel, The National Kiwi Centre, Breakers and Forest and Bird for their support.

This newsletter is distributed four times a year - have a great Christmas

