



Places for Penguins

a Forest & Bird Wellington Branch project



Forest & Bird

TE REO O TE TAIAO
Giving Nature a Voice

Newsletter

June-July 2021

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TAGGING WELLINGTON CITY'S KORORĀ

After considerable planning, Places for Penguins (PfP) have finally begun to tag the kororā around Wellington's coastline with PIT tags (Passive Integrated Transponder tags, commonly known as microchips). Being able to individually ID (identify) the birds will enable us to obtain more accurate information about how they are using the

land and sea, contributing that information to the pool of scientific knowledge. This will help us make informed conservation decisions and target our restoration efforts more effectively. We will also be able to present the data to local or regional councils and governing bodies to support their decision making.

There has been a lot of work required by the management team to get us to this point in our journey. We needed to increase our knowledge of the species and investigate where the gaps in the knowledge were. We needed to ensure we were able to carry out the work within the confines of the permit, and consult with the local iwi (thanks to Rangitopeora Wiremu) about our intentions and the benefits to the better understanding of the penguins. We then had to



Committee team weighing a kororā

ensure we created protocols that committee members and volunteers were able to comply with to ensure a smooth operation. We also had many hours of time commitment and planning regarding the logistics of how we methodically and most efficiently monitor and tag the 13 different bays we currently operate in.

The practical aspects of the operation included getting all committee members qualified to undertake the tagging work to comply with the Wildlife Act 1953 and our permits. This required the team to head down to our friends at the Oamaru penguin colony and Pukekura where they have been tagging birds for ID purposes for more than a decade. We were able to gain knowledge and experience from them to be able to tag our own penguins.

As a community-based project, we worked on getting our volunteers interested, keen to participate, and trained in how to assist. We need to ensure monitoring and tagging are not too frequent and

create as little disturbance as possible, but still maximise our research goals. We have currently selected some pilot bays around the coast to focus on before expanding out to include other bays.



Taking a beak measurement to help determine the sex.

The process involves checking and documenting the nestbox (as per original monitoring methods), carefully scanning the bird to ensure they do not already have a PIT tag, then carefully lifting the penguin out of the box to weigh them. This can give important information on health such as if the bird is feeding well or not. We then measure the bill depth and length to indicate if it is male or female, and finally perform the PIT tag insertion just under the skin between the shoulder blades following protocols for health & safety and hygiene.

We knew this would be a major task for us to undergo alone, therefore we made the decision to partner up with New Zealand Penguin Initiative (NZPI). For more info on them visit <https://www.penguin-conservation.nz/>. The organisation is run by Thomas Mattern (scientific director) and Richard Seed (research and conservation coordinator). This amazing duo aim to unite community-based conservationists under an umbrella offering support, advice, and equipment to enable work to be done with more ease. The collaboration means that all data goes to one mainstream database, which syncs the necessary information required by DoC (Department of Conservation).

This will not only provide a better combined NZ census but also allows for identifying individual birds and their life story. We would like to take the opportunity to say a huge thank you to NZPI for the support and guidance and we look forward to continuing this partnership long into the future.

PLACES FOR PENGUINS COMMITTEE GOES TO OAMARU PENGUIN SYMPOSIUM.

In early May, the PfP management team ventured down to the South Island, to attend the 12th Oamaru Penguin Symposium. This conference based around penguins and other seabirds creates a space in which knowledge and experiences are shared amongst like-minded researchers, rehabilitators, scientists, students, volunteers and conservationists. The 2021 conference saw 99 delegates congregate over two days to discuss the recent scientific knowledge gained in relation to species residing in New Zealand territory.

PfP's objective for attending the conference was to learn more about what was occurring in science relating to penguins, particularly little blue penguins (kororā), and to consider possible directions for our own research. We also wanted to network to meet and befriend other penguin fanatics and open up opportunities to share knowledge and experience.

The conference covered many topics from a range of speakers with many different experiences, which gave the listeners a fruitful insight into the amazing work going on around New Zealand.

Some speakers talked about foraging strategies and methods, and how the identification of individual birds helped them complete their research goals, specifically with Adélie penguins (*Pygoscelis adeliae*) and emperor penguins (*Aptenodytes forsteri*). Other talks were about using GPS (Global Positioning System) to document data on individuals of tawaki (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*) and

hoiho (*Megadyptes antipodes*). The GPS data gathered was used to create a map, indicating distance travelled to forage and dive depth. Dive depth can indicate things like which oceanic layers penguins are choosing to forage in for food and hence what they are feeding on. The data loggers used can also calculate the acceleration of a dive, an increase in which can indicate prey pursuit or predator avoidance. Camera loggers can also be used to get a penguin's view of its world and show how its behaviour changes when it encounters the camera.

Another form of research talked about was a 'citizen science' project, where community-reported sightings across Banks peninsula in Canterbury were used to create a census of the kororā (*Eudyptula minor*). The mammoth task was undertaken by hundreds of volunteers to gain a better understanding of their kororā population. Other speakers discussed the use of dogs in surveys, as they can be trained to become specialised detectors for other animal species. This can speed up and provide more accurate surveying beyond what humans can detect alone. The use of detection dogs for penguins is becoming a more utilised resource to survey suspected penguin localities and/or to gauge the level of presence. This can then be used to form maps of penguin presence that in turn can be used as part of the resource consent by councils or companies wishing to do coastal land alterations.

Overall, the networking and knowledge obtained from the conference by the committee team was invaluable. It gave us the opportunity to think about how we can engage more with our volunteers, how we could better achieve some of our current goals, and motivated us with the desire to continue the work that we do. We came back full of ideas for what the future could hold for our project and which directions we could propel ourselves into.



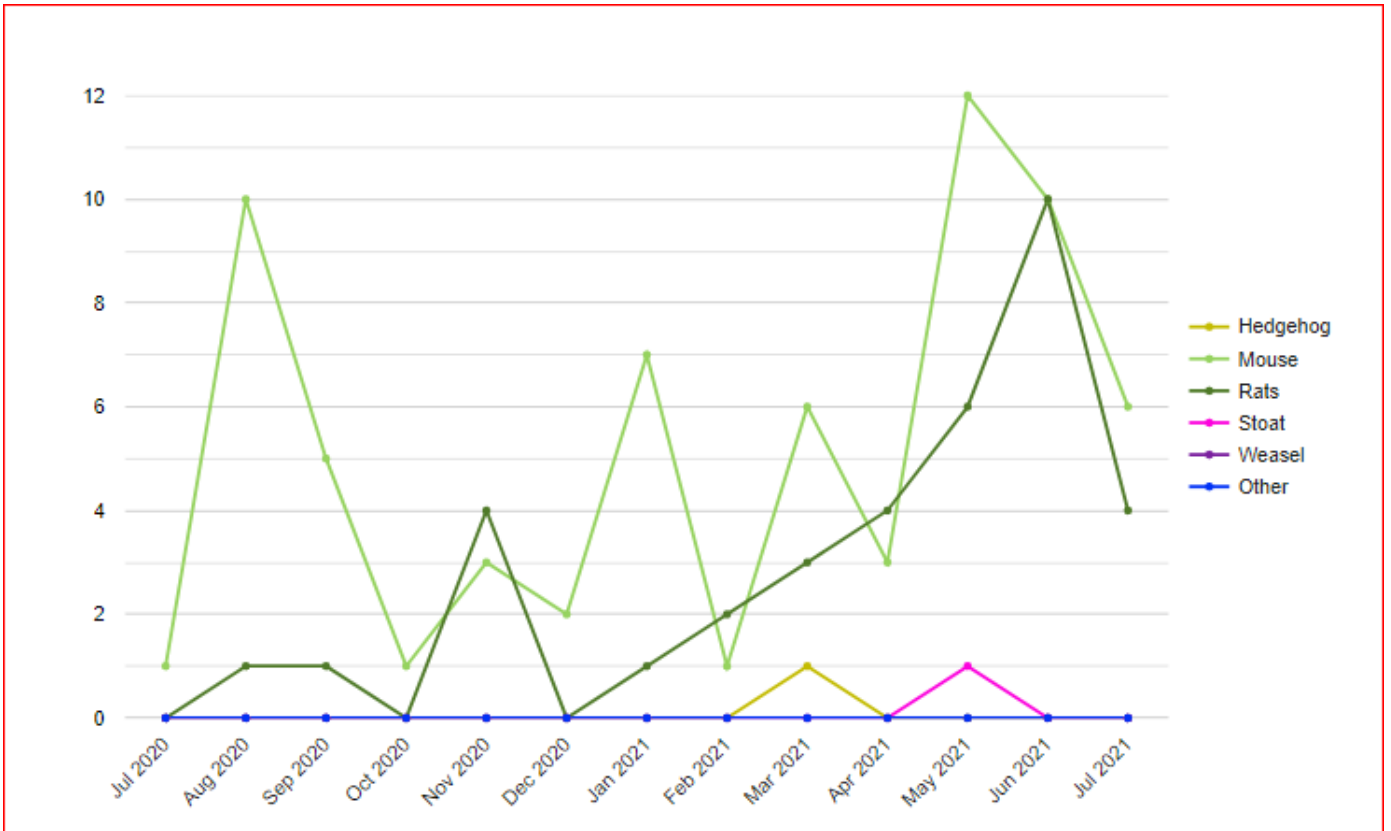
12th Oamaru Penguin Symposium: 99 penguin fanatics and guest-starring Kahu the Kororā

WORKING BEE REPORT 3RD JULY

PfP Coordinators Callum and Kerry would like to thank all the following volunteers: Lori, Grace, David, Barbara, Pippa, Mikah, William, Dhaymon, Tessa, Venu & Rashmi & their daughter for their work. We managed to get all the 200+ plants in the ground on the Seatoun/Worser Bay "Outcrop". The weather turned out perfect, a sunny winter's day with little wind so everyone got stuck in. The Outcrop is looking so much better covered with hardy native plants that can cope with the sandy soil and wind. There is now some vegetation starting to grow near the boat shed, and it will soon be possible to add some nest boxes.

TRAPPING UPDATE

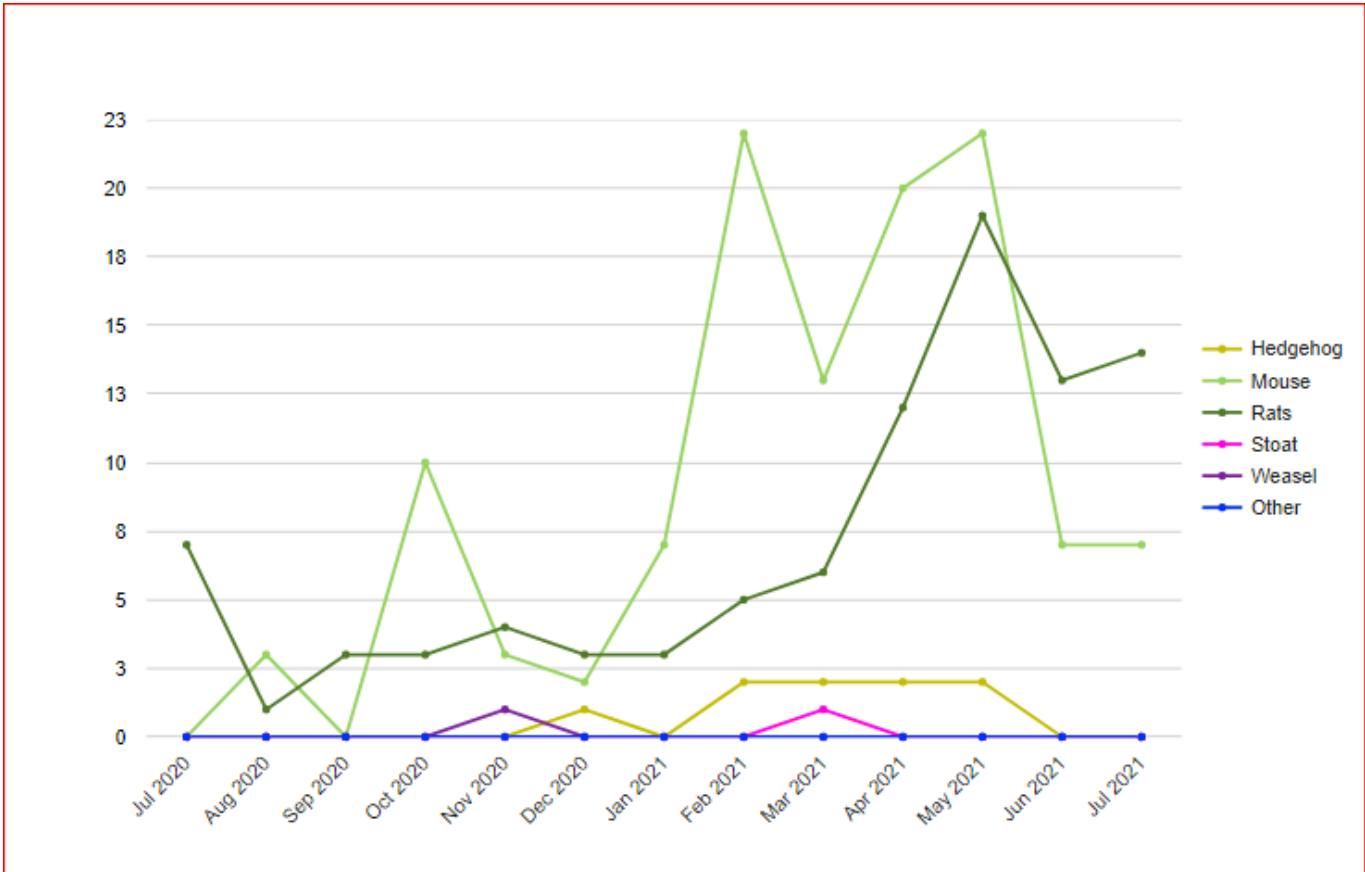
Now that the Miramar Peninsula is nearly pest free from rats and mustelids, the PfP trap monitors are checking traps around the South Coast from Owhiro Bay to Lyall Bay. Below are charts and heat maps highlighting the catches on a couple of the areas for the last year.



Owhiro Bay trap line catches in last year



Heatmap showing concentration of catches in Owhiro Bay



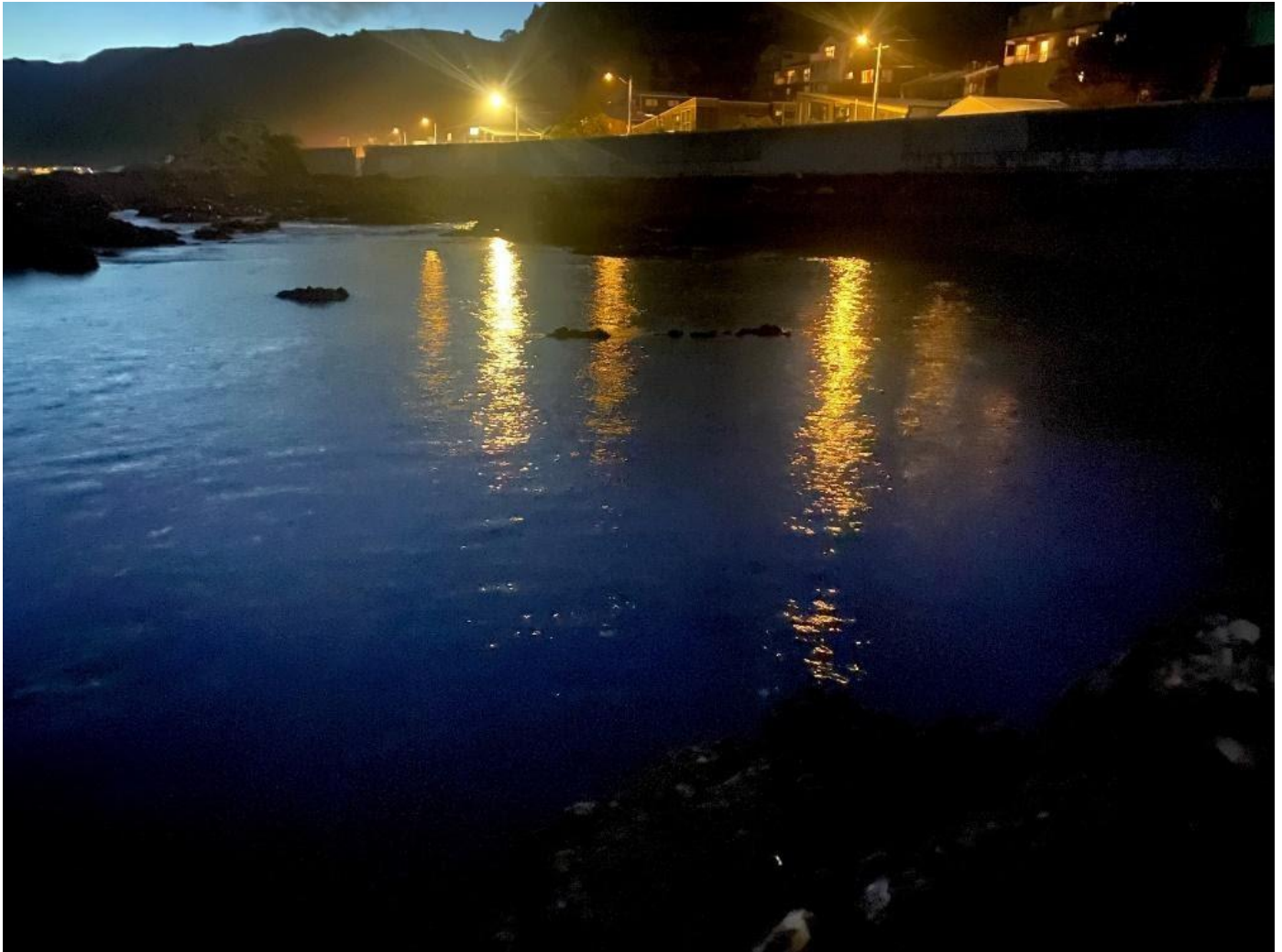
Princess & Te Raekaihau trap lines catches in last year



Heat map showing the concentration of the catches

PENGUINS IN OWHIRO BAY

One of our new volunteers Sarah was running in the evening from Island Bay to Owhiro Bay and noticed lots of penguins coming out below the concrete wall. She thought that most of them might be coming from under the road! It is very exciting that there could be a small colony there, and a good reminder that it's so important that all dogs are kept on a lead in the area. We have put out nest-boxes in the hopes of them settling in but ultimately kororā will choose their own nesting sites, and don't mind if they have to cross the road. If you look carefully, you might see a group of small white dots in the picture. It is very hard to photo small sea birds in the dark but you can hear them when they come into land. Below is one of the photos taken by Sarah.



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

Thanks to all our partners and supporters: Wellington City Council, Greater Wellington Regional Council, the Department of Conservation, the Society for Conservation Biology group at Victoria University, Conservation Volunteers of New Zealand, Weta Digital, Tumbleweed Tees, Sue Dasler Pottery, and the Henderson Trust via the Nikau Foundation.

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