

Places for Penguins update!

Over the past 6 years a small team of locals have dedicated themselves to regularly checking and clearing a trap line that has been set around the Ōwhiro Bay coastline. We regularly catch mice and rats, along with an occasional stoat! The team carry out this rather gruesome task in order to help protect our native wildlife from the devastating impact of these introduced species.



Kororā in Ōwhiro Bay sitting on eggs
Photo: Sue Reid 2023

Four years ago, we placed five nesting boxes in locations we knew kororā/little blue penguins were spending time in our bay. Places for Penguins install penguin nesting boxes on the seaward side of the road to try and encourage penguins to nest in locations that eliminate their need to cross the road at dusk and dawn (the times they return from and depart to the ocean). With kororā being the worlds smallest penguin (standing around 30cm in height) and being the worlds only blue and white penguin, it is easy to see why they are hard to spot in low light whilst crossing a road. This leads to many deaths each year as drivers accidentally hit them when they cross our coastal roads to get to and from their nests.

The huge storm in April 2020 swept away one of our nesting boxes and ripped away lots of the taupata, under which we had placed the boxes. We now have three boxes and for the past two breeding seasons a pair of kororā have successfully raised two pairs of chicks! If you see one of our nesting boxes along the coast, please don't take a peek inside however tempting it may feel. If penguins are frequently disturbed, they are likely to abandon their eggs/chicks. Places for Penguins monitors are trained and also have a special permit to carry out this work. Our latest exciting news: several weeks ago, we had one of our Ōwhiro Bay kororā microchipped! Places for Penguins are microchipping kororā that are monitored around Te Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington in order to learn more about their breeding habits and life style so they can keep striving to provide the best protection possible for this amazing species. Kat & Mike from Places for Penguins (featured in the photo) both have special permits to handle and chip kororā. Whilst microchipping the birds they also weigh them, photograph them and record their bill length and shape which helps identify their gender.



Kat & Mike from PIP
microchipping a kororā in
Ōwhiro Bay
Photo: Milna Holder 2024
Photo: Sue Reid 2023



The two largest threats our kororā population face are being hit by cars or attacked by dogs (this mostly occurs with dogs being exercised off-leash in penguin nesting areas). Four years ago, a dog owner was

walking her dog on an extendable lead around Ōwhiro Bay and it darted off the path into the bushes and returned with a little blue penguin in its mouth. A local resident took the penguin to 'The Nest' at Wellington zoo but sadly it did not survive. The dog owner was devastated. It isn't a case of dog attacks being carried out by unruly/badly behaved dogs at all. Penguins are very strong-smelling birds and a dog's instinct will likely take over if they come into close proximity to one to take a quick bite. That is all it takes unfortunately. The latest update from the Places for Penguins committee is that four kororā were killed by dogs in Wellington in April alone, (13 dead since January) including a breeding pair that had been microchipped and had successfully raised two chicks last breeding season.

A vet from 'The Nest' checking the kororā bitten by a dog in Ōwhiro Bay
Photo: Eugene Doyle 2020

You may be thinking, what can I do? There are many things! If you are a dog owner then please make sure you check the signage in areas you exercise your dog and be mindful there may be nesting kororā along the coast. If you are friends with dog owners, have a chat with them about our kororā population, as often people are not aware they are here, especially our bay! If you drive along the coast at dawn or dusk be mindful penguins might cross in front of you! If you spot any rubbish when out and about, picking it up will definitely make a difference to so much of our wildlife, kororā included. We are seeing more and more plastic turning up in the nesting boxes. Whilst we currently have enough penguin nestbox monitors, we would always be happy to have new trapping recruits! If this is something you are interested in, would like to go on a waitlist for penguin monitoring, please do get in touch minak@hotmail.co.uk.



microchipped
Photo: Mina Holder 2024