



# Places for Penguins

a Forest & Bird Wellington Branch project



**Forest & Bird**  
GIVING NATURE  
A VOICE

Newsletter

October/November 2016

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- What's happening
- Nestbox photos
- Local seabirds – pied shag
- Breeding summary
- Mystery photo
- Little Penguin ahoy
- Working bee

## WHAT'S HAPPENING

Normally, this is the time of year that most adult kororā (Little Penguins) are rearing their chicks. This year however, adults have been arriving considerably later than normal, with many only starting to nest in September or October. After hatching, chicks take an average of 56 days before they fledge, or leave the nest. In that time they grow from tiny balls of black fluff into penguins as big as adults



*Newly hatched Little Penguin and egg<sup>1</sup>*

and capable of looking after themselves. With plenty of food from their parents, the chicks gain weight and their down becomes fluffier and grey. In the early weeks an adult is always present at the nest to guard the chicks. Slowly chicks begin to take on the characteristic penguin shape and stand upright. Once they are big enough to be left alone, adults sometimes both go fishing at the same time to keep pace with the chicks' increased need for food. In a normal year, chicks are reliant on their parents until December or early January. This season they could well still be in the nest until February. Chicks stay at the nest site whether it is a natural one such as a rock crevice or under thick vegetation, or one of the 100+ nestboxes that Places for Penguins has placed around the Wellington coast.

## NESTBOX PHOTOS

Recent pictures from automated 'camera traps' reveal some of the Little Penguins' world. They take a photo



*Nestbox entrance during daytime*



*A rat passes by at night*



*A penguin inside and another outside*



*"Hello Ducky"*

when movement is detected. In daylight they produce colour photos and at night they use infra-red which does not disturb wildlife but produces black and white images. Other than kororā, we've seen half a dozen other bird species. Camera traps can also be useful for checking what pest species are in an area. In this instance, despite extensive baiting and traps, rats are still present. Knowing what pest species are present helps in preparing a predator control plan.

<sup>1</sup>Sourced from internet – Australian Animal Learning Zone

## OTHER LOCAL SEABIRDS – PIED SHAG

There are five types of shag regularly seen around Wellington. The pied shag, kāruhiruhi, (*Phalacrocorax varius*) is one of the more easily recognised. It is a big bird up to 85 cm long, with a squat stiff tail. It has webbed feet and its legs are positioned well back on the body, which makes them good swimmers but rather ungainly on land.



*Adult pied shag*

The word ‘pied’ means ‘comprising two colours’, but is normally used to describe something that is black and white. The term is used in many bird names around the world to describe species with plumage predominately of these two colours.

The pied shag certainly lives up to its name, with a bold black and white appearance, although close views show the back and wing feathers are actually dark grey edged with black.



*Feathers are dark grey edged with black*

The adult has a bright blue ring around the eye, a yellow patch of skin between the eye and beak (called a caruncle) and bare skin on the throat which can be different colours depending on the time of year.

Shags are mainly marine birds, although they are often seen around rivers and lakes. Zealandia has a thriving breeding population. Pied



*Pied shag on nest at Zealandia May 2016*

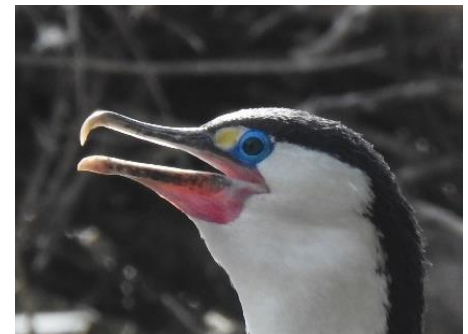
shags generally nest in colonies, in trees or ledges on cliff faces. Some nests at Zealandia are in trees that sprawl low across the lake and are not much above water level. Shags’ nests are generally messy affairs made of twigs which are collected nearby or pulled from waterside vegetation. The birds fly out to various parts of the Wellington coast to feed during the day. Like others in the family, pied shags are often seen in a typical ‘wing drying’

posture where they stand erect with wings held partially open to dry as their feathers are not proofed to repel water like other seabirds.

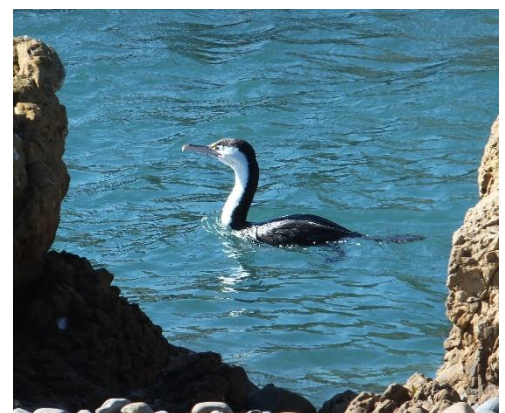
Shags are accomplished swimmers and their diet is mainly fish. Their hooked beak helps hold their slippery prey before they swallow it head first.

Pied shags are often seen in groups of up to half a dozen taking a rest or preening their feathers after a fishing trip.

Good places to see pied shags include Zealandia, The South Coast and there are often a few perched on rocks on the south side of the boat ramp at Tarakena Bay on the Miramar Peninsula.



*Breeding plumage showing head colours*



*Pied shags are excellent swimmers*

## KORORĀ BREEDING SUMMARY AT END OCTOBER By Kerry Shaw

After a slow start the kororā have started breeding and the results as at end of October has indicated that nestbox occupancy is currently 34 active boxes, similar to last season. Overall, PFP monitors are checking 106 nestboxes so the percentage occupancy is 32%. To 26 October, 15 chicks have been seen and 10 eggs observed, but quite a few birds are almost certainly incubating eggs that haven't been seen yet.

Tapu te Ranga island is going very well, with the benefit of more difficult access by humans and other pests. Half of the 12 nestboxes on the island are occupied.

### MYSTERY PHOTO

Is the photo on the right:

A blocked drain; a botanist's experimental garden; world's worst picnic site? OR

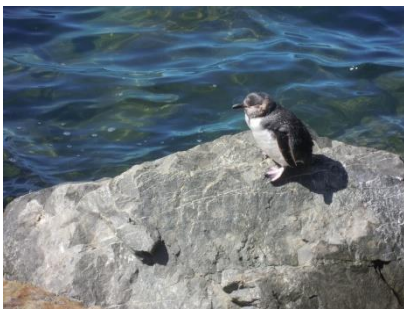
The natural nest site of a little penguin sniffed out by the specially trained nose of Mena the amazing penguin detection dog?

If you guessed the nest site, you were correct. Look out in the next edition of this newsletter for exciting news on how PFP's natural nest detection project went.



*Photo Karin Wiley*

### LITTLE PENGUIN AHOY



*Both photos Steffan Janssens*

This Little Penguin was out and about during the day recently. It was in the city centre near the old ferry ticket office on Jervois Quay. Normally Little Penguins are nocturnal on land, but this one seemed unconcerned by bright sun and the small group of people gathered round watching and taking photos. It was a thrill for overseas visitors who probably now think this is an everyday occurrence in Wellington. There have been other reports of a kororā in the port area in

full view during daylight hours. After a while it swam off and appeared to be uninjured and in good condition. Swimming, a spot of fishing, followed by some sunbathing. Maybe it's on holiday already.



*Penguin on upper right hand rock*

Any good penguin stories or photos that you'd like to share? Please email [placesforpenguins@gmail.com](mailto:placesforpenguins@gmail.com).

### NEXT WORKING BEE

The next working bee for PFP volunteers is likely to be for late November or early in 2017. It will probably be in conjunction with Te Motu Kairangi (Miramar Ecological Restoration Group) to weed Tai Paku Paku outcrop, although this still needs confirming. The outcrop is on Marine Parade, opposite Beerehaven Steps, 150m north of Seatoun Wharf and the junction with Ferry Street. We would love you to join us at this working bee. We will confirm location and send out date and details later.

*Photos by newsletter editor unless otherwise credited*

If any dead or injured penguins are found please contact:

**Department of Conservation Area Office on 04 472 5821 (after hours 0800 DOCHOT)**

Thanks to all our partners: Wellington Zoo, Wellington City Council, Greater Wellington Regional Council, the Society for Conservation Biology group at Victoria University, and Crombie Lockwood

WELLINGTON

