

Pohatu penguins' Newsletter - September 2020

Spring is in the air...

Spring has sprung early this year: unusually warm temperatures, flowering trees everywhere, first lambs born early August, the Shining Cuckoo already back from the Pacific... Even the penguins have started to breed early: the first eggs were spotted late July - usually not until late August - and we found soon after in another nest the first chicks born early August*!!!

At the time I'm writing this newsletter (early September) we have found many more nesting boxes with eggs and a few with very young chicks. So that is definitely the trend of the year to start early. It is amazingly beautiful at Pohatu right now. Lambs jumping in the daffodils, baa-ing to their mums as soon as they get a bit too far, so adorable! And each discovery of a new nesting box with eggs is a thrill. We are so hoping for a good breeding season...



Aren't the Valais Black Nose the cutest lamb in the world?



Daffodils mark the return of the beautiful days



An adult penguin sitting low in the nest could be the sign of eggs being incubated

*These early chicks belong to a nesting box whose mum is a little blue penguin (vs our local variant the White flippered penguin). It is normal for little blues from the other colonies to breed early as they double clutch within the same breeding season so they need to start early. However the records show that last year this same blue mum layed her 1st clutch in October. *Click on the link for more info about little blue and white flippered penguin.*

https://www.pohatu.co.nz/Our%20blog/White%20flippered%20penguin?mv_pc=3031

The art of creating a nest

Earlier this winter, penguins were busy making the nest ready. Penguins – mainly the males - bring all sorts of material they can find around their box to create a cosy nest: pine needles, twigs, hay... To impress their “Missus” some penguins are very creative, some are obviously a bit ambitious... or weird: we found a penguin sitting on stinging nettle. Ouch! Some have found good tricks to insulate their entrance from drafts!



Milou has collected a lot of twigs to create his nest



Blocking drafts with hay? Clever penguins ;)

Predator control on the land... and natural predation at sea

We are all go with our predator control. We added new traps over winter but we know we constantly have to be on the watch, looking for any sign of predation when we monitoring nesting boxes or walking around the colony. Stoats are clever and hard to catch.



Who would think that such small animal can cause so much damage on a penguin colony?

Another threat to our penguin is the natural predation at sea: shark, barracuda, sea lion, leopard seal and the Northern Giant Petrel... this is a big sea bird that we sometimes see flying above the sea waiting for our little penguins to come back from their day fishing. We've seen quite a few petrels lately hanging in the area. Something that reminds us that this is Nature and that we have to toughen up about natural predation. Nothing we can do, or shall I say nothing we should do about it. That's how the food chain works...



Big birds can predate on small birds

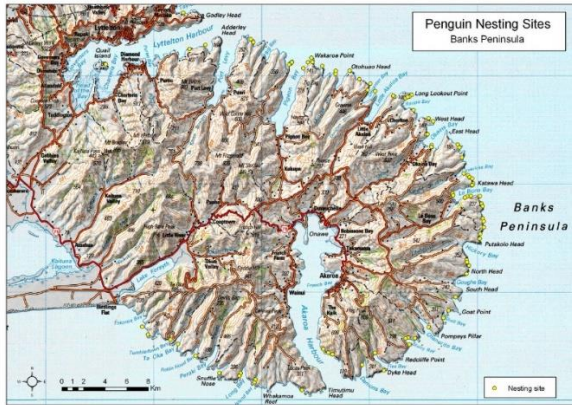
Tada!!

We are happy to announce an important event coming at the end of the year:

"The big little penguin 2020 survey – Banks Peninsula"

Every 4 years, the Pohatu colony is surveyed which means we aim at counting every single penguin nest (= natural burrow or man-made nesting box) that is active during the breeding season. Each active nest equal 2 penguins (a couple). Pohatu penguin colony is due for a survey this year but we also decided to work along locals, businesses, companies to survey the whole peninsula. That is about 74 sites, some with very small "colonies" of 5 active nests for example. The last big survey was conducted

20 years ago! Since then only Pohatu - the biggest colony of 1260 active nests in 2016 - has been regularly surveyed. Thanks to Averil who is organising the whole event we will have for the 1st time in 20 years a big picture of the little penguin's population in our area. Many volunteers will join us to climb the hills, boat, kayak and swim to remote bays, braving waves, fur seal's colonies, crawl among sea birds and their guano... Who said that working with penguins was a lucky job?



Banks Peninsula: over 70 sites to survey!



Ave has been spending long hours organising the survey



What is Kevin doing? (Archive 2016's survey)

- a - looking for his lost watch*
- b - resting in the shade after a long sunny day*
- c - checking if penguins are nesting under a bush*

We will of course give you an update once the job is finished and all the data analysed.

In the meantime, we are wishing you all well on every corner of the world. Be strong, be kind and remember to be grateful for all the beautiful things Nature has to offer ☺

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