

West Coast Blue Penguin Trust

Summer 2013 newsletter



Poor breeding season for blue penguins

Monitoring by Trust Ranger Reuben Lane has shown 2012 has been a poor breeding season for blue penguins in the colonies the Trust monitors.

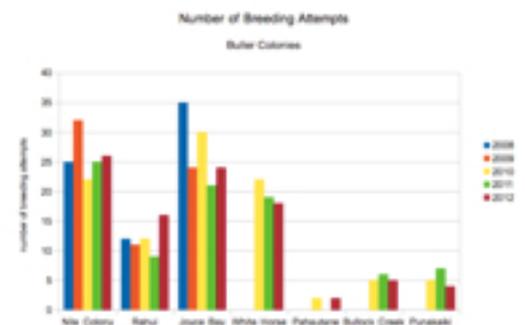
At Whitehorse there was a 70% breeding failure which Reuben mainly puts down to bad weather.

“Incubation time coincides with the rainiest time of the year and we had really big rain events in spring which flooded a lot of the burrows. In times past penguins would use burrows dug by mutton-birds but now they are reduced to nesting in little scrapes, rock piles and shallow burrows which are often susceptible to flooding,” he says.

While normally we would see losses during the incubation stage this year burrows with chicks in them also failed at chick rearing stage.

“I suspect a lot of the adult penguins were killed at sea by seals so didn’t return to feed the chicks. I found at least four penguins near the colonies which had seal injuries and a dozen seals on beaches which had starved to death. Poor sea conditions and perhaps a lack of food forced the seals to look at penguins more as a food source,” says Reuben.

While the Trust now has excellent data from colony monitoring it is looking at acquiring funding to study the penguins’ foraging habits. Feather samples collected in 2012 will also be analysed to look at the birds’ diet.



Supporters
meeting in
Punakaiki -
Friday 8th
February

The next Trust supporters meeting will be held in Punakaiki on Friday the 8th of February and we would love to see you there. The meeting starts at 10am at the Conservation Volunteers building about 3.5km’s south of Punakaiki.

At 7pm Ranger Reuben Lane will hold a trapping workshop followed by an illustrated talk by Kerry-Jayne at 8pm at the Pancake Rocks Café. Anyone is welcome and there will be nibbles afterwards.



Buller beaches surveyed for first time

The Trust has completed the first comprehensive penguin survey of 40k's of beach from Cape Foulwind to Hector.

Ranger Reuben Lane says penguin populations were higher than previously thought but erosion in some areas has meant the penguins have an unusual distribution.

At Carters Beach between Holcim and the Buller River the penguins have a very linear distribution because of the effects of erosion and the fact the farms come close to the dunes.

"It's not often you see a colony so spread out but the penguins are just adapting to their environment. They are programmed to come back so they will keep on doing that until there is nowhere left for them," says Reuben.

At the tip-head the penguins are having a hard time getting up a 2m high sheer bank. "You can see where they have paced back and forth trying to find a way to their burrows. Some kind local had placed a log they can use as a ramp which is great".

Penguin found in Hamner Springs

The Trust was surprised last year to hear a blue penguin had made its way from the West Coast to Hamner Springs. It turns out someone from Charleston found it in a driveway and for an unknown reason decided to take the penguin to Hamner. DOC somehow got wind of it and took the well-grown chick to Rangiora where it was fed and cared for, apparently unaffected by its travels.

The moral of the story is wherever possible leave penguins alone. "If you find a penguin on the road the best thing to do is usher them to the nearest bush or scrub, preferably on the seaward side of the road," says Trust chair Kerry-Jayne Wilson.



A survey of Wall Island, off Tauranga Bay at Cape Foulwind, has revealed a healthy population of Sooty Shearwaters and Fairy Prion's. Matt Charteris (pictured) and Reuben Lane were surprised at the bird numbers.



Thanks to DOC's biodiversity fund for supporting work like the Trust's penguin monitoring & surveys

High-tech bird watching

This season the Trust has had a different look at the private lives of penguins with a number of motion activated cameras surveying penguin burrows.

Reuben has been through hours and hours of footage which has given him a relatively continuous observation of burrow entrances.

“It has given us information about how often the penguins come and go and what they do outside the burrow. I was surprised to see how much time they spend preening outside and we got some funny footage of their mating rituals”.

One good thing about the footage was it showed that stoats aren't visiting the burrows regularly. Reuben has compiled some of the footage which can be viewed on the facebook page through this link <https://www.facebook.com/pages/West-Coast-Blue-Penguin-Trust/245255915596332?ref=ts&fref=ts>



Birds on film

Dog fence to protect penguins

After dogs killed the majority of penguins at a colony last year at Siberia Bay at Cape Foulwind, DOC, with support from Holcim, has erected a dog fence at the Omau end of the walkway.

“The Omau dog fence helps contain the dogs initially and more importantly help raise awareness and remind dog owners about the proximity and vulnerability of the penguins. We applaud the initiative,” says Trust chair Kerry-Jayne.

Thanks for
your support
Holcim



In brief.....

Stoat trapping in Cobden

As part of Greymouth's Northern Breakwater Project a stoat trapping programme is going to be run on Cobden Island, the lagoon and surrounds to boost bird numbers.

If you are interested in volunteering to help come along to the DOC office on Tuesday 5 February at 1pm – contact Anne for more details on 03 768 7673

T-shirts

The Trust is just about to order more childrens t-shirts so let us know if you'd like to purchase one for \$25. Adults sizes are also available info@bluepenguin.org.nz

Out and about

Kerry-Jayne gave a plenary lecture on seabird research and conservation at the NZ Ecological Society Conference at Lincoln in late November.

She also attended the Environment and Conservation Organisations of Aotearoa NZ conference in Arthurs Pass in January on behalf of the Trust.

Kerry-Jayne in print

Watch out for Trust chair Kerry-Jayne Wilson's latest book, West Coast Walking – a naturalist's guide which hits the bookshop shelves in mid March.



Penguinville a hit in Hokitika

Children of all ages flocked to this year's Penguinville held at Hokitika beach as part of the Driftwood & Sand beach sculpture festival. A record 87 sections were sold with children building penguin houses from

the rustic to the elaborate. This year Zoe Watson also ran environmental games on behalf of the Trust and we now own two very cool penguin suits. Reuben also ran his very popular penguin painting workshop.



Zoe's penguin games were fun



Reuben's penguin painting class



A home fit for a penguin

Become an official Blue Penguin Trust supporter

As a charitable trust we need your support and we're now offering the chance to become an official West Coast Blue Penguin Trust supporter.

Even a small donation will make a difference and you know your donation will be used locally to protect the penguins, fund world leading research and run the Trust.

The suggested Annual Supporter donation is \$25 but any contribution is appreciated and will be put to good use. We have recently signed up with new fundraising website Fundraise Online that will allow the Trust to receive donations from around New Zealand and even overseas.

"Supporters can go onto our website and just click a donations button to support us financially. Or you can donate by cheque to PO Box 63, Hokitika 7842 or with online banking, just go to our website www.bluepenguin.org.nz," says co-ordinator Inger Perkins.

Fundraise Online is a totally secure site and accepts most credit card donations without the worry of disclosing details to third parties. Every donation is paid directly to the West Coast Blue Penguin Trust and is tax deductible in New Zealand.



Scan the QR code to donate

Cape Foulwind update

Sooty shearwaters seem to have been attracted by the sound-system the Trust has put into Cape Foulwind with nesting numbers better than expected.

Chair Kerry-Jayne Wilson says at least 7 and possibly up to 13 eggs have been laid this season and all 36 known burrows have been visited.

“This is a lot better than we expected and the greatest number of Sootys we have ever had in this area so the sound-system seems to be working. Now we wait to see if our trapping programme has worked so they have a good chance of survival,” she says.

While most of the penguin nest boxes the Trust installed with the help of the Conservation Volunteers have been used we have only seen evidence of three chicks being born.

“We always knew it would be harder to attract penguins from established breeding sites. It is easier to pull in shearwaters as they fly over a larger area so are more likely to come across the calls than penguins,” says Kerry-Jayne.

Ultimately it is hoped to build up numbers of Sooty Shearwaters and Blue Penguins at the site so the public will be able to view the birds returning to their nests at dusk.

Thanks Solid Energy for funding this project



Education project planned

The Trust is currently looking for funding for an education project that would see a school resource made available for 5 to 12 year olds.

The idea came about from a desire to protect the West Coast's natural resources and it was thought targeting the younger generation would bring the message home to parents and grandparents as well. Through a variety of fun and challenging activities the children would learn about coastal birds on the West Coast as well as the threats to their survival.

The resource would be available to all West Coast schools and community groups either via the Trust delivering it or on-line.

We have applied to the Lotteries Foundation for funding but they also want to see that there is local support as well so if anyone knows a business or individual that might be prepared to donate around \$5,000 to get this project happening please get in touch with Inger via info@bluepenguin.org.nz



Zoe Watson and Reuben teach children about the environment and penguins

A day in the life the moult

It's that time of the year again when I go into semi-hibernation after gorging myself out at sea. Now after all that yummy decadence I'm stuck here in my burrow feeling hungry, itchy and grumpy. At least it is only two weeks and then I'll be back at sea with a new bright blue coat of feathers - can't wait.



Thanks to sponsors below and ANZ, Kea Tours, Hokitika's Shining Star, Birds Ferry Lodge, Rimu Lodge, Beachfront Hotel, The National Kiwi Centre and Breakers for their support.

This newsletter is distributed four times a year

