

>Katiki Point

Tourists destroy wildlife

Reserve no longer safe for penguins

By HAMISH MACLEAN

KATIKI POINT wildlife has been “left to the mercy of the tourists” and the area will now never be a local asset, Penguin Rescue manager Rosalie Goldsworthy says.

The volunteer spearheading yellow-eyed penguin conservation at Moeraki Peninsula last year championed establishing a tourism operation at the point to protect the nationally vulnerable birds that live there.

But Mrs Goldsworthy said she had since reached the conclusion that “unfettered public access” to Katiki Point had degraded the historic reserve — and her hopes it could be transformed into a tourist destination.

“I have let go of the idea that this place will ever be a local asset,” she wrote in her weekly newsletter on penguins.org.nz on January 1.

“The historic reserve is not safe for penguins. It is not safe for NZ fur seals either and they have stopped breeding there. On the other hand, the gulls have had a good breeding season on the historic reserve this year.”

From 6.30am to 10pm visitors were at the popular spot, distressing the wildlife, Mrs Goldsworthy told the *Otago Daily Times* yesterday.

“Even zoos have closing times that are enforced, but our wild animals are left to the mercy of the tourists,” she said.

Four breeding pairs of penguins live on the historic reserve which borders the Department of Conservation wildlife habitat where 23 breeding pairs live.

She removed the last of eight

penguin chicks hatched at the reserve this breeding season late last year as it was starving and was being pecked by an adult penguin — “dysfunctional behaviour” brought about by stress, she said.

Katiki Point is largely Ngai Tahu land under the customary care of Te Runanga o Moeraki with about 2ha of public conservation land managed by the Department of Conservation. Penguin Rescue is based at Moeraki Lighthouse.

Runaka o Moeraki chairman David Higgins was on leave and could not be reached for comment on Tuesday.

However, Mr Higgins told the *Otago Daily Times* last year his priority for the site was the preservation of Te Raka a Hineatea Pa site where penguins brought tourists who “stomp all over ... sacred places”.

Waitaki Mayor Gary Kircher said when the council renewed its memorandum of understanding with the runaka on December 14 he asked for “formal talks” to discuss the possibility of a tourism operation at the site, but that meeting had not yet happened.

A tourism operation at the historic reserve could be a win-win, to “tell the story of tangata whenua more as well as have a natural attraction for penguins”.

“I think it is a great opportunity that not only turns it into the commercial operation that it actually needs to make it environmentally sustainable, it’s actually something that is going to help employment for the locals in Moeraki. It’d be a great opportunity.”

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