



# Places for Penguins

a Forest & Bird Wellington Branch project



**Forest  
& Bird**

TE REO O TE TAIAO  
Giving Nature a Voice

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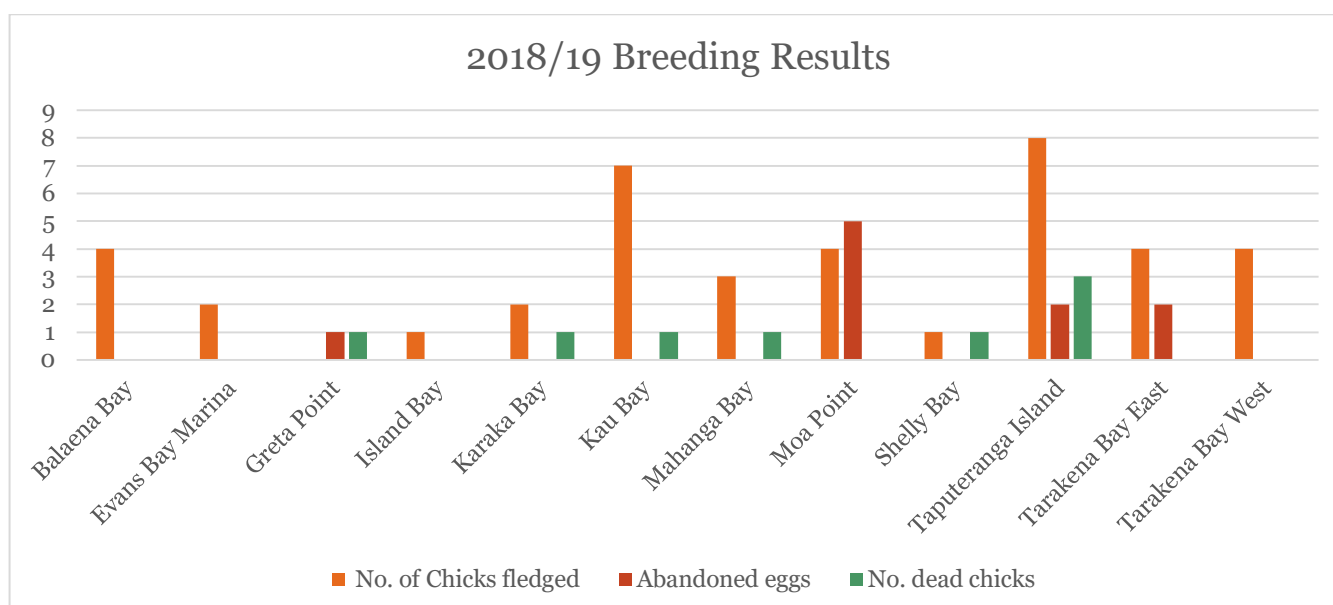
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## NESTBOX BREEDING RESULTS 2018-19

The table below shows this year's Little Blue Penguin (kororā) breeding results compared to the last four seasons. This year has been a poor year in the number of chicks fledged. This could be due to the availability of food at the critical time in the breeding season as the season was quite long: August to February. The first egg observed was on 13 August 2018.

Breeding season		(2014–15) season	(2015–16) season	(2016–17) season	(2017–18) season	(2018–19) season
Boxes	% occupied (breeding)	26%	29%	34%	33%	28%
Eggs	Laid	35	55	61	60	58
	Abandoned	1	10	12	2	10
Chicks	Hatched	34	45	49	58	48
	Dead chicks	4	2	4	2	8
	Fledged	30	43	45	56	40

During the last five years nestbox occupancy has been highly variable from year to year and it is difficult to discern any patterns yet. Taputeranga Island continues to do well, but there have been some interesting observations. A couple of boxes had two chicks but one was half the size of the other. See the next article for an explanation of why this might occur!



## DIFFERENT SIZED KORORĀ CHICKS

Little Blue Penguins almost always lay two eggs, and they are laid 2-5 days apart. Incubation starts upon laying the first egg, but it may only be partial incubation for the first few days, which delays the development of the embryo in the first laid egg.

The incubation period averages 35 days, and delaying the start of it for one egg means they hatch at about the same date, so the chicks are at similar stages of development from the outset.

Places for Penguins (PfP) monitors almost always find this to be the case when nestboxes are checked during the breeding season. Usually both chicks in one nestbox will be the same size and indistinguishable from each other.



Young downy chicks of the same size

Occasionally though, this does not happen. Now and again monitors check a nestbox and find quite differently-sized chicks inside. This year, at one of the bays where we have nestboxes, two boxes had differently-sized chicks. The pair on the left below were hatched quite early in the season. As the chicks grew and their adult feathers started to push through, they appeared to be at the same stage of development. However when the time came, one chick left and the other remained a few days on its own. It's not known if the parents continued to feed the remaining chick after the first one left. The pair on the right were from eggs laid late in the season and will continue to be monitored until they fledge.



Downy chicks of different sizes



Another box with chicks of different sizes

## LITTLE BLUE PENGUIN NESTBOX DESIGN

The first attempt at using artificial nest sites for kororā was at Phillip Island Penguin Reserve in Australia during the early 1980s. There, called Fairy Penguins, the species is present in large numbers and their nightly landfall was becoming quite a tourist attraction. Local people decided to try building nestboxes for them and they had some good success.

A man named Euan Kennedy, who was then working for the New Zealand Wildlife Service, had seen the nestboxes used at Phillip Island and wondered if they could be used at Oamaru to solve an unusual problem. Kororā were causing difficulties by nesting in places that they were not wanted, such as the local quarry. Attempts to fence them out had not been successful. Little Blue Penguins are very capable of excavating under fences, and in some places make nest burrows in soft soil.



Active nestbox showing entry tunnel

Several of the boxes initially installed were used by kororā, apparently in the first season after installation. By 1987, Euan was working for the Department of Conservation (DOC) and tried them at a location where a traditional nesting area had been damaged by construction. A third site was also provided with nestboxes in 1989. Since then, over 300 boxes have been installed in the Oamaru area.

The original design was a long nestbox with a small entry tunnel connecting to the middle at a right-angle. The early installations were done by digging into a slope and burying the whole box except for the entry tunnel. Being covered in sand or soil and

having no removable panels, checking occupancy meant reaching into the tunnel and risking the occupants' sharp beaks in the line of duty. Those pioneer nestbox monitors might have wished they could obtain some 'impeccable' gloves!

The 90's saw improvements in design. A removable panel was added for checking inside visually, and ventilation was improved. Initial fears that tanalised wood might be problematic for the birds were proven unfounded.

The boxes PfP now use are tanalised to extend their life. Rather than burying boxes, they are usually placed on the ground surface in locations hidden under dense vegetation for concealment and shade.

The design PfP uses is the one that has been developed since those early days, and it is the version recommended by DOC. There was one problem with the early boxes that needed adjustment. DOC staff found it necessary to enlarge the entry tunnel. The original dimensions were fine for breeding birds, but too small to permit access for kororā that had put on weight prior to moulting. The new sizing permits entry to larger birds but is still small enough to keep dogs out. A local adaption made for PfP is a small hole for taking the temperature inside the nestbox. When the thermometer probe is removed, a plug is inserted to seal the hole.



Empty nestbox with inspection panel removed

With thanks to Dave Houston at DOC, author of the original article.

## SEALIONS AND PENGUINS SEEN TOGETHER?

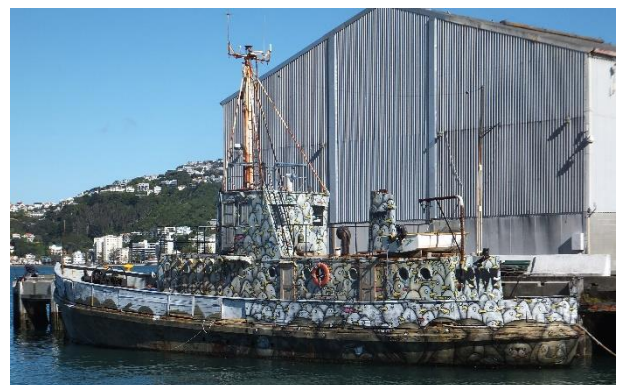
On the Wellington Waterfront, on the part of Queen's Wharf known as the outer T, there is a boat that is home to dozens, even hundreds of penguins.

The boat is the *Sealion* and it has been moored on the end of the outer T for several years. Maintenance is a never ending requirement on boats and they need regular repainting to keep them in good order.



Some time ago the *Sealion* was painted, but not as you'd think. It has been done as a floating mural of a beachside scene. Sealions are there, but the majority of the scene is given over to penguins.

On closer study, every penguin is different. There are happy ones, sad ones, weird ones, cool ones, fat ones and downright wacko ones. There are ones with short beaks, long beaks, two beaks, crinkly beaks, and coloured beaks.



It is a visual feast of splendid spheensiformes (penguins), painted with aplomb, humour and sufficient accuracy that they cannot be mistaken for any other birds. The artwork is by DSIDE Global Street Art, a Wellington based artist. The work is reminiscent of other large modern and often funny murals around Wellington. It is not finished – spaces have been left for quite a few more sea lions to go along the waterline, and presumably these must be painted from another boat.



The artist has incorporated various features of the boat into the painting. A porthole and a capstan become bulging eyes, hose reels are heads. You have to get up close to appreciate the humour and the nuances of the facial expressions on the birds, and maybe even try to count them. If you like the shark wall between Te Papa and Chaffer's New World, you'll like this. View at a distance from the Eastbourne Ferry terminal or get the full experience by walking between Ferg's Kayaks and Dockside, then turn left onto the outer T.

*Text and photos by members of the Pfp management team, except where otherwise credited.*

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