



## Winter newsletter

August 2021



Misty peak covered by a wintery snow icing overlooking Akaroa Harbour

After an exceptionally dry spring and summer season – *leading to water use restriction for the whole community and a lot of stress on our local farmers* - it seems that water was poured all at once on our hilly country. We have indeed experienced a pretty wet winter so far, with a couple of floods when the dry ground couldn't take it anymore. We even experienced a snow thunder storm which was pretty unusual... Wild weather! At least the streams are not running low anymore.

The shortest day of the year is now well behind us and it feels like spring isn't far away. Gorse, daffodils and kōwhai in some part of the peninsula are flowering, but hold on! Winter hasn't said its last word yet...

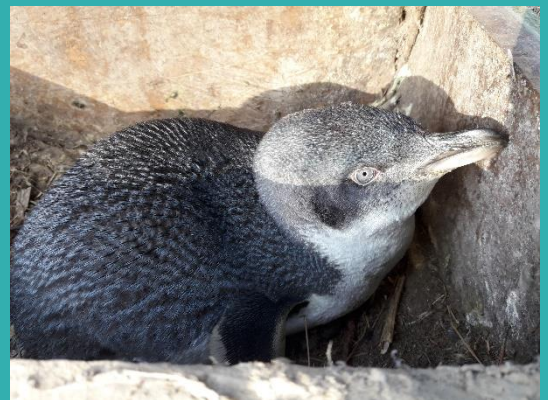
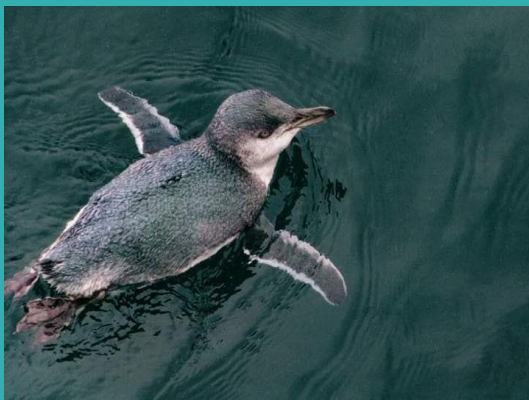


## Penguins whereabouts

*What our little penguin have been up to these last few months?*

After the [moulting season](#) – in January/February - the colony spent a good month at sea to feed... like every year. And like every year, penguins came back as expected early April for their annual social party. I know it sounds fun to talk about a “social party” for penguins! But that’s really what they do. At this time of the year, no chick to raise, no moult to go through so the colony reunites for a social gathering. On the water, big rafts of penguins are observed at dusk and when they decide to go to their nest, they can be a bit vocal! When Francis or Shireen have had a bad sleep because “*some little rascals were not being considerate of their humans’ neighbours at night*” that’s usually the signal that penguins are back!

Then, penguins go again... and come back. And that’s the cycle of autumn and winter months. Few days on the land, few days at sea. Fishing and resting.



## Pre-breeding season

Late June, we started noticing new nesting material such as twigs or pine needle in some nests. That is the time of the year when penguin males start arranging the nest in the hope to please Mrs Penguin, their usual partner,



or to attract a new female. Little penguins are usually loyal to their partner and mate for life. However, in case of disagreement on the nest decoration - *just kidding!* - or if the pair has failed to breed the previous season, or more sadly if one partner passes away then penguins will look for a new partner.



Penguins collect what they find in their close environment to arrange a nest. Usually twigs, pine needles, dried leaves or grass



Some penguins have a particular attention to details... like these ornamental pine cones!

The winter visits to the land are called “pre-breeding visits”. From then, the pairs are more often seen together in the nest. At the time I am writing some pairs might have already laid their eggs. Last year the 1<sup>st</sup> egg was spotted late July which was unusually early in the season. But not long after we found chicks already hatched in another nesting box, which means the first eggs were laid early July in the colony last year.

Our winter monitoring has shown penguins in good health so far.



## Maintenance

Autumn/winter is maintenance season for our crew. Some nesting boxes need fixing, some need full replacement. When penguins are gone at sea, we take the opportunity to do the necessary improvement hoping that they will like their new house when they return!



A brand new box with the adoption name placed again on it

Reuse, recycle... to make the hinges on the lid of the box, an old tractor cambelt will do!

## Funding for research: Good news, bad news

Let's start with the bad news. A couple of month ago, we applied for a grant to D.O.C (Department of Conservation) to help fund our micro-chipping project and tracking at sea as well as hiring a marine scientist permanently. Unfortunately the D.O.C received so many applications, we didn't get chosen. Also we were hoping to get our permit to start micro-chipping but it wasn't expected the paper work part of the process would take so long. Therefore we have to postpone the micro-chipping to next season. We will look at other grants to ensure the sustainability of our conservation efforts. In the meantime your amazing support through donation and adoption is our life boat!



The good news is that we have partnered with NZPI (New Zealand Penguin Initiative). NZPI's aim is to improve the conservation status of New Zealand penguin species through research initiatives, community involvement and advocacy. We should be able very soon to add technology in the way we monitor and collect data. It will pretty much be the same work than what we have been doing until now but we go digital with the use of a phone and app! This partnership will also give us the opportunity to be part of a bigger project and we will easily be able to share/compare our data with other colonies in New-Zealand.

To learn [more](#) about NZPI





Our current monitoring style: old fashioned notebook and pen!

## Trap tunnels for our local trap library

Thanks to schools and volunteers who visited us in the past year, we've managed to build quite a few wooden tunnel boxes for traps. The ones we didn't need were donated to our local trap library.



## Queen's Birthday great surprise!

Every year, on Queens' Birthday week-end, are revealed the list of the new members of the **\*New Zealand Order of Merit**. What an amazing surprise to see the names of Shireen & Francis Helps!!! A great acknowledgement to their on-going dedication to protect wildlife. Well done Shireen & Francis!! We are so proud of you both :)

*\*for those persons who in any field of endeavour, have rendered meritorious service to the Crown and nation or who have become distinguished by their eminence, talents, contributions or other merits - Queen Elisabeth II*

The funny side of the story is when Shireen received the email, she thought it was a scam and didn't open it... she was about to delete it, before giving it a second look! Francis and Shireen just couldn't believe it!

Read the story [here](#).



## Pohatu Korora Kaitiaki Program

The Pohatu conservation club has been existing for 2 years now and has gained a lot of popularity among local children – and parents - since then. Run by Joey and Averil, it gives the opportunity to children 8 years old and over to learn, participate, engage around wildlife, conservation, and protection of our *taonga* (treasures).

See the latest [video](#)!



Digging invasive gorse, planting native trees, monitoring wildlife, checking traps and beach art are some of the activities that children are taking part in. They always come back with a big smile on their face and you can rate the amount of fun they had by the amount of mud collected on their clothing!

In July, Joey and Averil had the opportunity to present a conservation activity at the **Te Mātāpuna Mātātahi/Children's University**, in Christchurch. Joey created an amazing board game to make children think about environmental issues and how to solve them, taking in count the whole picture. Children loved it!

Read Joey's [blog](#) about her amazing day

## Akaroa wildlife pass

We are pleased to introduce our latest partnership with two local companies [Black Cat Cruises](#) and [Shamarra Alpaca](#) to create the "[Akaroa Wildlife Pass](#)". Because we can never get enough of animal cuteness!! Watch Hector's dolphin, little penguins then cuddle a woolly Alpaca. It will make your day!



[Book Now](#)

## Plastic Free July

This year again the whole team has been supporting the “Plastic Free July” campaign. You might have seen our [Facebook](#) posts with ideas on how to tackle the plastic waste issue. In the hope that it will become soon “All year round – Plastic free” campaign!

## First Arapawa lambs

And to end on a very cute note, our first Arapawa lambs were born late July!! This breed of wild sheep lambs much earlier than other breeds so here are our little winter cuties...

