NEW ZEALAND

PENGUIN INITIATIVE

ANNUAL REVIEW

December 2025

Table of Contents

About NZPI

Vision

We're on a mission to see penguins flourishing around our coasts!

Values

Community

Support and facilitate community-led conservation and collaboration across Aotearoa, and aid citizen science to pursue positive outcomes for penguins and their habitats.

Courage

To strive in the face of challenges and inspire others.

Committment

Encourage long-term sustainability of conservation efforts and high standards of animal welfare.

Services

Conservation

- Project Support & Advice
- Training & Resources
- Collaboration
- Networking

Science

- Kororā National Monitoring Programme
- Kororā National Diet Study
- Publications

Advocacy

- Local, Regional and National Threats
- Submissions
- Education

ELI
Environmental Law Initiative
Tiakina te mauri o te taiao

NZPI is affiliated with the Environmental Law Initiative (ELI). ELI combines science and the law to protect the environment & biodiversity.

Team Insights

Melissa McLuskie
Community Programme Manager

It has been incredible to see the growth of the NZPI network over the past year, with more groups stepping up across different regions to monitor and implement habitat protection for their colonies. We are continuously developing our distribution and population knowledge, as more colonies are monitored- whether that be by counting footprints, using trail cameras, checking nests or marking individuals- it is all helping us to understand more. It was fantastic to see lots of people from our groups at the Oamaru Penguin Symposium in May, and great that lots of people had already connected via our online Kororā Kōrero and recognised each other.

Collectively through sharing knowledge, we are discovering amazing behavioural characteristics about kororā and also identifying the key issues that make them so vulnerable to human-induced harm and population declines. There are consistent patterns evolving and an urgent need for land managers to take simple, practical actions towards protect habitats; through increased dog restrictions and dog owner education/awareness, fencing off burrows/boxes, rubbish clean ups, increasing native vegetation, providing additional nesting opportunities away from the ocean and monitoring public disturbance.

I have been fortunate to visit some amazing locations and meet wonderful people. The more I chat with locals from around different parts of the country, the more historic knowledge I recognise is out there and I absolutely love hearing from people that have lived amongst colonies for decades. Part of my role is empowering people and often groups already have a lot of the local knowledge and know-how! It is always encouraging to see that with a little bit of support, and some expert guidance and some practical field tips- how passionate and capable everyone is at getting on with it and looking out for their penguins!

Demand is growing for delivering talks, workshops and wider community education to discuss monitoring, habitats, rescue and rehabilitation, I suspect as a result of all the good work being done and heightened awareness by public and organisations. We are counting on our groups to support each other as much as possible, to ensure the national project is meaningful and sustainable.

Thank you to all our groups for devoting their time and for undertaking challenging work! Thanks to everyone that has hosted me for a site visit, attended our online monthly meetings, shared your expertise with others- the future for penguins is hopeful with you all backing them!

Melissa at Oneroa (long beach) in Russell, Northland. L. Rumsey

Highlights

- New areas/regions with people looking after their colonies and groups progressing with monitoring/habitat protection.
- Group visits, connecting with people at the Oamaru Symposium, giving talks/hosting workshops to reach lots of people.
- Progress towards enhanced data collection and addressing threats.

Challenges

- Growing network and a small team
- Keeping consistency across diverse people, sites and colonies
- Addressing the continuous multitude of threats to colonies, all across the country

Team Insights

Hiltrun Ratz
Programme Director

At the end of the year, I get speed wobbles - where did the year go? Through Melissa's indefatigable travel efforts, we have had a growth spurt in the number of groups signed up to NZPI. It is a privilege to support them in their efforts to protect and care for their local kororā. Some of our groups that have been with us for a while are like well-oiled data collection machines and we want all our groups to be competent in finding and monitoring their kororā, raise local issues with their councils, and help protect them. So, we are working hard on the new monitoring App, the Database that will double check the data and then having it all displayed on the Dashboard. Like all good things, this is taken a while, but it will happen!

For me the most exciting thing has been pushing back the frontiers of science: a year ago we knew nothing about what kororā were eating outside Banks Peninsula, Oamaru and Stewart Island - and those studies were a while ago. Now we have a much better idea. Like with all methods, the prey DNA in the scat has its limits but we are working with Wilderlab on improving what is detected - and also what can't possibly be right. It has been a steep learning curve for me to learn all about fish and their taxonomy - you think that kororā taxonomy is complicated with subspecies, clades etc. Some fish are classified in one family in one authoritative book and in a totally different family in another book - yep, they change their minds leaving penguin people scratching their head.

It has been exciting to engage with Auckland University to develop something that will make monitoring natural burrows easier. Victoria University law students investigated how the Wildlife Act, the Resource Management Act, Dog Control, and the Reserve Act intertwine in the space kororā occupy on land, not just their nesting burrows but also the foreshore they have to cross to get there. Too many kororā die on beaches due to dogs and vehicles. The Antarctic Centre in Christchurch collaborated with Canterbury University to find out what's happening with kororā on Christchurch beaches and found the usual issues of dog presence and unsafe habitat.

The Oamaru Penguin Symposium was another highlight for the year. It was a record crowd thanks to many NZPI groups sending delegates to mix and mingle and talk penguins. Our workshop prior to the start of the Symposium was a great opportunity to spend extra time with people. As another opportunity to talk penguins, our monthly kōrero have been well attended, and it has been fun to catch up regularly to hear how things are going.

Things we do for penguins: crawling around in caves to check how they are going at Allans Beach

Highlights

- At the Oamaru Penguin Symposium we met up with so many penguin enthusiasts - and learnt about what everyone was up to.
- The scat DNA diet study is taking shape: pushing back the frontiers of science!
- So many people wanting to support their local kororā.

Challenges

- So much to do and so little time!
- Hearing about the dog kills around the country - is this the main cause of the disappearance of kororā from our shores?

So, let's keep talking penguins, and make Aotearoa safe for our precious kororā!

Key Conservation & Engagement Outcomes

Our Progress

Supporting Conservation Efforts

- 1400+ Community Conservation Hours
- 11 Monthly Online Support Meetings (Kororā Korero)
- 18 Groups Visited
- >$12,000 Equipment Loaned
- Annual Review Report featuring group conservation efforts

Expanding Science

- National Monitoring Programme Growth- 26 Groups Contributing
- National Database Upgrades & Penguin Monitoring App Development Progress
- National Diet Study -Initial Results
- Scientific Publication

Growing Advocacy

- Penguin Threat Review Progress
- Improved Dog Attack Reporting Awareness
- 3 Educational Workshops and 5 Presentations
- Education Resources Created
- Bi-Monthly Newsletters

Presentations & Workshops

Community Outreach & Knowledge Sharing

Oamaru NZPI Drop-In Session

Oamaru Penguin Symposium: Kororā National Diet Study

Kororā National Monitoring Programme: 2025 Update

Birds NZ Conference Kororā Diet Study Presentation

Western Bay Wildlife Trust Rescue & Rehabilitation Workshop

Project Island Song Kororā Workshop & AGM Presentation

Whangarei Bird Recovery Centre & Birdcare Aotearoa Kororā Biology & Husbandry Presentation

Feature Interviews & Publications

Highlighting Our Cause

Conservation Amplified: People Helping Nature Podcast

In this episode of the People Helping Nature Podcast, Hiltrun Ratz and Melissa McLuskie from the New Zealand Penguin Initiative (NZPI) reveal how they're uniting community groups all over NZ to fill critical knowledge gaps about this species. Through standardised monitoring and collaborative efforts, NZPI is building the evidence needed for meaningful protection. Access the podcast interview here: Small but Mighty: Little Penguins and the People Saving them (with NZPI) – Conservation Amplified

98.1fm Raglan Community Radio: NZ Penguin Initiative Visits Raglan

Kristel and Georgia from the Karioi project are hosting Melissa McLuskie from the New Zealand Penguin Initiative following their success with Little Blue Penguins on the Whaingaroa Coast. We take the chance to dive deep on the state of the Little Blue Penguin and the work NZPI is doing. Access the radio interview here: NZ Penguin Initiative Visits Raglan | Raglan Community Radio 98.1fm

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Breeding success of little penguins (kororā, *Eudyptula minor*) in Wellington, 2014–2023: a first record of double brooding on North Island, New Zealand

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Abstract: Kororā, little penguin, breed in New Zealand and Australia with two subspecies now recognised after numerous taxonomic revisions: *Eudyptula minor minor* only in New Zealand, and *E.m. novaehollandiae*, in Australia and Otago on the southeast coast of South Island, New Zealand. One of the distinguishing features of *E.m. novaehollandiae* is the possible laying of a subsequent clutch by the same female after successfully fledging chicks (double brooding). In this study in Wellington, North Island, 25–53 nestboxes used for breeding were monitored for 10 years, 2014–2023 to determine abundance and breeding success. From the 380 clutches, 81% of eggs hatched, 87% of hatched chicks fledged, 70% of eggs fledged chicks, and 1.32 chicks fledged per clutch. Micro-chipping of adults from 2021 allowed identification of individuals at most locations. Double brooding was suspected prior to 2021 and was confirmed at one location in 2023. This is the first record of double brooding of kororā on the North Island. Genetic analysis of the female will resolve whether *E.m. minor* can double brood or if *E.m. novaehollandiae* has reached the North Island.

Ratz, H.; Shaw, K.; Westphal Santa Maria, Â.; Smith, K.E.; Forrest, J.K. 2025. Breeding success of little penguins (kororā, *Eudyptula minor*) in Wellington, 2014–2023: a first record of double brooding on North Island, New Zealand. *Notornis 72(3)*: 141–150, https://doi.org/10.63172/553041vqhqv

Keywords: little penguin, breeding success, Wellington, kororā, double brooding

INTRODUCTION

Little penguins kororā (*Eudyptula minor*) are the smallest extant penguin species and occur in southern Australia, New Zealand and their outlying islands (Marchant & Higgins 1990). Their taxonomic status has been repeatedly revised starting with the division into six subspecies based on morphology (Kinsky & Falla 1976). Further analyses of their morphology as well as biochemical blood analyses (Meredith & Sin 1988) resulted in the classification of all kororā as one species, *Eudyptula minor* (Checklist Committee 1990). Two different clades were identified based on mitochondrial DNA, morphology, and vocalisation—one consisting of Australian and Otago (south-east coast of South Island) kororā, and the other comprising the rest of New Zealand kororā (Banks *et al.* 2002). Despite further confirmation using genetic analyses (Overeem *et al.* 2008; Preacher *et al.* 2009), the species status remained unchanged with no subspecies recognised (Checklist Committee 2010). Grosser *et al.* (2015) suggested full species status for the Australian/Otago clade, based on the analysis of

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Breeding success of little penguins in Wellington

Hiltrun worked with Places for Penguins to collate monitoring data and report the first record of double brooding on the North Island. Read the article here: Publications - New Zealand Penguin Initiative

NZPI's First Annual Review (December 2024)

Last year we wanted to start reporting on our progress and showcase the collective efforts made towards penguin conservation around the country. Available here: Reports showcasing NZPI's work and highlighting penguin conservation groups across the country - New Zealand Penguin Initiative

Penguin Safe Zones & Pathways

Kororā occupy a diverse array of habitats, including those in close proximity to humans. As more research and monitoring is being undertaken across the country, the more we are learning just how diverse their habitat use can be. Burrows are often located amongst dunes, coastal vegetation, rocky shores around beaches, harbours and estuaries. There's also a number of colonies that make home amongst pastures. Pathways taken by birds to access burrows, may include climbing cliffs, travelling over 1km inland, or using creeks, rivers and lagoons and can often be an area that is overlooked when searching for kororā.

Habitat use in colonies can overlap across a number of ecosystems, so they are vulnerable to many threats, both at sea and on land, and need safe zones and pathways to travel to and from their burrows to be safe, whilst occupying them. Planning needs to consider their life stages, behaviour and future colony expansion to ensure development and marine activities don't impact populations. It can be very difficult to find kororā in some habitats and multiple surveys need to be undertaken over a few seasons, to confirm they are absent from an area.

If you are visiting coastal areas- it should be assumed that kororā may be present (even in small numbers), until it is proven that they aren't there. The more areas around the country are surveyed consistently in future, the more we understand the distribution, presence/absence and habitat use. This will help bring to light key reasons why many colonies have declined over the years and allow us to take action to support their recovery.

Fenced areas around land-based habitat and ensuring safe and easy access to and from the ocean, alongside restoring native vegetation and undertaking pest control are becoming the standard: keeping colonies safe from dogs and public disturbance. Nest boxes can provide additional nesting/moulting opportunities. It is recommended that habitats with kororā present should have dog regulations/exclusions implemented, to help prevent and reduce the number of attacks occurring each year across the country.

Supporting Kororā Habitat Diversity

- **Coastal**
- **Marine**
- **Freshwater**

Resighting Marked Penguins

A number of kororā colonies are marked with PIT-Tags/Microchips, as part of population monitoring and also some birds that may have been rehabilitated and released.

Information obtained by resighting marked penguins can help us understand survival, recruitment, movements of individuals around the country, threats and also help conservation groups to intervene, should something tragic happen e.g. a parent bird that is raising chicks is attacked and killed by a dog, leaving the partner and chicks vulnerable.

To help increase resighting rates, collectively all organisations involved with marking penguins, need to increase awareness to the public, wildlife rescue organisations and veterinary clinics that penguins may have microchip present. Any birds found washed ashore in distress or deceased, should be reported to the nearest penguin group to be scanned for a microchip.

Scanners being used to check birds, need to be able to detect FDX-A and FDX-B microchips, as both types have been used in New Zealand. A bird should be scanned multiple times, over the entire body to ensure a microchip is not present.

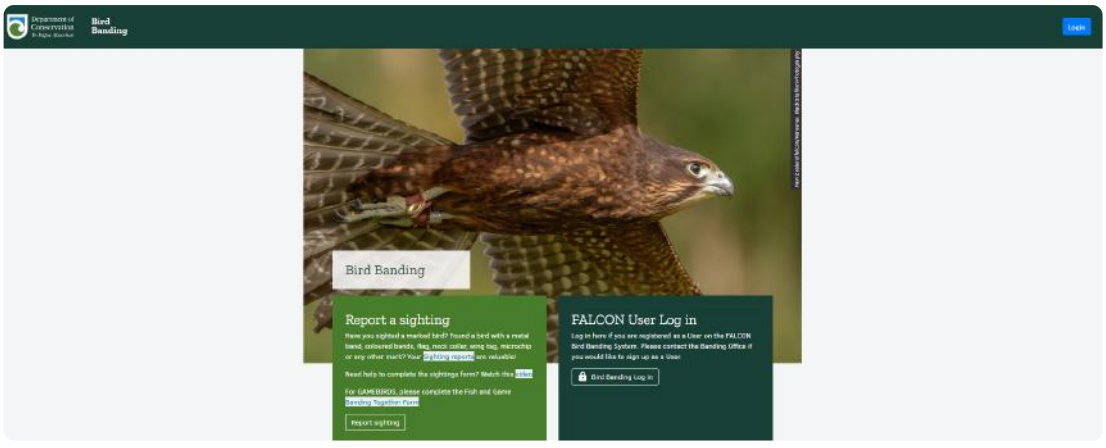
If a microchip is found it should be reported to DOC's Wildlife Marking Office and also the local penguin group.

Understanding Long-Term Population Trends

Rescued kororā. Melissa McLuskie

Marked penguins that are found by members of the public can be reported to DOC's Wildlife Marking Team: falcon@doc.govt.nz

More information about marked populations can be found on DOC's banding website and registered operators can access the Falcon database: Bird Banding



Kororā/Little Penguin National Monitoring Programme

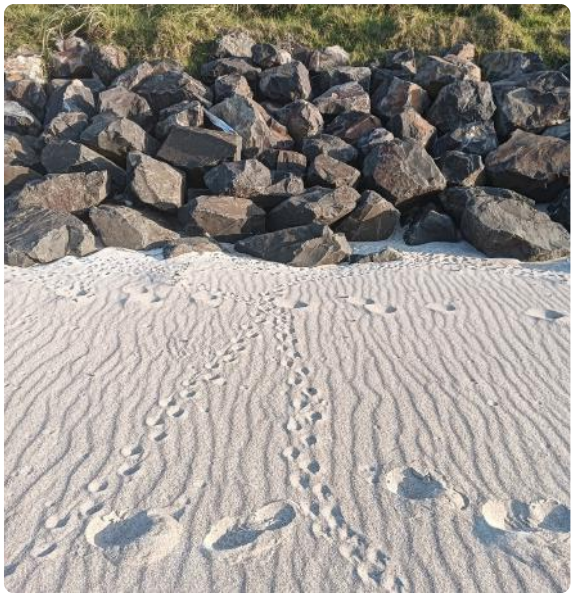
Nationwide network of groups/organisations committed to monitoring their local colonies and contributing data to the national database.

26 Groups

9 Regions

Kororā/Little Penguin National Monitoring Programme

Overview



TIER 1: Marked Populations
Adults/Chicks Microchipped
Regular Nest Checks

TIER 2:
Unmarked Populations
Regular Nest Checks

TIER 3: Presence/Absence
Footprint Surveys
Trail Camera Surveillance

Programme Highlights

- 8 New Groups Contributing
- Progress Towards Improved Database & Field Monitoring App for Enhanced Knowledge & Reporting Capabilities
- National Diet Study Progress
- Scientific Publication
- Threat Mitigation
- Monthly Meetings Networking & Real-time Colony Updates
- Increased Community Engagement/Education

National Conservation Inputs*

NZPI groups collecting data:	26
Penguin leaders & volunteers:	>170
Number of predators caught:	>1700
Number of plants planted:	>100
Number of rubbish clean up events:	3 + most visits

*Data listed is a minimum representation of what has been reported.

Monitoring & Marking Results *

2024/2025 Results

Tier 1	North Island	South Island
Number of colonies monitored	21	3
Number of burrows monitored	49	4
Number of nest boxes monitored	268	254
Number of adults microchipped	22	80
Number of chicks microchipped	75	203
Heaviest male	1240g	1640g
Lightest male	820g	1020g
Heaviest female	1080g	1620g
Lightest female	710g	820g
Heaviest chick	1230g	1500g
Lightest chick	580g	720g

Tier 2	North Island	South Island
Number of colonies monitored	15	1
Number of burrows monitored	16	34
Number of nest boxes monitored	81	0

Tier 3	North Island	South Island
Number of colonies monitored	3	0
Max number of footprints observed	14	0
Max number of cam observations	0	0

Number of chicks fledged

North Island	South Island
162	273

Multiple North Island colonies reported possible double brooding

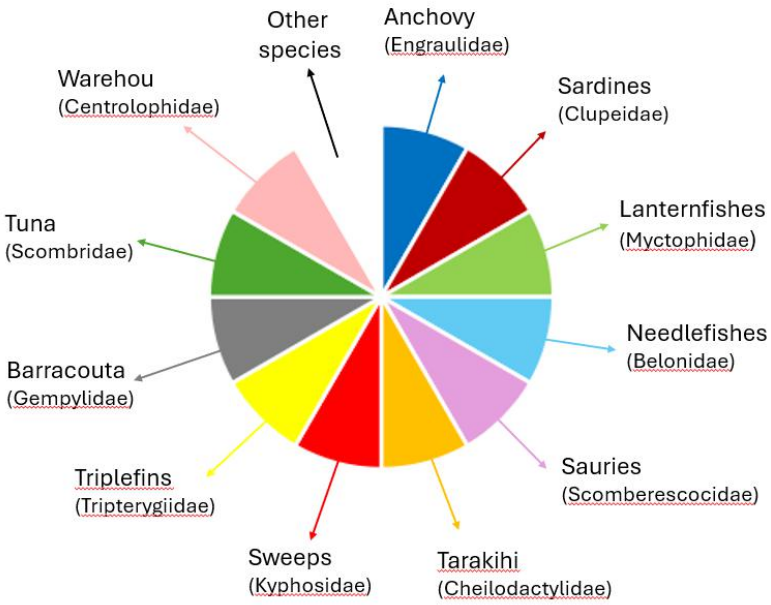
Common Causes of Nest Failure

Starvation
Abandonment
Predation
Infertility
Broken Eggs
Tidal inundation
Entanglement
Burrow collapse

*Data listed is a minimum representation of what has been reported.

Kororā/Little Penguin National Diet Study

A year ago, the only information available about the diet of kororā was from three studies from Bank Peninsula to Stewart Island between 1984 and 2010. Last year in October NZPI started a nationwide scat DNA diet study that will go for a total of three years. We now have results for the four seasons of the first year, with NZPI funding eight collections sites (Muriwai, Tiritiri Matangi, Moturiki Island, Cape Sanctuary, Wellington, Nelson, West Coast South Island and Allans Beach) around Aotearoa. Other groups have been invited and Kapiti, Leigh, and Kaiteriteri contributed samples in autumn and winter.



Initial Results

"WHO KNEW POO COULD BE SO INTERESTING!"

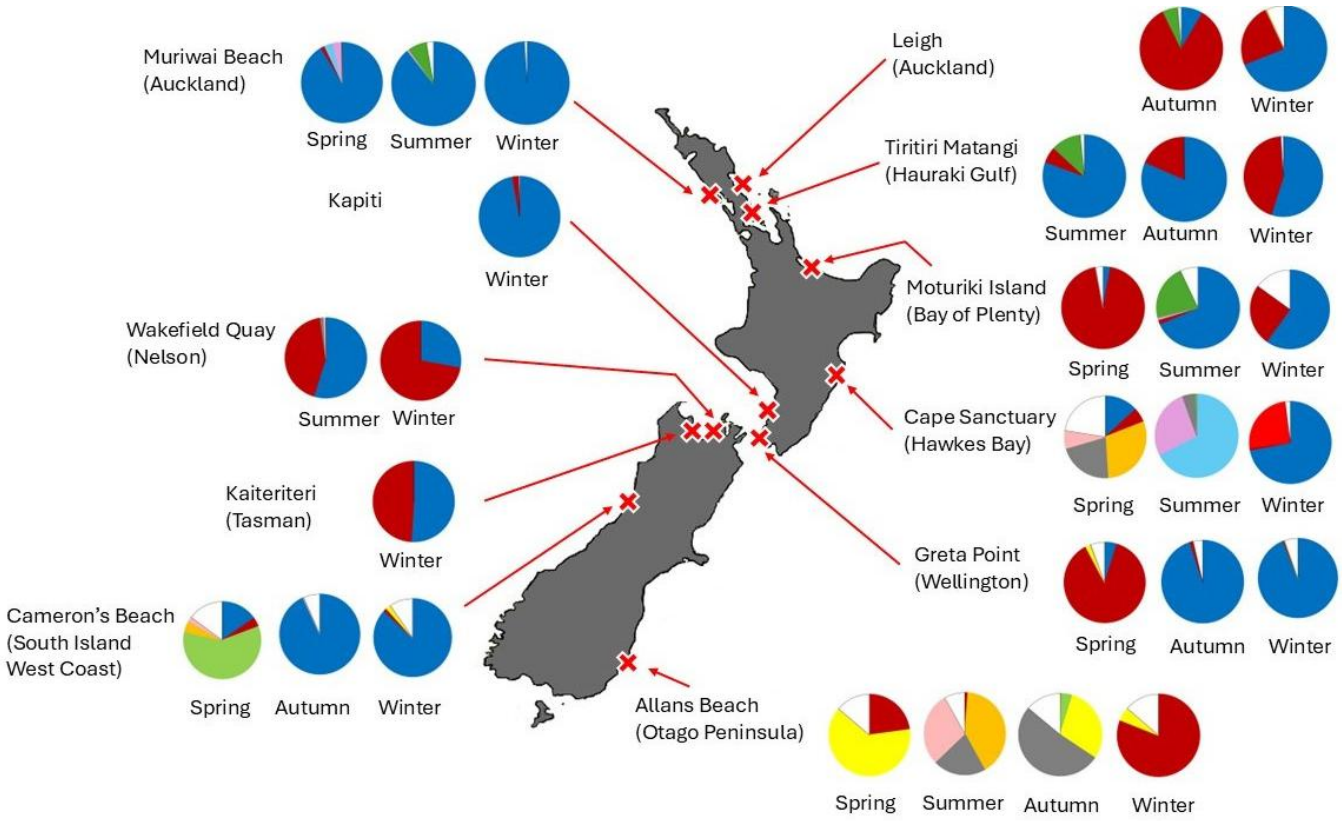
Scat is collected, processed and then sent to Wilderlab for analysis. They then send an XL sheet with a very long list of organisms whose DNA was found in the sample. Examining these results, fish families that had more than 10% the relative read abundance of DNA became the most sensible way of interpreting and reporting the data.
While non-fish prey DNA was detected it was not important.

There were 11 fish families that had a 10% relative read abundance in at least one sample in one season, illustrated here in the pie chart where the colours correspond to the pie charts associated with each kororā colony around the country.

Blue colour is Anchovies - and they were found everywhere: even as far south as Allans Beach (winter sample) which was a surprise but maybe not: the ocean is warming and it is possible that Anchovies are moving south.

Red colour is Sardines: warm-water Pilchard found as far south as Cook Strait, and cold-water Sprat mostly at Allans Beach, but oddly also found in the sample from Cape Sanctuary and the West Coast South Island.

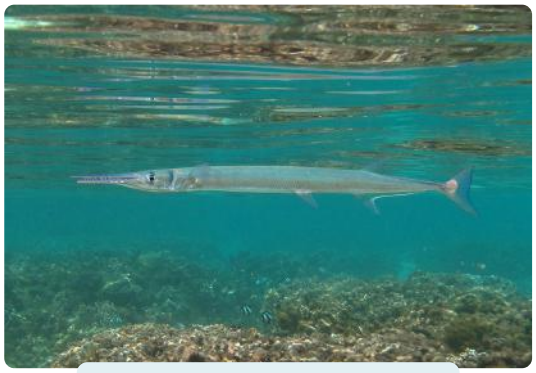
The sample from many places are dominated by these two families, but the results from Cape Sanctuary (North Island east coast) and Allans Beach (South Island east coast) indicate that kororā diet can be hugely variable. Any fish can be taken as a youngster by kororā but why kororā have such variety on the east coasts and not elsewhere, is unknown.



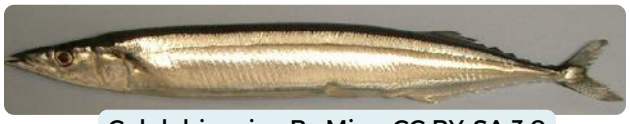
Oddities and what does it mean?

There were some fish family DNA in the kororā scat that were extra-limital, i.e. these fish are not normally found in NZ waters - as far as we know:

Needlefishes have only been recorded from the Kermadec Islands, 1000km north of the Bay of Plenty. They have now been identified from several samples (sky-blue in the pie charts). They have only been identified to family, so we don't know the species. This warm-water species is further south than expected, and this is either an indication of a hole in our knowledge of the distribution of this fish family or warming oceans causing them to migrate south to cooler waters.



An example of a Needlefish



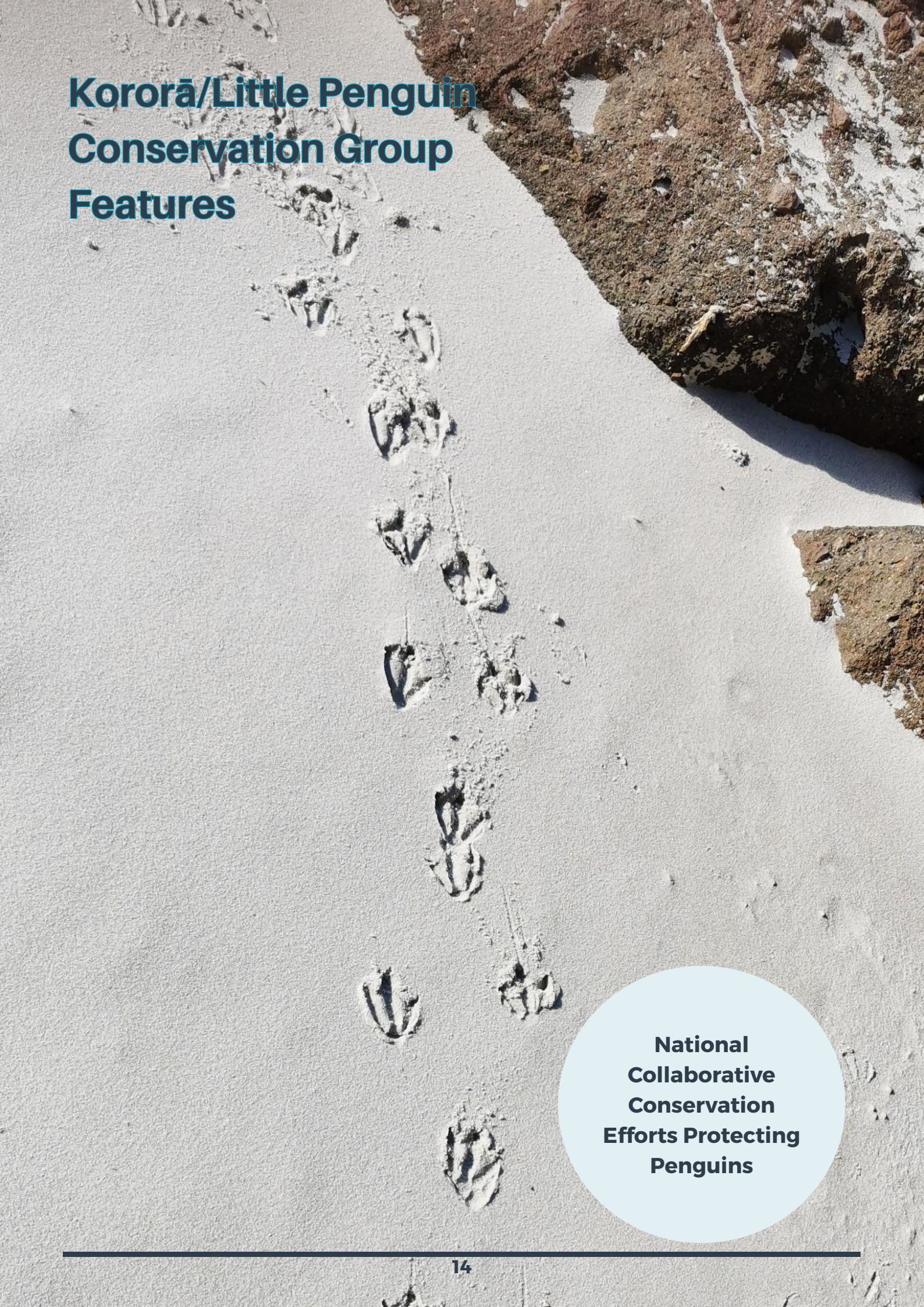
Cololabis saira. By Miya, CC BY-SA 3.0

Pacific saury (Cololabis saira) were also extra-limital (pink in the pie charts) as their distribution is the north Pacific, and yet they were detected in samples from the northern kororā colonies.

There is much we still don't know about some fish families, fish distribution, and how kororā diet differs and changes over time and between seasons and locations. Climate change is likely to impact prey availability for kororā with some species like Anchovies and Pilchard moving south, and extra-limital families like Sauries and Needlefishes arriving in northern New Zealand.

NZPI is planning two more years of sampling of kororā scats to see how the diet changes between seasons, years and locations. **Anyone who is interested in contributing a sample from their local kororā colony, please get in touch and let us know you want to participate in the diet study: admin@nzpi.nz.**

Kororā/Little Penguin Conservation Group Features



National Collaborative Conservation Efforts Protecting Penguins

Friends of Motu Manuka Haulashore Island

Location: Haulashore Island, Nelson
Project Start: 2019
Contact: andrew.fidler.nz@gmail.com

Key Successes

- With the help of NZPI, we started PIT tagging (microchipping) of penguins.
- Fledging of four chicks from two nests.
- Ongoing financial support from Port Nelson (critical for transport costs over to the island)

Key Challenges

- North end of Haulashore island is rapidly eroding, probably as a result of an adjacent, artificial seawall not being maintained. This erosion necessitates moving the acoustic lure and some nest boxes further from the sea edge.
- Winter storms toppled three trees on the island but fortunately without damage to boxes etc.

Haulashore Island trap layout- Aerial View.

Since 2019 a combination of providing nest boxes, trapping of rats and installation of a solar-power acoustic lure (playing penguin calls at night), have been used to encourage breeding on the island. A single nest was first reported on Haulashore Island in 2022 and as of writing in 2025 there are three nests. All indications are that the project will be successful with the goal being 10 breeding pairs on Haulashore island by 2030!

As of 2015, Port Nelson had a dwindling, remnant population of little penguins nesting adjacent an ever-busier coastal road and in the vicinity of increasing urban human and dog populations. In response, and in collaboration with Port Nelson Ltd and the Nelson City Council, a project was initiated to establish a thriving penguin breeding colony on small (ca. 10 hectares) Haulashore island located just at the entrance to Nelson's port, a site safe from dogs, cats and cars!

Scanning a nest box bird to read its PIT-Tag ID.

In 2024 there were two nests with four chicks fledged. As of writing, in 2025 there are three nests with the fledging rate currently unknown.

Adult guarding a chick in a nest box.

Helps Pōhatu Conservation Trust

Location: Flea Bay, Akaroa, Banks Peninsula
Project Start: 2021
Contact: www.pohatu.co.nz

Key Successes

- Three Master's students, Georgia Gwatkin, Paula Brown and Kaitlin Bowe finished their theses studying the white-flippered penguins at Pōhatu.
- Pōhatu was featured in several news articles and programmes, including 7Sharp in February 2025, where they highlighted the research at Pōhatu.
- Developed several educational resources and interactive digital experiences that will be shared in many ways, including in schools, at public events, and on ecotours.

Key Challenges

- Continued poaching in the Pōhatu Marine Reserve
- General public disturbing and opening boxes, despite them being on private land
- Flooding of nests during more common, heavy rain storms

Monitoring a nestbox (left to right: Kaitlin Bowe, Benoit Navarron, Georgia Gwatkin, Ali Ballard).

In 2022, the Helps Pōhatu Conservation Trust expanded a long-term conservation programme at Pōhatu/Flea Bay on Banks Peninsula, focused on monitoring, researching, and protecting one of the largest kororā/little penguin colonies on mainland New Zealand. The aim of the project is to protect Kororā from ongoing population declines due to both terrestrial and marine threats. We need to understand population demographics, such as reproductive success, adult survival, and recruitment rates, and how this relates to their distribution, habitat selection and behaviour both on land and at sea. Additionally, we promote predator control, marine sustainability, and marine protection through advocacy, outreach, and education.

The 2024-2025 season was the third year of marking white-flippered penguins with transponders and weekly monitoring of the colony. We monitored over 230 kororā nestboxes weekly from 1 September 2024-31 March 2025 and fortnightly thereafter until the start of the 2025-2026 breeding season. Despite having a lower number of eggs laid compared to previous years, fledging success was the highest. We also had our first resighting of 15 new breeders from the 2022-2023 cohort!

Monitoring team checking a nestbox.

Last chick to fledge in the colony.

Penguins First Timaru Inc.

Location: Caroline Bay, Timaru, Canterbury
Project Start: 2019
Contact: penguinsfirsttimaru@gmail.com

Key Successes

- Fence extension to protect habitat and reduce disturbance, and new fence installed around breeding habitat in dunes.
- Increased native vegetation for cover and nesting materials.
- Support from Venture Timaru to establish a trust and enhance community education/awareness.

Key Challenges

- High visitor numbers coming to observe the penguins.
- Vehicle traffic and speeding cars posing risk to penguins that may wander onto the road.
- Finding volunteers to help educate the public at night.

Mesh fence installed to protect habitat and reduce disturbance.

To ensure the wellbeing and protection of the kororā/little penguins at Caroline Bay, and other areas around the Timaru Coast, and to educate the public viewing the penguins from Marine Parade"

A small colony of kororā have made an impossible piece of real estate their home at Caroline Bay, near a well-lit busy road, which is next to an even more brightly lit Port of Timaru. For many years people have visited the colony and volunteers have supervised, concerned about the penguins' welfare. In 2019 a group of volunteers set up Penguins First Timaru and early in 2025, we became established as an Incorporated Society and Charitable Trust.

Night patrol volunteers to educate public and help keep penguins safe from disturbance.

For years we have counted penguins and visitors. Penguin numbers have remained more or less the same, based on our observations. However, visitor numbers have exploded and we often see more than 200 people on the footpath, coming to observe the nightly arrival of our kororā. Last year after intensive lobbying we were incredibly relieved to see the fence along Marine Parade extended, to prevent visitors sitting on the rocks and near nest entrances. We also did a random survey of visitors, to show the Council the value of our penguins to Timaru's economy. We took the results to Venture Timaru, to lobby for a proper fence around the breeding area in the dunes. At the beginning of this current breeding season (2025), a new mesh fence was installed, and new signs and a website are on their way- complete with a QR code, so people can easily donate to the trust.

Friends of Aramoana

Location: Aramoana Beach, Otago
Project Start: 2022
Contact: hiltrun.ratz@nzpi.nz

Key Successes

- More nest sites and breeding pairs found.
- Consistent fortnightly visits.
- Improved and more complete data.

Key Challenges

- Only low tide access and hard to reach natural burrows.
- No trapping of introduced predators, and possible dog presence at times.
- Erosion through high tides and waves that destroyed habitat access and nest sites.

The vision is to document the kororā population trend and breeding success through passive observations and to ensure that all nests can be safely accessed from the beach by the penguins.

Following footprints crossing the beach into the foreshore and sand dunes meant we found more natural burrows that were checked throughout the season. Some of those were used for breeding and others for moulting providing a good foundation of locating nests. That meant we had a good idea about number of pairs breeding (14) that incubated 28 eggs, hatched and fledged 22 chicks. Another five individuals were recorded that were not associated with a nest so were single and/or too young to breed.

Two adults inside a natural nest.

A couple peering out from their nest, staring at their visitor.

2 chicks, 6 weeks old inside a small cave.

Allans Beach

Location: Allans Beach, Otago Peninsula
Project Start: 2022
Contact: hiltrun.ratz@nzpi.nz

Key Successes

- First season at Tier 1 monitoring and all boxes were replaced with tamper-proof designs.
- There were more penguins than expected.
- Predator trapping was started with the help of the Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Group.

Key Challenges

- Access only at low tide.
- Public access to the colony with the potential of interference and disturbance.
- Sealions sometimes block the access to the colony.

Checking for a microchip of a kororā in a nest box with internal tunnel.

The vision is for obtaining high quality data for a small kororā colony on the Otago Peninsula, including breeding success, survival, recruitment and nest and mate fidelity.

Once microchipping started it became clear that there were more kororā calling Allans Beach home than expected. A total of 14 adults and 5 chicks were chipped (1 chick got away without a chip because it grew up in a deep hole deep in the cave). A total of 12 eggs were laid, and 6 chicks hatched and fledged. The chick weight record stood at 1400g at 6 weeks: pretty impressive and it was the youngest, and a singleton (see photo below).

The last chick of the season gets its microchip.

Despite high number of visitors to the beach (for Otago) and dogs being allowed on the southern end of the beach, not once was a dog seen at the northern end of the beach where the kororā colony is. The public still visits the colony, but hopefully interference is low.

Internal tunnel and tamper proof nest boxes.

Guardians of the Bay of Islands/Project Island Song

Location: Bay of Islands, Northland
Project Start: 2025
Contact: www.projectislandsong.co.nz

Key Successes

- Hosting kororā workshop with over 20 attendees & AGM presentation
- Engaging locals to help find & protect penguins
- Working with tertiary students to further knowledge

Key Challenges

- Limited funding
- Popular tourist destination over summer
- Recreational use of kororā habitat

We know locals, tourism operators and boaties in the Bay of Islands always see kororā in the water and footprints on the beaches. It's great to now be able to funnel that knowledge and information into a wider citizen science programme of data that will continue to help these populations into the future.

Kororā at Oneroa (long beach) public toilets, Kororāreka/Russell. L. Rumsey

Project Island Song is a pest-free wildlife sanctuary covering the seven islands in the eastern Bay of Islands. The project works to restore and protect the natural eco-systems and heritage of the Bay of Islands so that it is here for everyone, forever.

This is our first year as part of the NZPI whanau, so it's early days for us. It was awesome to have Melissa visit us in Kororāreka/Russell at the end of October, including delivering a workshop for 20 of our team, volunteers, and wider community members on the kororā/little penguin. Melissa was also our AGM speaker this year, further engaging our local community in this project. Very little work has been done previously on understanding any kororā populations north of Auckland, so we are excited to be part of activating monitoring work on the islands and the wider community.

Possible kororā nesting site at Urupukapuka Island, Bay of Islands. L. Rumsey

Footprints on Urupukapuka Island, Bay of Islands. A. O'Neill

We're excited to be part of the wider NZPI whanau to engage the community in gathering vital information about the kororā here in the Bay of Islands.

Whakaoranga o Karioi - Karioi Project

Location: Raglan, Waikato
Project Start: 2023
Contact: www.karioiproject.co.nz

Key Successes

- Identifying new kororā burrows
- Confirming fledged chicks
- Installing many new artificial nest boxes

Key Challenges

- A lot of the newly found burrows fell victim to a very active coastline (big swells, erosion)
- Educating dog owners in our community to help protect vulnerable kororā and their habitats.
- Figuring out how to passively monitor very public burrows

Our focus now is on expanding the protection of high-value coastal corridors to support ongoing kororā recovery alongside a growing ōi population.

Kororā footprints found on Ngārunui beach during our footprint surveys. Georgia Cummings

Te Whakaoranga O Karioi (Karioi Project) initially began with a focus on ōi (grey-faced petrel), but as our work progressed, we discovered that kororā are also nesting along the Whāingaroa coastline! We're now in the early stages of establishing more formal penguin monitoring and the expert guidance from Melissa and Hiltrun at NZPI has been invaluable in helping us get started. Our community-based conservation programme includes predator control, coastal monitoring, outreach events (science nights and radio interviews) and volunteer training.

Last season brought an exciting discovery, Miro the seabird detection dog located ten kororā burrows along the coastline. All of these were natural burrows situated right on the coast, which presents challenges for monitoring them without causing disturbance. Despite these difficulties, we were thrilled to confirm that at least two of the pairs occupying the burrows, successfully fledged chicks. Monitoring cameras captured kororā behaviour outside burrows, really helping to engage our community in penguin awareness and protection.

John, a student from the local school helping us build new nest boxes. Georgia Cummings

Rubbish removed from kororā and ōi habitat.

Eastland Port & Ecoworks NZ

Location: Eastland Port, Gisborne
Project Start: 2022
Contact: www.eastlandport.nz & www.ecoworks.co.nz

Key Successes

- Outstanding chick survival and fledging with 18/18 chicks fledged.
- High occupancy and full breeding participation (all 16 pairs attempted breeding).
- Several nests achieved two-chick fledges.

Key Challenges

- Ensuring adequate nesting material is available for the kororā, due to minimal natural materials being present
- Members of the public interfering with predator traps
- Maintaining dry and cool environments inside the nesting boxes

Tweedle-dee & Tweedle-dum in one of our nest boxes. Nicola Carter-Ecoworks

Nearly fledged chick in a burrow under the geotextile, that was laid to stabilise the rock wall. Guido Haag-Ecoworks

Eastland Port's kororā colony, the Waikahua Enhancement Area, was established along 260 metres of the port's southern seawall in 2022. The project includes a purpose-built protection fence to prevent kororā from entering operational areas, 20 nesting boxes, native coastal planting, and a network of predator traps. Ecoworks maintain and monitor the site on a fortnightly basis. An additional 10 nesting boxes have been installed for the 2025/2026 breeding season to expand available habitat.

The 2024/2025 breeding season at the Waikahua Enhancement Area was highly productive, with kororā making strong use of the established nesting structures (plus one natural burrow found within the fenced area). A total of 16 adult pairs were present across the monitored nest boxes, all of which attempted breeding. Across these nests, 22 eggs were recorded, resulting in 18 chicks, all of which successfully fledged, a notable achievement reflecting favourable site conditions and effective predator management. Nest success was recorded in 11 of the 16 breeding attempts (68.75% success rate), while five nests experienced failure at egg stage. Several nests produced two healthy chicks, demonstrating strong parental performance and stable habitat conditions through the season. Monitoring by Ecoworks ensured consistent oversight and rapid response to emerging issues, contributing to the excellent overall fledging result.

The purpose-built protection fence to prevent kororā from entering the port operational areas. Nicola Carter-Ecoworks

"With 16 breeding pairs and every chick successfully fledging, the kororā colony is showing strong momentum. The expansion of nest boxes will help support this growth in seasons to come," Eastland Ports Environmental Manager, Megan Kissick.

Waiheke Penguin Project

Location: Waiheke Island, Hauraki Gulf, Auckland
Contact: hfuller2001@yahoo.com

Key Successes

- Increased use of boxes.
- Live solar camera at one property, which is working well.
- Relationship building with landowners.

Key Challenges

- Lots of work on boxes to make them optimal for the penguins.
- Local areas facing tidal inundation.
- Off-leash dogs around Waiheke in coastal areas.

Photo from live solar camera of penguin resting.

Waiheke Penguin Project has been going for four years and signed up with NZPI February, 2025. A small monitoring project on private land, involving two landowners with neighbouring properties both with penguin colonies present.

This season, the work of the past 2 years was consolidated. Focus was on getting boxes established and spaced well, also getting to know the landowners better. When the project started, there was no kororā activity but already we have three pairs nesting, which is great progress. R3 fledged 2 chicks, p3 3 chicks and p5 2 chicks (a total of 7 chicks fledged). The project will contribute to the national monitoring programme and we are glad to be part of the national kororā community.

Box never used, now hosting pair with eggs.

Elevated nest box, to prevent tidal inundation.

Auckland Zoo Kororā Project

Location: West Coast Beaches, Auckland
Project Start: 2023
Contact: www.aucklandzoo.co.nz

Key Successes

- Monitoring with local community members for first breeding season across three sites, in collaboration with community partners; NZPI, Iwi, DOC and Auckland Council.
- Strengthened relationships with volunteers from Piha, Te Henga and Karekare and built stronger partnerships with local iwi, Auckland Council and DOC. This has created a united approach to conservation and monitoring, including processes for dead penguins and dog attacks.
- Submitted monitoring permit application to DOC for three sites on Auckland's West Coast.

Key Challenges

- Public breaching dog restrictions in place at Piha, Karekare and Te Henga, which has resulted in a high number of penguin deaths, including within designated total No-Dog zones.
- Inability to complete monitoring towards the end of breeding season, due to permission issues.
- Difficulty locating nests in dune and bush areas at Te Henga, despite a high number of footprints indicating regular activity.

Checking a nest box with a burrowscope. Zoo kororā monitoring team

Auckland Zoo aims to facilitate the monitoring of kororā present in Karekare, Piha and Te Henga/Bethells beaches on Auckland's West Coast. To achieve this, we plan to engage with mana whenua Te Kawerau ā Maki, local community groups Karekare Landcare, Pest Free Piha and Kororā Te Henga, Auckland Council and DOC. The objectives of the project are to determine the distribution, breeding success, recruitment, survival and identify key threats for kororā in the project area.

Adult in small crevice. Zoo kororā monitoring team

The zoo monitoring team assisted active volunteers in the monitoring of local birds at the three sites by providing technical support/training, alongside the expertise and resources provided by the New Zealand Penguin Initiative (NZPI). Standardised monitoring protocols have been followed as part of NZPI's national monitoring programme. Altogether, we successfully identified key nesting areas, located active burrows, and carried out effective breeding monitoring.

Exploring habitat along the coast. Zoo kororā monitoring team

Karekare Landcare

Location: Karekare, West Coast, Auckland
Project Start: 2023
Contact: www.karekarelandcare.org

Key Successes

- Community awareness has resulted in a generous donation from a local resident to purchase automated traps for predator control and nesting boxes for kororā habitat.
- Monitoring identified kororā activity hotspots, improving protection efforts.
- Lone Kauri school students participated in kororā education and beach clean-up activities.

Key Challenges

- Coming across dead kororā and not being able to understand their cause of death. Protocols need to be made easier.
- Educating the public about kororā protection and how vulnerable they are. Better dog control is required.
- Obtaining the required permits, so we can continue with more extensive monitoring.

AT220 trap in penguin habitat area, Karekare

KAREKARE LANDCARE.ORG

Karekare Landcare aims to create a safe habitat for kororā by controlling predators and supporting breeding through placement of nesting boxes away from landslide-prone areas. The group also educates the public about protecting kororā. With support from NZPI, Auckland Zoo, and Te Kawerau ā Maki, a monitoring programme is now in its second year.

Footprint data and camera footage have revealed seven new burrows so far this breeding season. Unfortunately, eight dead penguins have been found on our coastline since May 2025. Only one was able to have a necropsy, which suggested trauma was most consistent with a dog attack.

Lone Kauri School activity about little penguins.

Adult penguin killed by dog attack at Karekare Beach, August 2025.

We would like to thank the support that NZPI and Auckland Zoo staff has given us in monitoring Kororā this year.

Pest free Piha

Location: Piha, West Coast, Auckland
Project Start: 2023
Contact: www.pestfreepiha.nz

Key Successes

- Increased use of nest boxes from last year, where no boxes were used to one being used to fledge a chick. Followed by four boxes used by adults for moulting.
- Community helped plant harakeke and tī kōuka for habitat enhancement.
- Assistance given to Auckland Zoo's monitoring programme, including recording footprint trails on both North and South Beaches.

Key Challenges

- Continual disregard by public of designated No Dog zones, where kororā habitat exists.
- Ongoing communications with Auckland Council, to request staff patrols to coincide with the Seabird/Shorebird breeding periods and active dog walking times.
- High visitor numbers resulting in habitat disturbance and nest box disruptions/vandalism.

Nest box vandalism. Dudley Bell

Piha volunteers actively care for Kororā and their environment. From monitoring breeding activity, rescuing/retrieving suffering and dead birds, planting protective and enhancement vegetation, and checking footprint movements across the beaches. The nest box initiative from the previous year has shown success, which is very pleasing. Some boxes will require re-siting due to placement inaccuracies. The highlight was returning a rehabilitated bird back to the ocean.

The season success was the fledging of one kororā from a nest box and subsequently adults moulting in four of the boxes. Natural burrows being hard to monitor in this environment meant that success was hard to gauge when working only with foot tracks in the sand. We did however determine that from rock cracks and caves, that there were young chicks raised to fledgling stage.

Dudley releasing kororā after rehab at Waiheke. Dudley Bell

Protection fence for rock crack. Dudley Bell

Kororā Te Henga

Location: Te Henga, West Coast, Auckland
Project Start: 2023
Contact: kororatehenga@gmail.com

Key Successes

- Successfully developing a method for using data on track number and location to estimate number of nests.
- Construction and distribution of 14 nest boxes with the assistance of Auckland Council Environmental Group.
- Invited to present our results to the Oamaru Penguin Symposium in May 2025.

Key Challenges

- Identifying nest sites.
- Identifying what the main predator threats are, and how best to counter them.
- Further education of the public about local penguins.

Kororā Te Henga was formed in early 2024 after good numbers of penguin tracks had been observed previously on Te Henga/Bethells Beach and in neighbouring bays. In the 2024-25 season, we calculate that around 80-90 pairs of Little Penguins nest in our area, focused particularly around the major headlands immediately north and south of Bethells Beach, with even more likely in the more distant and inaccessible rocky coast.

We focused on counting tracks over the course of the season, largely because finding burrows and nests is very difficult in our terrain; we did identify 3-4 nests and obtained trail camera shots of penguins going to and from their burrows. By noting both the number and location of the tracks we were able to estimate numbers of nests with a good degree of confidence. The location of tracks to the north of Bethells and their timing late in the season led us to conclude that around 10 pairs (out of 68-70 pairs in the area) nested a second time, perhaps after failure of their first laying. We also concluded that the birds leave the beach for months, after their chicks fledge apart from short stays to moult.

Two adults keep watch outside their burrow captured on trail cam.

Penguin tracks from nests in the dunes. Richard Gardner

Richard checking a burrow under pōhutukawa roots. Simon Runting

Muriwai Environmental Trust - Penguin Project

Location: Muriwai, West Coast, Auckland
Project Start: 2015
Contact: www.muriwai-environment.org

The Muriwai Penguin Project has been running for over 10 years, operating predominantly in the southern bays of Muriwai. We currently have about 50 nest boxes and aim to install more for next season, while also expanding our trapping network. Our main goals are to protect and expand the colony, raise local awareness regarding dog control and improve knowledge of the Auckland West Coast kororā population.

Key Successes

- Volunteers trained in Oamaru and three team members becoming L2 qualified and one L1.
- Wildlife Authority from DOC granted and commenced bird marking.
- Expanded monitoring team and significantly improved our data collection.

Key Challenges

- Dogs an ongoing issue, with three attacks recorded in the last 12 months.
- Removal of nest boxes from the dunes north of Muriwai, to avoid encouraging birds to nest there that are at risk of disturbance and strikes from 4WD vehicles, off-roaders and motorbikes in the dunes. There still appears to be at least one pair nesting in the area.
- Extreme weather events remain a risk; one nest box containing birds was buried in a slip. We are actively working on ensuring all nest boxes are sited safely.

Rescued penguin that was buried in a landslip.

It has been a very successful year for the Muriwai Penguin Project, with all aspects of our work going from strength to strength. In December 2024, four volunteers travelled to Oamaru training on handling and marking birds. In June, we received our Wildlife Authority from DOC, and have since started marking birds this current 2025 season. In May, we presented an AI-based Dog Detection system at the Penguin Symposium. Subsequently, an intern from the University of Auckland's Master of Data Science programme has continued with the project to improve the model. We are conducting field trials and hope to deploy more devices soon, with plans to open-source the model/hardware for other groups to use.

Andy, Cam and Alice in Oamaru for training, December 2024.

We have strengthened our partnerships with iwi, Council, and others; it has been a huge pleasure working alongside iwi on monitoring this season. The season has gone extremely well, with more chicks fledged than last year and 15 chicks in nest boxes - a significant increase. We also believe we may be seeing evidence of double brooding - watch this space!

"Given the degradation of habitat and the rising challenge of marine heatwaves in the gulf and on the east coast, it is imperative to both protect and better understand the 'westie' kororā population." Richard Wright, Chairman.

Forest & Bird - Leigh Penguin Project

Location: Leigh, Auckland
Project Start: 2018
Contact: leighpenguins@gmail.com

Our vision is to create a safe habitat for Little Penguins and other seabirds to thrive along the coast from Ti Point Wharf to Goat Island.

Key Successes

- Enthusiastic dedicated volunteers monitoring nest box colonies, rock & cave burrows
- Community education & engagement events
- Taking part in the NZPI Scat e-DNA study

Key Challenges

- Starvation events & finding dead penguins
- Coastal development & disturbance
- Predators & off-leash/ uncontrolled dogs

Dead chicks inside a nest box, October 2024

It was a mixed result for the season. At the beginning of the year, we had quite a few penguin chicks that washed up on our coasts malnourished and/or dying. Weights were extremely low and despite our best efforts transporting the birds to rehab facilities, the mortality rates were high. We suspect this is likely the results of the poor state of the Hauraki Gulf, overfishing, sedimentation and climate change. We also have a relatively small population, which means they are highly vulnerable to threats.

Educational signage featuring season updates at Leigh Coastal Reserve

Adult pair loafing in a nest box. Madeleine Roberts

Ahead of the winter breeding season start, we ran a volunteer programme for new Penguin Rangers to monitor the coastlines of Goat Island, Leigh Coast and Ti Point, with the end result of a whole new team who were keen to learn all about penguins, monitoring and conservation.

This current season we have had a handful of nesting birds and chicks raised so far. Fingers crossed the food is more available and plentiful this summer!

Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi Inc.

Location: Tiritiri Matangi Island, Hauraki Gulf, Auckland
Project Start: 2019
Contact: www.tiritirimatangi.org.nz

Key Successes

- Two new volunteers joined the team, which made it easier to cover the scheduled checking days.
- Funding for 30 new nest boxes provided by the Tiritiri Matangi Supporters. Volunteers have built most of the boxes which were installed at a new site south of the wharf.
- The most welcome success was for the birds, which had a very successful nesting season.

Key Challenges

- Poor weather conditions and competition for seats on the ferry, limited the number of visits to the island.

Juvenile Duvaucel's Gecko inside a nest box. Johnathan Mower

SoTM exists to 'promote and enhance the open sanctuary at Tiritiri Matangi and to ensure the continuance of the project'. The Supporters have, over many years, worked to restore the Island's flora and fauna including planting over 280,000 trees and translocating birds, reptiles and invertebrates to (and latterly from) the island.

This season was much more successful than the previous one when all first clutch nests failed, probably because their parents couldn't find enough food. The return rate of tagged adults this season was near normal, suggesting that adults survived the event. Twelve pairs nested in the boxes, laying 31 eggs of which 25 hatched and 24 chicks fledged. Four pairs attempted a second clutch after their successful first clutches and two of them produced two chicks. Project Lead, John Stewart.

Adult inside a nest box

We now have a good team of enthusiastic committed volunteers. We have occasional catch-ups to discuss the monitoring project and consider suggestions for extending our monitoring activities.

Nesting site inside an implement shed, almost 1km from the shore. Jonathan Mower

Motuora Restoration Society

Location: Motuora Island, Hauraki Gulf, Auckland
Project Start: 2019
Contact: www.motuora.org.nz

Key Successes

- Increasing use of nestboxes (15, previous best 13).
- Two pairs attempted a second clutch after a first successful clutch. One of them fledged two chicks.
- Expanded number of volunteers trained to monitor the boxes, and managed most of the planned fortnightly checks.

Key Challenges

- Poor weather limited the number of visits to the island.
- Cost of transport to the island.
- Change of DOC ranger interrupted some monitoring and there was challenges with data recording.

Volunteer Karin holding a chick for measuring and marking. John Stewart

Motuora Restoration Society
Restoring Flora and Fauna on Motuora Island

The Motuora Restoration Society was formed in 1995 to restore the fauna and flora on this once-farmed 80-hectare island. Pioneer planting is complete, and we are now concentrating on succession species. Little penguins have readily taken to nestboxes and to various other structures they find acceptable.

The season began well with 15 pairs laying in nestboxes. Thirty-three eggs were laid (including two second clutches after successful first clutch), 26 hatched and 21 chicks fledged. This was a strong recovery after the previous season, when all first clutches failed. The return rate of tagged adults was a little down from what we would expect, but any missing birds have been replaced by new partners. Project Lead, John Stewart.

Adult guarding a chick. Karin Gouldstone

Our volunteers really enjoy their penguin monitoring and are highly engaged with the struggles of our birds to survive and breed.

Post-guard chicks developing blue feathers. Karin Gouldstone

Motuihe Project

Providing penguins with alternative accommodation options should keep them safe and make them easier to find in the future!

Location: Motuihe Island, Hauraki Gulf, Auckland
Project Start: 2023
Contact: www.motuihe.org.nz

The Motuihe Trust has a mission to restore, enhance & protect the indigenous flora & fauna, and the significant Maori & historic sites of Motuihe Island in consultation with stakeholders. Members of the community are provided with opportunities to participate in the restoration & maintenance of the island. Visitors are able to see native birds in their natural habitat, easily accessible from Auckland City.

Key Successes

- Ability to use burrowscopes for checking nests, and trail cameras for viewing penguin interactions around the island.
- New leadership team and regular volunteers getting more familiar with the island and where burrows are located.
- Great habitat for Kororā, as the native vegetation continues to thrive and our ecosystems recover.

Key Challenges

- Penguins preferring natural burrows, which makes them hard to find.
- Island access, especially with the changing weather and lack of a regular service.
- Boaties continuing to walk their dogs on the island.

Our second season developing a penguin monitoring protocol for the Motuihe project showed slow but steady progress. We had a change in leadership, as our previous leaders left for other adventures and opportunities. We are slowly building a dedicated team who have knowledge of the island and its coastlines. We are still hampered by the preference of our kororā for natural burrows, with many of them well inland, which makes their nests hard to find and monitor! In spite of intermittent trips, we were able to confirm at least one chick fledged on the headland- uphill, inland and deep within the roots of an old tree stump.

Volunteer group en route to do beach surveys.

We learned to use burrowscopes, which certainly helps see what is happening in the deep, natural burrows once we find them. Surprisingly we found kakariki and tui chicks in burrows in clay banks adjacent to where our kororā were nesting! And despite not seeing many penguins in the flesh, we did manage to see them through some of our trail cameras. Our monitoring permit was approved, which will allow us to carry out more tasks as our project develops.

Nest box camouflaged amongst natural habitat.

Adult pair outside of burrow caught on trail camera.

Project WETA & Predator Free Waihi Beach

Location: Waihi Beach, Bay of Plenty
Project Start: 2022
Contact: www.predatorfreebop.nz/waihi-beach

Predator Free Waihī Beach and Project WĒTĀ deliver targeted conservation efforts across Waihī Beach, Bowentown and surrounding bays. The programme is driven by a strong community network of trained volunteers, mana whenua partnerships and strategic conservation planning. The project is focused on reducing invasive predator populations and restoring biodiversity. Our work prioritises vulnerable native species, particularly the kororā/little penguin and northern New Zealand dotterel, while supporting wider ecological recovery across dune, coastal and estuarine habitats.

Key Successes

- Obtained Wildlife Authority and project lead became a certified L2 operator.
- Collaboration with Western Bay Wildlife Trust & Waihi Beach School involvement.
- Significant reduction in predators and protection of high-risk burrow areas.

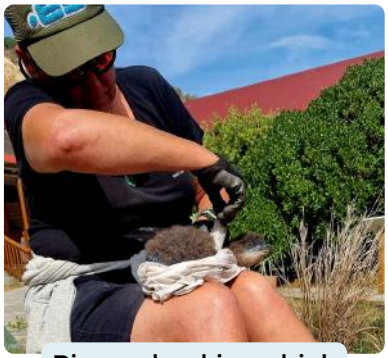
Key Challenges

- Ongoing predator presence
- Locating burrows and time required to monitor effectively
- Managing colonies amongst a popular beach and fishing destination

Students reviewing trail cam footage.

Over the past year, Predator Free Waihī Beach and Project WĒTĀ have made significant progress in kororā protection, predator control, and community engagement. With a newly issued wildlife permit, NZPI aligned specialist training, growing microchipping capability, and expanded monitoring technologies, the project is positioned strongly for continued success.

Trapping team at work.



Pippa checking chick condition during training at Oamaru Penguin Colony.

Collaborative action, scientific rigour, and committed volunteers remain the heart of this work, ensuring that kororā and other taonga species flourish in the Waihī Beach and Bowentown rohe for generations to come.

Western Bay Wildlife Trust

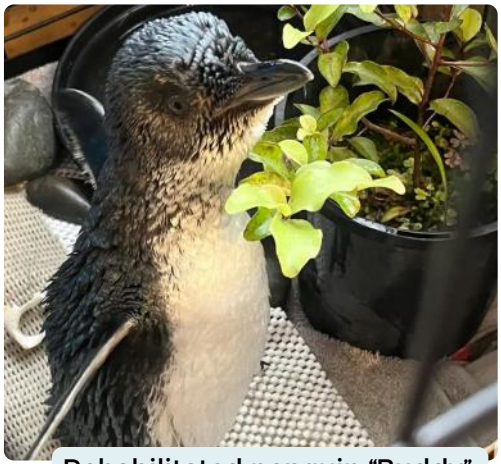
Location: Mount Maunganui, Bay of Plenty
Project Start: 2011
Contact: www.westernbaywildlife.nz

Key Successes

- Expanding knowledge of burrow distribution for our monitoring project with a conservation dog survey in October 2025.
- Successful rehabilitation of Kororā "Buddy" after 18 days of care.
- Kororā rescue training session with NZPI, for our growing network of volunteers.

Key Challenges

- Dog bylaw breaches causing a huge threat to our colony. One fatal dog attack on Kororā was confirmed through necropsy and more suspected cases are on-hand.
- Summer visitors dumping their rubbish and/or leaving fishing gear (hooks and lines) in Kororā habitat.
- Lack of information from DOC Hotline for rescues, leading to long searches, delayed rescue times and/or failure to locate sick/injured/starving penguins.



Rehabilitated penguin "Buddy". Vicki Woodcraft

Western Bay Wildlife Trust is a seabird and shorebird community conservation trust, with a particular focus on establishing a long-term kororā monitoring research project to understand our local colonies and improve their management on land and at sea. We also run a kororā rescue hotline for our area. Our other main focus is habitat restoration, through community involvement by planting native vegetation and organising clean-up working bees throughout the year.

2024/2025 marked our 6th consecutive year of nest monitoring on Moturiki Island. The nest occupancy was high, including potential double brooding in three of our nests. Whilst we did not have any known predation events in our colony, some nests failed due to unknown reasons. We also collected samples for the NZPI kororā diet study throughout the season.

Moturiki clean-up working bee. Vicki Woodcraft

Anna (WBWT) with Christine & See during Kororā conservation dog survey. Callum Armstrong

Cape Sanctuary

Location: Cape Kidnappers, Hawke's Bay
Project Start: 2006
Contact: www.capesanctuary.co.nz

Key Successes

- Progress towards upskilling the team for holding and microchipping
- Poo scooping/participation in the NZPI's wide diet study – very interesting and hopefully will help protect Kororā (and their food) in the future
- Weed control and nestbox repairs successful

Key Challenges

- Site maintenance and convincing the penguins to stay in nestboxes, and not disappear in deep self-dug tunnels
- Funding to cover vehicle costs for weekly monitoring rounds and handling/chipping training
- Ongoing predator control necessary due to the open ended 'leaky' fence

Alongside many other native species protected within the 2500ha fenced sanctuary, two kororā colonies are part of the monitoring project. Even though nestboxes were installed more than 10 years ago, the NZPI supported monitoring project kicked off in 2024 with the goal to build a better picture over the years of how the penguins are doing here, while also providing information that is comparable to other sites. The dedicated core team of currently 6 penguin enthusiasts is a group of volunteers who take turns to make sure data is collected frequently enough and that the penguin sites are maintained to provide attractive real estate for the birds. Signs of penguins can also be found in several other places along the 17km coastline between the ends of the 12 km predator-proof fence, that runs across the peninsula. However not all of them are easy to get to - some are tucked away between steep cliffs, so the focus lies on the ones that are accessible.

In 2024/25, 15 of over 130 boxes were occupied by breeding pairs, another 20 were used as short-term accommodation. One pair had a second breeding attempt after a successful first clutch, which was very exciting to find (and feathers were taken of the female for potential DNA analysis). After acquiring a DOC permit, the team managed for the first time to microchip 30 adults and 16 chicks. This was possible thanks to Hiltrun who came to the Cape Sanctuary to share her knowledge and skills, and also thanks to training at the Pohatu penguin colony in Akaroa.

Renewing nestbox markers.
Cherie Le Lievre

Adult kororā during moult in nestbox.
Mary Campbell

Kapiti Coast Biodiversity Projects Inc- Kororā Project

Location: Kapiti Coast, Wellington
Project Start: 2015
Contact: www.kapitibiodiversity.org.nz

Key Successes

- Regular footprint surveys undertaken.
- Hosted a university student undertaking research on dog owner education, to help keep Kororā safe.
- Increased advocacy.

Key Challenges

- Accumulation of woody debris & shells on the beach for long periods of time, obscuring footprints.
- Coastal erosion and tidal inundation.
- Maintaining safe pathways for penguins to get home to their burrows.

Adult caught on trail camera.

The aim of the Kāpiti Biodiversity Project is to improve native biodiversity throughout the Kāpiti Coast on land and sea. The Kororā Project started in 2015, to identify, monitor and protect populations along the Kapiti Coast beaches.

In 2024, we undertook 13 observation days and found the maximum number of footprints in October, with 24 tracks identified. We also monitored a small number of penguins on private land via trail camera. 3 dead penguins found- one broken flipper, one anaemic and another with a stomach full of sand. Dune collapse, erosion, humans blocking access and loose dogs are ongoing concerns, posing risk to colonies.

Tidal inundation along Paekakariki Beach during large swells.

This current season we have begun further trail camera monitoring and look forward to understanding more about our colonies along the coast.

Sue and Glenda in front of kororā advocacy signage, located in the Paekakariki Village.

Forest & Bird- Places for Penguins

Location: Wellington
Project Start: 2013
Contact: placesforpenguins@gmail.com

Key Successes

- Third year in a row a marked pair produced a double brood, and the first confirmed case of North Island double brooding that was published in Notornis in 2025.
- Successfully changed monitoring procedure to ensure welfare is a top priority, whilst also capturing data that can contribute to the National Monitoring Programme.
- Working closely with Wellington Zoo, to necropsy any deceased Kororā found and help us better understand the main threats.

Key Challenges

- Navigating how to proceed with marking colonies and gaining important recruitment data, after microchip migration issues were identified in hoiho.
- Large numbers of kororā continue to be killed by dogs in Wellington, including in dog restricted areas.
- Lack of suitable habitat protection at a number of sites.

Conservation dog See indicating a burrow during the survey of the south coast.

Places for Penguins has been dedicated to creating a safer coast for kororā around Te Whanganui-a-Tara since 2013. We have grown from a handful of volunteers installing nest boxes to provide safe habitat for penguins to a group of 90+ dedicated volunteers that monitor, trap, microchip kororā and report. Our monitoring is widespread, covering over 20 kms of coastline working with iwi, council, DOC and locals to educate and advocate for penguin safety which is the key to success.

This year we had fewer kororā come back to settle down and nest, with the first eggs found at Tarakena Bay in early August, with the chicks fledging in October. Most sites had eggs laid by September. The last eggs laid were at Tarakena Bay East and Moa Point, where the first clutches were abandoned because the female disappeared. The male found a new partner. We had 43 pairs breeding, producing 61 fledged chicks and only one chick died.

2 chicks found near the airport at Moa Point.

Adult in nest box sitting on eggs, the earliest confirmed egg laying in Wellington on record (15 June).

This current season we're on track for a higher % of dead chicks, in particular chicks in the inner harbour appear to be smaller and in poorer body condition than last year.

Goals for 2026

Continue to Grow Our Penguin Network Across Aotearoa

Continue to Develop & Enhance the National Monitoring Programme & Diet Study

Release New Penguin Monitoring App

Display More Groups Data via the Dashboard

Online Monthly Meetings

Group Visits/Training

Penguin Threats Action

Increase Scientific Publications in Collaboration with Groups

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Presentation & Workshop Attendees

Groups Supporters and Funders

Tangata Whenua

Department of Conservation

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