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## **GOOD NEWS FOR PUKEKURA PENGUIN POPULATION CULTURAL ECOTOURISM OPERATION HELPS KORORA LITTLE BLUE PENGUINS FLOURISH**



### **The summer of 2017/18 was a tough one for little blue penguins up north but at the Blue Penguins Pukekura colony it's been all good news.**

Manager Hoani Langsbury says “Hundreds of little blue penguins died in the North Island, washing up on beaches starving and unhealthy, and this was attributed to the effects of La Nina. However our colony at Pukekura is one of the few little blue penguin colonies that are growing. We believe that the partnership work we do, funded by our visitors, is one of the key reasons for our success.”

Since 2012 a guardianship (kaitiakitaka in Maori) and tourism project, jointly managed by the Royal Albatross Centre, Otago Peninsula Trust, Korako Karetai Trust and Pukekura Trust, has seen the penguin population increase to approximately 250 breeding pairs. This summer 313 chicks successfully fledged.

Key factors in keeping these little blue penguins safe, and supporting their breeding, are preventing them from getting onto the road and into the carpark, protecting them from introduced predators (rats, feral cats, stoats and dogs), planting native trees and shrubs to give shelter, providing them with ready-made nests where they can incubate their eggs and raise their chicks (large enclosed wooden nesting boxes that are half buried), and strictly managing people's access into the area.

The tourism operation, where up to 90 visitors per night learn about the penguins, then watch them from a platform as they emerge from the sea at dusk and scurry up the beach and into the bushes to their nests, has generated revenue which supports the penguins in the best way possible as Hoani explains. “The visitors' financial contribution goes directly towards penguin welfare and habitat restoration. This includes revegetation of the area, with over 15,000 plants established, more than 150 nest boxes built, 671 pests destroyed, and for the last two breeding seasons we've had a dedicated penguin scientist monitoring their welfare.”

School children from Otago have been involved with weeding, replanting and installing nest boxes. This provides a wonderful opportunity for hands-on-science and an understanding of ecology.

The management of the penguins at Pilot's Beach (Takiharuru is the Maori name) has gone ahead in stages. First enclose the nesting area, next control the introduced predators, then enhance their habitat, and alongside all of this, educate the visitors. Things have shifted up a notch over the last two summers with the introduction of radiofrequency identification (RFID). Scientist Hilrun Ratz and volunteers have microchipped 1007 little blue penguins at the colony. The data from these chips provides vital information on many aspects of the penguins' comings and goings.

In 2018 we've had another special 'first' at Blue Penguins Pukekura. “This year as part of our kaitiakitaka responsibility we supplementary fed a total of 29 chicks that had been abandoned by their parents. The parents had switched to their moulting mode where they stay on land and don't go out to sea to get food. 24 of these chicks fledged successfully,” explains Hoani.

Kai Tahu, the local Maori, hold the little blue penguins in their hearts as taoka (treasures). Those who are descendants of the revered chief Karetai have an important connection with Takiharuru. They take the role of kaitiaki (guardians) and leaders in sharing the area with visitors to provide a sustainable environment for all, including future generations.

Kai Tahu had a significant settlement called Pukekura at Taiaroa Head from the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Takiharuru is a sacred and special place for the descendants of paramount chief Karetai, a signatory to the Treaty of Waitangi, who lived out his final years on the headland overlooking the beach.

Visitors to Blue Penguins Pukekura contribute to a cultural ecotourism venture which is a true community partnership, where science and Maori kaitiakitaka are working to make a secure future for the little blue penguins of Takiharuru.

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Pukekura is an unmissable wildlife paradise. The headland is home to the kororā (Little Blue Penguin) Colony, the Royal Albatross Colony, a seal colony and nine types of nesting birds with over 20 species spotted around the area.

Living at Pukekura:

Native/Endemic: Spotted Shag, Royal Spoonbill, Little Shag, NZ Fur Seal, Oystercatcher, Red-billed gull, Northern Royal Albatross, Black-backed Gull, Sooty Shearwater, Fantail, Stewart Island Shag, Little Blue Penguins, Paradise Shelduck, Oystercatcher, Welcome Swallow, Wax Eyes, Grey Warbler.

Introduced: Little Owl, Starlings, Blackbird, Hedge Sparrow, Skylark, Song Thrush

Visits Pukekura:

Australian Gannet, Giant Petrel, NZ White-capped Albatross, Bullers Mollymawk, Australasian Harrier, Yellow-eyed Penguin, White-faced Heron, White-fronted Tern, NZ Sea Lion, Elephant Seal.

## Background

### Fast Facts:

Otago Peninsula Trust was formed in 1967 and is New Zealand's first private charitable conservation Trust.

The Trust is a major ecotourism operator, hosting over 200,000 visitors annually to its award winning enterprises.

To achieve its objectives the Trust oversees the business operations and marketing of:

- The Royal Albatross Centre at Taiaroa Head; The world's only mainland Royal Albatross breeding colony
- Historic Fort Taiaroa, underground fortifications with world's only fully restored 1889 Armstrong disappearing gun
- Glenfalloch Woodland Garden. Stunning 1871 historic garden. Seasonal displays.
- Glenfalloch Restaurants; Top 10 Dunedin Restaurant. Dining, Weddings, functions and conferences.
- Fletcher House, Edwardian villa built in 1909 by Sir James Fletcher (management contract)
- Pukekura Blue Penguins, World's smallest penguin, evening penguin viewing tours (joint venture)
- Education Programmes: Interactive student focussed LEOTC in natural environments.

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