

The Little blue penguin makes the perfect advocate for conservation!

Lucy Waller, WCPT Education Ranger, May 2018

How do we use our Kororā to present an environmental/conservation message?

Everybody loves penguins. They are cute, beautiful, funny, fascinating and not unlike humans. They look for a mate, a nice, safe house, some good food and to produce healthy offspring. There are, arguably, 18 different species, so a great variety of sizes and colours, habitats and behaviours to learn about and to be able to choose your favourite. Some are close to extinction, such as the Hoiho (yellow-eyed penguin), endemic to New Zealand. We find them in snow and ice, forests and at the beach. They are full of surprises and they come with fun facts such as blushing with their feet and having their own built-in goggles! Kids love penguins. They are the perfect advocate to present an environmental/conservation message to all ages. As humans, if we love something, we are passionate about protecting it. The starting point to any community initiative and particularly a conservation initiative, is our children.

One person loving nature and wanting to protect it, by saving an injured animal on the beach or saying no to plastic bags at the shop makes a difference. However, if a whole class take action and they then, in turn, influence their families and school, whole community shifts can happen and with this, genuine environmental change occurs. The mission is always the same with every school visit; if each student goes home that night and tells just five people about our penguin and what we can do to support its survival, as the Kororā raft up and come into shore that very night, they have 150 more guardians.

Most of the time, a suspicious or disbelieving community is simply an unknowing community. I cannot count the number of times I have heard people, who have lived somewhere all their lives, say "I didn't know we had penguins here. Is this really true?" So why would we spend our energy trying to protect something that we don't believe is truly there? The other common view that many hold is that if something has been there forever, it will stay forever. The first story to tell is of the extinction of the moa, within just 90 years of humans landing on the islands of New Zealand. Luckily, penguins are still here and we need to support them to survive their biggest challenge: us.

Using a beloved animal to present the message of conserving the environment is a powerful one. The penguin represents an advocate for what is happening on our earth and opens doors to conversations about conservation. Numbers are declining due to human interaction, whether it be tourism or habitat loss due to coastal development, pollution, climate change causing erosion, warming sea temperatures, flooding, fishing nets or the more obvious killers; dogs, stoats and cars. If the community can see a direct link, it makes the idea of helping save the planet a much more real and manageable concept to understand for people from all walks of life.

How can a school adopt this idea as part of their curriculum?

The WCPT is welcomed into schools, armed with Kevin the taxidermy Kororā and Toni the Tawaki (Fiordland crested penguin; the South Island West Coast's second resident penguin). We visit schools and educate the students about penguins, thus encouraging discussions about the environment and conservation issues. It is never a difficult mission to get the kids, and staff I should add, to fall in love with penguins, excited to find out that they have these wonderful creatures on their local beaches and then devastated to find out the struggle of survival they face due to humans! Using the WCPT's Blue Penguins & Other Seabirds resource book, which links games and activities throughout the entire curriculum, fitting into any subject, the kids get involved in activities to learn lots of facts and then moving on to learning how to become the 'Guardians of their penguin'.

"I found the Blue Penguins and Other Seabirds resource a great resource for inquiry-based learning. It provided clear links to the curriculum which helped with planning lessons and also provided appropriate ideas for students to "take action" and contribute to social change here on the West Coast." (Jade Blackman, Year 3 Teacher, St Patrick's Primary School, Greymouth)

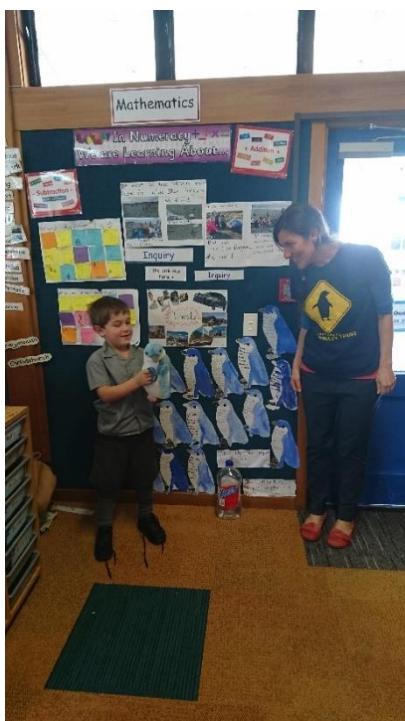
The very motivated St Patrick's Primary School's year 3 class took their actions a few steps further. After using the education resource independently and very successfully, they then brought the topic alive with a Penguin Ranger visit and some field trips. Footprint spotting on the local beach enabled them to learn how to spot the difference between the tracks of penguins and other seabirds and a look at their nesting habitat encouraged them to investigate breeding activity. "I enjoyed it when Lucy brought in a trap and the threats. Also when we made nesting boxes and when we made some footprint moulds." (Charlee, Year 3)

They were then inspired to design and build their own nest boxes for the local colony. A whole community appeared Saturday morning to celebrate the work of the children, to learn about penguins and how to preserve them, but also to see with their own eyes that there are indeed penguins on their local beach; the same beach they have grown up with for the past 30 plus years. A fantastic day of education, coming together, a beach clean-up, some communal fresh air and a walk; what a success for a community and the penguins!

(Patrick McBride's video of the day can be found here:
www.facebook.com/McBrideVision/videos/1554125437968379/)

St Patrick's Primary School's year 3 class have since taken their actions even further and have gone onto becoming "Penguin Rangers" themselves, teaching overseas visitors how to protect their wildlife and, this year, dedicating their studies to sustainability and threats to native birds using their theme "One God, One World". A success story for a year 3 class, a school, a community, a local penguin colony and thus the environment.

Photos



The students are very proud to be Penguin Rangers and educate others about their Kororā.



Sharing their knowledge and advising American visitors, Michaela and Niko, how to be responsible visitors to New Zealand.



Plaster of Paris footprint moulds bring the penguins' tracks in the sand to life for the students. Parents get involved in the activities too and can then do this at home as a family.

A Saturday well spent for a community installing three personalised nest boxes and doing a beach clean-up.



Getting out onto the beach to "stop, look, listen" brings the topic alive for the everybody.