



Places for Penguins

a Forest & Bird Wellington Branch project



Forest & Bird

TE REO O TE TAIAO
Giving Nature a Voice

Newsletter

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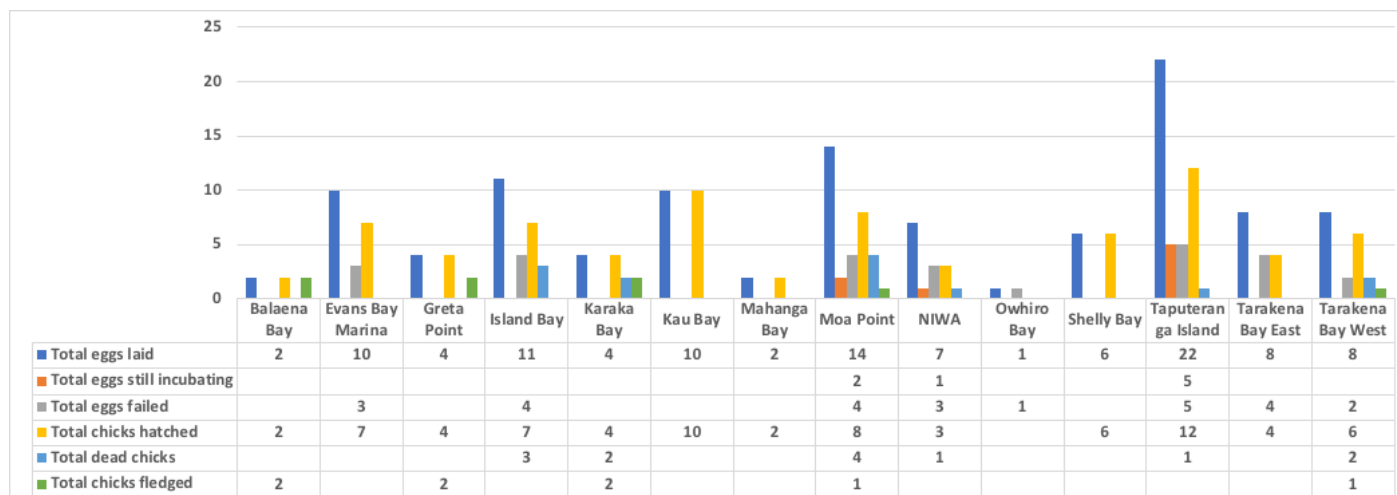
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SEASON UPDATE (AS OF DECEMBER 2021)

This year we had a few little blue penguins (kororā) come back early to settle down and nest, with the earliest nests found on Taputeranga Island and Moa Point in July! Unfortunately the Taputeranga nest failed but the Moa Point nest produced a single chick who was also the first of the season to be marked with one of our PIT-tags.

We have had a total of 109 eggs laid across all our bays (except our new Cobham Drive group), with 54 of our 138 nest boxes being used this season. So far 75 chicks have hatched successfully with 8 of these already having fledged and left the nest. We have 54 chicks still residing in our nest-boxes, with the remaining 13 chicks unfortunately not making it to the end of the season.

At the time of writing we were still waiting on 8 incubating eggs, with the majority of these residing in a 'limbo state' in our data as the Taputeranga monitors were unable to visit the island due to the harsh weather during December. A total of 26 eggs this season failed to hatch.



NEW NEST BOX COORDINATORS

We have had a reshuffle in our committee team regarding the nest box coordinator role. Andrea was hired as the New Zealand Penguin Initiative coordinator, so was unable to continue as nest box coordinator for Places for Penguins (Pfp). She will however still be in charge of coordinating the tagging that we do. Katherine Smith (Kat) will be the new coordinator and point of contact for all the matters related to nest box monitoring, and Brittany Florence-Bennett (Britt) will be responsible for the data analysis and monthly updates.

Kat is the Karaka Bay team leader and has experience as a handler and tagger with both kororā and tawaki. She works at Wellington Zoo as the avian Zookeeper, where she is also responsible for looking after the penguin inhabitants of the zoo.

Britt has been a monitor with the Island Bay team for three years and part of the committee since February 2021. She graduated with a MSc in Ecology & Biodiversity and works as a Community Outreach Officer with Predator Free Wellington. Britt dedicates a great deal of her free time to helping plan ways to move forward with penguin conservation and advocacy, and is also looking after our social media.

We thank Andrea hugely for the fantastic job she did as the nest box coordinator, and wish her well with her new exciting role.

WELLINGTON ZOO CONSERVATION GRANT AWARDED TO PLACES FOR PENGUINS

We at Places for Penguins have been extremely successful in being granted the generous sum of \$4,500 from Wellington Zoo Trusts Conservation Grant. Since we have approximately 50 volunteers helping with our mahi, anything that allows us to streamline the logistics for monitoring sessions is incredibly helpful. The new equipment we are able to purchase through this grant will enhance volunteer experience and workflow, and will provide insightful data that we can use for our kororā research objectives.

The much-needed capital will enable us to purchase more specialist equipment such as Passive Integrated Transponder readers (PIT wands) that can scan each bird that has been given a microchip. This gives us data such as how frequently each individual bird travels to a particular bay, their choice in mating partner (or partners!) and annual breeding success for that individual. We will also purchase more trail cameras to capture video or images of the activity surrounding the nest boxes. These data collection techniques allow us to carry out our research in a way that disturbs the birds as little as possible, and obtain more data than we did before, including also getting an idea of predator presence in the area.

We look forward to making these purchases and getting stuck in to using the equipment, which will help us to gain essential data and make more informed decisions for how to best protect some of the wildlife on Wellington's coastlines.

DOG DETECTIVE

This year WCC contracted a penguin detection team (DOC certified dog trainer Alistair Judkins and dog Mena) to search for natural kororā nest sites all the way from Balaena Bay to Owhiro Bay. The dynamic duo took six days to complete this task. The results were very encouraging, and we now have a better understanding on the number of breeding pairs of kororā around our coastline. Importantly, we also have evidence of kororā nesting in areas we didn't previously know about, so those new areas will be on our radar if any coastal development is suggested. Most



of the natural nests detected were in the 'rip rap' but one penguin was discovered with a nest burrowed into the sand, which is very unusual for Wellington. However, the nest has since been swept away in the latest storm.

Over 100 sites were detected which is promising news. It was also interesting to find where the kororā hot spots are around the coast so that we can work with WCC to provide better protection and improve the environment. We thank WCC for their support and funding of this very important work.

ORIGINS OF TE WHANGANUI-A-TARA (MĀORI LEGEND)

Soon after Te Ika-a-Māui (the Fish of Māui) was pulled out of the ocean to become the North Island of Aotearoa, there lived two taniwha in a lake near the head of the fish. The lake was located where Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington Harbour) is now, but was completely landlocked.

One of the taniwha was called Ngake, and he was energetic and enthusiastic, swimming quickly around the harbour and chasing fish. The other taniwha was called Whātaimai, and he preferred to take life slowly, usually resting on the shores of the lake.

Over time they grew bigger, and after hearing many stories of how vast and plentiful the ocean was just beyond the southern cliffs of the lake, Ngake convinced Whātaimai that they should break out of the lake and spend their lives in the ocean.

One day Ngake went to the northern end of the lake where Whātaimai was bathing, and told him he was going to finally break out. Ngake coiled his tail like a spring against the north side of the lake and then suddenly let it go. Ngake was launched across the lake and slammed into the cliffs on the other side. The force shattered the cliffs and created a pathway through to Te Moana o Raukawa (the Cook Strait), where Ngake now had his freedom.

Whātaimai saw what Ngake had done and tried to copy him, but because he hadn't been as active as Ngake his tail was not as strong and as he reached the gap that Ngake had created, his stomach grazed across the ground causing him to slow down and get stuck before he could reach the sea.

Whātaimai was completely stranded, forced to rely on the tide to bring fish and dampen his skin. After years of living like this there was suddenly an earthquake that lifted the land beneath him up out of the water and high into the air. Without access to the tides for food or water he soon died, and his spirit left his body in the form of a bird, Te Keo, and flew to the closest mountain, Matairangi (Mt Victoria).

Te Keo looked down on the body of the taniwha and wept, before departing for the taniwha spirit world. This gave the very top of Matairangi the name Tangi te Keo (Te Keo's mourning).

Over time Whātaimai's body turned to rock and became the area known as Hataimai. The gash in the earth left by Ngake's tail spring became Te Awakairangi (the Hutt River), and some of the leftover rocks from the smashed cliff became Te Aroaro o Kupe (Steeple Rock) and Te Tangihanga o Kupe (Barrett's Reef). Ngake was never seen again, but some say he resides mostly in Te Moana o Raukawa. Whenever the water is turbulent he is there chasing fish, but when it is calm, he is off exploring te Moana Nui a Kiwa (the Pacific Ocean).

THANKS TO NEW WORLD MIRAMAR AND ISLAND BAY

Since PpP nest monitors have begun using Passive Integrated Transponder (or PIT tags) to identify individual penguins, it has required the nest box monitors in the selected bays to 'wand' the penguins while they are breeding (wave the wand near the penguins so it reads the data on the tags). As our colony is spread out along the coast, we needed to find a place to store the wand so that the monitors could easily pick it up and drop it off. One of our monitors talked to New World supermarkets in Miramar and Island Bay as they were in great central locations along the coast. They very kindly offered to store the equipment securely for us. PpP would like to thank New World Miramar & Island Bay staff for this ongoing support.

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, the Henderson Trust via the Nikau Foundation, and New World Miramar.

**Absolutely Positively
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Me Heke Ki Pōneke



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