



WEST COAST PENGUIN TRUST BLUE PENGUIN FORAGING STUDY

Having established key land based threats to blue penguins and with projects underway to address them, the Trust wanted to better understand the marine ecology of kororā on the West Coast. Under the leadership of Kerry-Jayne Wilson, the Trust has always endeavoured to ensure robust science underpins any conservation management and this project is no different. Enabled through NZ Penguin Initiative collaboration and support, 11 breeding blue penguins were tracked using depth/GPS tracking units, seven individuals in the earlier chick-guard stage and four in the later post-guard stage.

Following sensitivity of penguins during the 2019 season, a season with poor food availability and chick starvation, actual tracker deployment varied in 2020 from the plan presented to Birds NZ following discussion between Kerry Jayne Wilson (Trust Scientist), Matt Charteris (Trust Ranger), Dr Thomas Mattern (Otago University and NZPI), Richard Seed (NZPI) and the landowner. A cautious approach was deemed necessary to maintain breeding pairs, maintain current breeding situation and to maintain relationship with, and access from, landowner.

Tracker deployment took place at approximately the same stage of the breeding season monitored in the 2019 season. All deployments had the units returned and the data was shared with NZPI for centralisation and accessibility of data. No nest desertions occurred. Foraging trips observed were short and efficient compared to data gathered in the 2019 season when food appeared scarce and distant. Supporting breeding data was recorded at two Buller colonies (including GPS unit deployment colony), the 2020 Buller breeding season being more productive with healthier adult and chick weights, and a higher breeding success compared with the 2019 breeding season.

Long term, the Trust will continue to collect data and aims to compare findings to marine variables to best support conservation management advocacy and action.

More details on our website: <https://www.westcoastpenguintrust.org.nz/news/facilitating-blue-penguin-korora-tracking-projects/>

And on the NZPI data platform: <https://www.penguindb.nz/WCPT/tracking>

