



ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

Message from the Chair

Our vision continues to be that “Sea and shore birds and their habitat across the West Coast Te Tai Poutini are healthy and thriving”.

Our mission is to achieve the vision through research, education, awareness, advocacy and practical projects, founded on strong science.

To work towards our vision, we have relied on grant funding from the Department of Conservation (DOC), settling into a pattern in recent years of \$1 from DOC, \$1 from donations and other grants, and an equivalent \$1 from volunteer time and in kind contributions, that is 50% of our expenditure from DOC and \$3 of conservation for every DOC dollar. Our last DOC grant ran out in November and the once annual funding round, absent for a couple of years, was finally announced around the same time. However, with both penguin species classified as *At Risk, Declining*, the fourth tier of the classification system, we were not eligible as only groups working to conserve species in the top three tiers could apply. In fact, when grants were announced recently, it seems that DOC had only been able to focus on the top tier, *Nationally Critical*, excluding even the Yellow-eyed penguin / hoiho.

I have explained the situation with regard to DOC funding to help clarify where we find ourselves. We believe very strongly in the need for our work to continue, to better understand the ecology of and threats to both kororā and tawaki here on the coast, so that we can lead and support conservation actions to protect them. We will do all we can to ensure that work continues and, for now, that means a bit of belt tightening and being clear on our priorities, especially fundraising while maintaining existing projects.

Change has remained a theme for the Trust this year with Education/Awareness Ranger, Lucy Waller, adding the main Trust Ranger role to her responsibilities after Linden Brown resigned to focus on other projects. We acknowledged the loss of Kerry-Jayne Wilson MNZM from our world and from the world of seabird science at a well-attended memorial ‘party’ in Charleston, as Kerry-Jayne wished and a year after she died.

Our scientific endeavours, previously guided by Kerry-Jayne, are now guided by Dr Thomas Mattern, the leading NZ penguin scientist who worked with Kerry-Jayne on and their [State of Penguins](#) report. We are very fortunate to benefit from his extensive experience and wisdom.

Penguins and other sea and shore birds are a treasure or taonga, and we strive to protect and conserve them and the wider marine and coastal environment in all that we do. Through our various projects, from field work to classroom education, from advocacy to fundraising and social media, we have contributed to and advanced penguin and seabird conservation. We are determined to continue to do so and we invite you to help us when and however you may be able to.



Robin Long, Chair, West Coast Penguin Trust
August 2023



Highlights of Trust Projects over the Year

Little penguin / kororā monitoring

- 2022 proved to be a challenging season for kororā on the West Coast. Our two monitored sites at Charleston had a late start to the breeding season, with the first eggs laid in late August, which is 2-3 weeks later than normal. From then on kororā bred in a slow trickle, with eggs still being laid in late October. Sadly, over half of these eggs did not hatch after being abandoned by the adults. Lack of easily available food is the likely cause of this attributable to the marine heatwave, with the adults having to take long foraging trips at sea whilst the other parent stayed on the eggs.
- As a result, we saw a low rate of breeding success from the 2022 season, with only 35% of eggs successfully fledging. This is comparable to some previous seasons such as 2016 and 2017 (37% & 43%), but significantly lower than the last two seasons (80-90%)
- The number of eggs laid at the Nile colony were higher than the previous year, inflated by the discovery of three additional breeding burrows (which were likely to be breeding in previous seasons). Additionally, and somewhat interestingly, two pairs laid a second clutch of eggs this season. This is common at East Coast colonies, but quite a rarity on the West Coast. One of these pairs successfully raised their first clutch and the second clutch failed, whilst the other failed on their first clutch before successfully raising their second clutch.

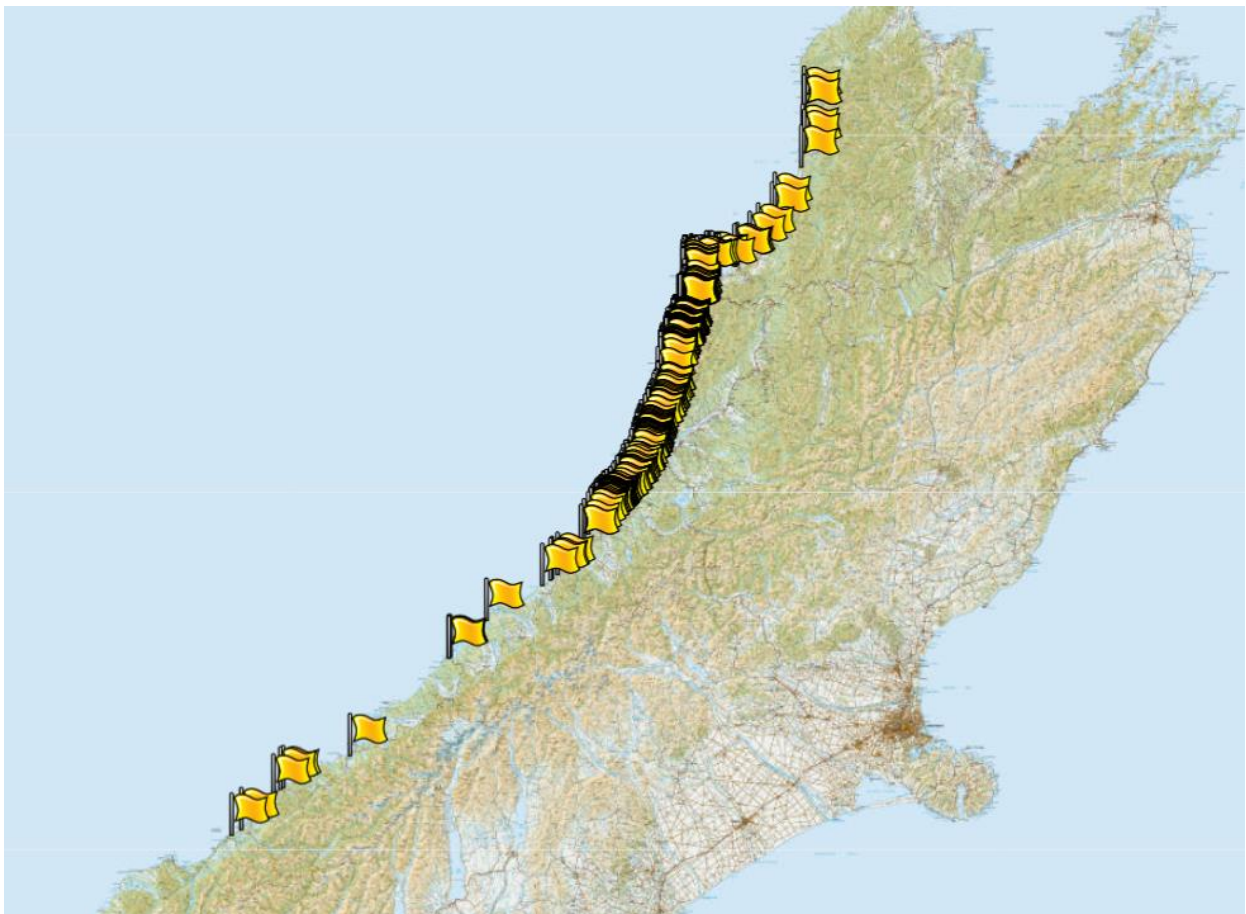


1. A blue penguin / kororā chick viewed using a burrowscope;
2. Kororā tracks coming and going safely south of Okarito

- We also monitor four other sites along the Buller coast once or twice each season for an indication of population trends. Sadly one of those, at Punakaiki, has had just one or no breeding burrows in recent years. It should be protected by our first and trial section of penguin protection fence, however loose dogs are likely to have killed any penguins that attempt to nest there.
- South of Okarito is the largest colony of little penguins / kororā on the coast, safe from dogs and cars. We monitor every few years and Ranger Linden Brown carried out a survey there in October, the first time since 2018. Breeding appeared to be later there as well, presumably due to the reduction in food supply due to the marine heatwave, but numbers of breeding pairs found was the same as in 2015. Linden noted “the Ōkārīto colony is a healthy and safe kororā colony; a reminder

of how things would have been in the past, but also a vision of something to work towards for other kororā colonies on the West Coast.”

- Some dogs are a hundred times better at finding penguins than we are. Their sense of smell beats our sense of sight hands down. We were fortunate to have conservation dog handler, Alastair Judkins, and his beautiful Weimaraner, Mena, join us for two weeks in September for their second visit. With Rangers Linden and Lucy, Mena worked hard on coastal surveys at beaches from Hari Hari to Granity and for several school visits along the way. We were very sad to hear that Mena had died earlier this year.
With grateful thanks to the Bill Blackadder Trust for their support of the survey work.
- When the Trust started in 2006, our first objective was to understand what might have been contributing to an anecdotal decline in numbers of kororā. A simple spreadsheet database was established in collaboration with DOC to record every reported dead penguin. We have recently spent time adding grid references and translating those records, around 400, to a gpx file that can be viewed on maps, each data point including date, cause of death if known and a description of the location. We are grateful to volunteer Fung Lai for work on this project and to DOC for allowing the data to be shared. It will now be shared with council planners across the region.



Map showing dead penguin reports, 2006-2022

Penguin protection fences

- The Coast Road penguin protection fence continues to protect penguins. When it was built in 2014, three major gaps were left where owners of baches on the legal road managed by Waka Kotahi / NZTA were not supportive of the fence plan. Numbers of penguins in those protected colonies appear to be growing now they are safe and we have sadly received reports of one penguin killed and others seen on the road close to the gaps. We are working to fill the gaps, ensuring bach owner wishes are met where practicable, and were grateful to two new bach owners for their

support. A new section of fencing was completed in June 2023, just in time for the new penguin season, with excellent support from Waka Kotahi and Westreef. We hope to close the remaining gaps in the next year or two, to ensure penguins are safe along this stretch of road.



New section of penguin protection fence at Limestone Creek being installed by Westreef

- The new Hokitika Fence, sponsored by Westland Milk Products, has been performing the same successful role on the northern side of Hokitika. Very sadly, one penguin died at Houhou Creek recently when Chorus had removed part of the fence there to replace cables. Having tracked down Chorus and the local team, Ranger Lucy explained the situation and there was immediate understanding and a promise to ensure the fence was left secure each night during the installation.
- We are very grateful to Waka Kotahi, who increased their annual contribution to fence maintenance from \$5,000 to \$10,000, which supported the new fence installation at Limestone Creek. Our thanks go to Westreef and Rota Carroll in particular for the work on the new section of fence, as well as to Fulton Hogan for ensuring the grant went to the new section of fence.

Foraging study – GPS tags for kororā

- Our kororā foraging study was on hold in 2021 while we recruited our new ranger, Linden Brown, and we had hoped to relaunch and extend it during the 2022 season with generous support from the Brian Mason Trust and the Environment & Heritage Lottery Fund. However, it quickly became apparent that the penguins were under stress, probably due to the marine heat wave, and the call was made to cancel it for the season before it began to avoid further stressing the birds. Both grant funders have agreed to an extension so that the study will take place during the 2023 and 2024 seasons with the guidance of penguin scientist, Dr Thomas Mattern and the generous support of land owners Matt Charteris and Annabel Gossett.

Trapping to protect seabird colonies

CAPE FOULWIND

- The trust maintains a network of 22 traps at the southern end of the Cape Foulwind walkway, with the twin goals of maintaining the predator-free status of nearby Wall Island, where seabirds nest in every inch of the island, and protecting any sooty shearwaters which breed on the mainland in this area. New Ranger, Lucy Waller, attended predator control training provided by the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology as one of the first actions in her new role, and has been putting effort into maintaining the traps and trap boxes in recent months.
- During the 2022 breeding season, previous Ranger, Linden Brown, monitored the sooty shearwater nests at the Cape Foulwind site with fortnightly visits and a couple of trail cameras. The Trust has seen a few more birds nest there over the years but never seen any chicks survive. Linden established that nests failed at the point of or soon after eggs hatching and a weka was seen at a burrow on camera imagery. It seems likely that weka will be taking chicks as soon as they are hatched, a very natural situation but very disappointing. We hope to better understand the situation with further monitoring during the 2023 breeding season, approximately November to January.



A sooty shearwater in its Cape Foulwind burrow

SEAL ISLAND

- Seal Island, north of Punakaiki, is home to spotted shags and sooty shearwaters. The island is connected to the mainland at low tide and the Trust's predator control project is aimed at keeping the island rat, weasel and stoat free. Trustee and volunteer, Margaret Costello, with the help of her husband Jim, has installed and maintained predator traps on the mainland adjacent to Seal Island for six years. Huge thanks go to Margaret and Jim for all the patient and regular effort over the years. Little penguins / kororā also nest in this area, protected from the state highway by a section of penguin protection fence.



Seal Island at low tide

Fiordland crested penguins / tawaki

- By contrast to kororā, tawaki had a good breeding season in 2022, with breeding success between 72% and 100% at the three colonies we monitor in South Westland, where success is one chick alive before chicks gather to crèche. These results are roughly in line with the previous three seasons.

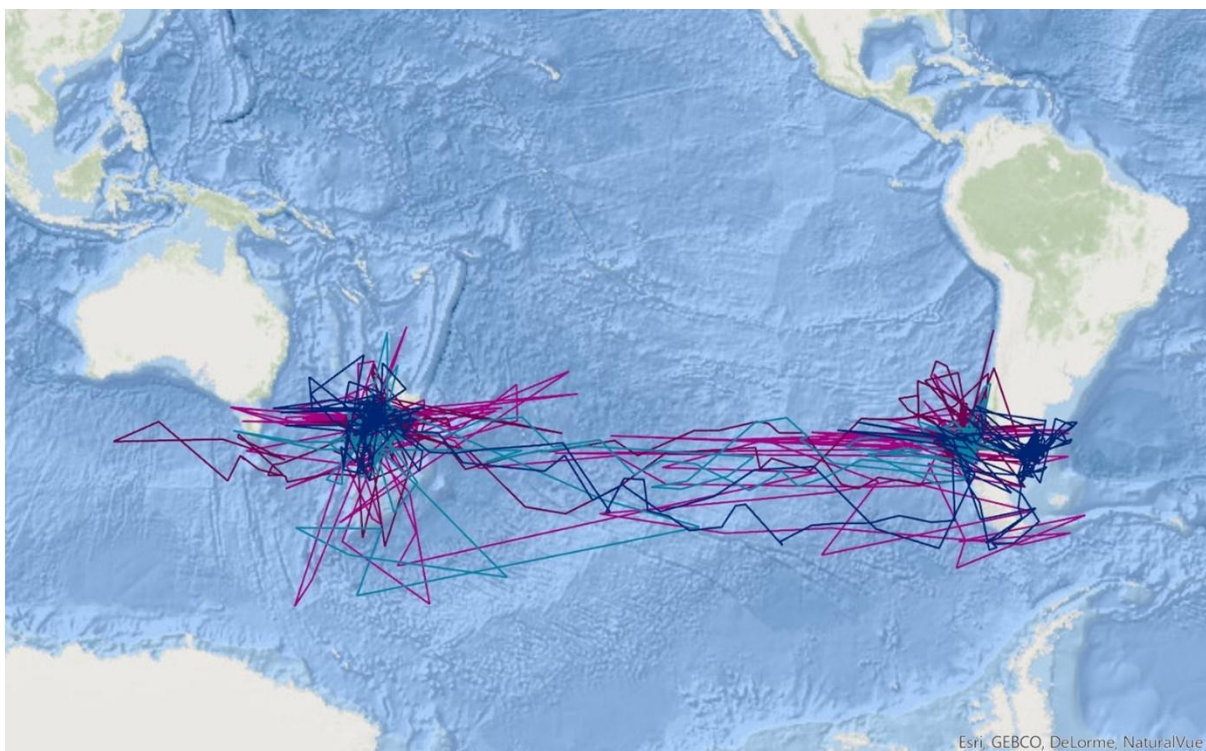


Adult tawaki leading chick to the sea (photo: Dr G McSweeney)

- The breeding season progressed as normal after a late start. The marine heatwave and sea surface temperatures several degrees warmer than average brought about by La Niña conditions appear to have been easier for tawaki to navigate. We believe that this may be down to the larger size of tawaki and their ability to dive to greater depths than kororā, and therefore able to reach the colder water where prey fish would be found. Dr Thomas Mattern and Dr Ursula Ellenberg of The Tawaki Project have found that tawaki dive up to 113m off the coast of Fiordland, with a mean of 27.5 ± 7.2 m. Kororā on the other hand are likely to dive up to 10m for most of their foraging, occasionally up to around 20m. Dr Robert Smith, Moana Project oceanographer from the University of Otago, reported that the eastern Tasman Sea was more than two degrees warmer than normal at depths of 100-400m¹.
- We would like to acknowledge the wonderful annual support from the Wellington Zoo Trust, which supports our monitoring and better understanding of tawaki. Our research puts us in a strong position to advocate for better conservation management.

Westland petrels / taiko

- Over the years, the trust has supported research to understand and improve the conservation of Westland petrels and we continue to advocate for them as needed, along with all threatened seabird species in the region and their habitat, both on land and at sea.
- The third season of a three year study of Westland petrels /taiko is underway, managed by DOC and led by Westport biodiversity ranger, Kate Simister. The project is funded by the Conservation Services Programme, which in turn is managed by DOC with funding from the fishing industry. The CSP monitors the impact of commercial fishing on protected species, studies species populations and looks at ways to mitigate bycatch . Interim findings were published recently and are available on the Trust's website. In the meantime, the trust supports the project when needed.



Interim report from DOC illustrates Westland petrel annual migration

¹ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/482415/marine-heatwave-fiordland-set-to-reach-record-sea-temperature>
West Coast Penguin Trust Annual Report 2022-23

Education

- Following the disruption caused by the pandemic and changes to the curriculum, teachers and schools have been finding time for penguin education, guided by Ranger Lucy Waller and school visits are in demand again.
- Combined with survey work by penguin detection dog, Mena, and handler Alastair Judkins, Mena and Alastair joined Lucy for visits to 11 schools from South Westland Area School to Granity School. The much appreciated visits kick started a renewed interest in penguin conservation, our educational resource book providing valuable activities that fit perfectly with the new local focus of the curriculum. Grateful thanks to Pub Charity for supporting Mena's visits to all these schools.



Hokitika Primary School children meet penguin detection dog, Mena

- We have been working with Mohua (Golden Bay) Little Penguin Trust to adapt our educational resource for their region and we expect to have the new edition ready soon.
- Education remains a key component of our work. We know that giving children an understanding and appreciation of penguins and their environment is an excellent way to help them develop an enduring love for nature. Those lifelong values start with understanding and connecting to nature and our programme does that through everyone's favourite, the little penguin or kororā, and extends to other seabirds. Children that we connected with years ago are now adults, including one local primary teacher. It is encouraging to know that they have kept and promote those values we shared years ago.
- We are grateful and honoured to be working with many wonderful and committed teachers across the region and their students. We are also enormously grateful to the following for grants, without which, this programme would be much reduced: the Sargood Bequest, the West Coast Community Trust, and Scotlands Te Kiteroa Trust. Donations from our generous supporters also keep this enormously important and valued work going.

Awareness and advocacy

- Raising awareness is a key role for the trust, to share news, raise awareness of threats to penguins and provide guidance to minimise risks, invite donations and generally connect people to our projects and the nature on their doorstep as much as possible.

- Advocacy is another key area of work, focussed on opportunities to improve the protection of penguins and other threatened seabirds as well as to raise awareness of and manage threats to them. We watch for resource consent applications in coastal areas and share knowledge of penguin activity in such areas, as well as actions or conditions that could keep penguins and other seabirds safe. We also contribute comments to help guide planners and law makers as new plans and legislation is being drafted, including, for example, the new District Plan, TTPP, and the Stewardship Land Review by DOC.

West Coast Penguin Trust Board

- With the death of Kerry-Jayne Wilson MNZM in March 2022, a couple of other changes of trustees as well as new rangers, we have put a period of change behind us and now have a positive and supportive team with five volunteer trustees and three part time staff, and the benefit of guidance from Dr Thomas Mattern. The team has been taking time to clarify priorities and focus on the future.

Thanks to our Trust Team:

Patron

Craig Potton MNZM

Trustees

Robin Long (Chair)

Jill Cotton

Margaret Costello

Martin Abel

Suzanne Hills

Manager Inger Perkins

Accounts Karen Grant

Rangers Linden Brown (Ranger from September 2021 to March 2022), Lucy Waller (Ranger from March 2022 and Education/Awareness Ranger), Tawaki Rangers: Catherine Stewart, André de Graaf, Polly Hall

Dr Scott Freeman, Advisory Trustee from DOC

Website and IT services

Leon Dalziel of Baby-e Website Design

James Kim

Thanks to our sponsors and donors:

We are enormously grateful for the ongoing support we have received from our sponsors, Supporters (Annual Supporters are those who donate a minimum of and often far more than \$50 a year plus a few Supporters for Life (minimum \$500 donation)), other donors, and those who have provided in-kind support for the financial year to the end of March 2023. It is only with their assistance, plus that of volunteers, that we can carry on our operation – conservation projects that are critical to ensuring that penguins and other threatened seabird in our region thrive.

We are enormously grateful to the Department of Conservation for the generous support and collegiality from staff across the region and beyond that is essential to our operation. We hope that DOC may be in a position to support our work again in the future.

Huge thanks to the following wonderful individuals and organisations and to others who wish to remain anonymous, or we may have missed for their marvellous generosity, encouragement and confidence in what we do.

| Generous providers of grants | Superb Supporters | Other fabulous donors |
|--|--|---|
| Department of Conservation (2019 grant, completed November 2022) | Alice Shanks | Pension Insurance Corporation PLC |
| W.C Community Trust | Alun Hassall | Waka Kotahi NZTA |
| Wellington Zoo Trust | Amy Wilson | Flow State Solutions |
| Sargood Bequest | Anna McKay - Woodpecker Bay Baches | Westland Milk Products |
| Scotlands Te Kiteroa Trust | Annie Inwood | Grey High School students |
| Bill Blackadder Trust | Brenda Kaye | Tumbleweed Tees |
| Brian Mason Trust | Carolyn Hewlett | |
| Pub Charity | Catherine van Paassen | Andrew Pester |
| | Christian Masser | Betty Seddon |
| | Christine Stet | Briar Charmley |
| Donation box hosts | Chuck Theriault and Elysa Dennett | Brooke Rattenbury |
| DOC Punakaiki Visitor Centre | Daniel Beetham - Woodpecker Bay Baches | CJ Philip |
| Fox River Market | Deborah Carden | Carolyn Hewlett |
| Kiwi Centre - Hokitika | Dorte Herholdt Silver | Elizabeth Meaclem |
| J's Café - Westport | Dr Jonathon Clearwater | Frida Inta |
| Photo Corner / Moments in Time - Hokitika | Fung Lai | Gemma Torr |
| Underworld Adventures - Charleston | Jack & Kay Davidson | Glacier Valley Eco Tours – Tash Goodwin |
| Westport New World | Jan/Stephen Macdonald/Roberts - Breakers | Haydon Ditchburn |
| Hokitika Craft Gallery | Jayne Blakemore | Jenny Greene |
| Ross Store | Jessica Inglefield | Jess Reedy |
| Woodpecker Bay Bach | Kim & Stu Free – Canterbury Petfoods | Ken & Ruth New |
| | Little Blue Falmouth - Holin Davison | Kerri Lukis |
| | Lore Leseberg | Kerry-Ann Schacter – Annie Oak |
| Special mentions | Lyn & Alan Stobie | Kim McPherson |
| Matt Charteris & Annabel Gossett | Maria Valls | Kirsten Miller |
| Catherine Stewart | Mark Davies | Meena Janthakun – NZ Craft |
| Luisa Salis-Soglio | Michael Humphries | Paul Elwell Sutton |
| WestReef Services | Natasha Meynell | R Martin |
| Pancake Rocks Café | Nicholas George | Ria Brejaart |
| Jeanette Goode | Nicky & 'Peng' Armstrong | Richard Young - New Zealand Photography Workshops |
| Julie Leighton | Peter Wall | Roswitha Scheer-Hughes |
| Tracy Johnston-Coates and family and friends | Rohan Wanigasekera | Ryan Blundell - Tides Chart NZ |
| Jase Blair | Sarah Griffiths | Sue Todd |
| Wilderness Gallery – Hokitika | Soumya Vega | Sylvain Hosatte |
| Dr Euan Kennedy | Susi Luecht | Vivien Pybus |
| Fung Lai | Suzanne Hills | Walter Daniel Horton |
| | Valerie Pollard | |
| | Wilderness Lodge Lake Moeraki | |
| | Yuki Yonezawa | |