

>Katiki Point

Traps helping liberate penguins

Yellow-eyed penguins are a well known image associated with New Zealand, but the species' future is fragile, under threat from all manner of predators. Intrepid North Otago reporter **Shannon Gillies** spent a day at Katiki Point working with a woman doing her bit for a piece of natural Otago that once gone, will be very hard to get back.

TUCKED away on the Otago Coast, four tiny sparks of hope for a threatened species have been discovered.

On Thursday, four yellow-eyed penguin eggs were found on Kaitiki Point at Moeraki.

Should they hatch, they will help boost New Zealand's dwindling yellow-eyed penguin population.

So the penguins' minders say everything that can be done to ensure their safety must be done.

Te Runanga o Moeraki member and conservationist Nola Tipa says I can interview her about the situation, but under one condition — I have to go trapping with her.

We meet at her Moeraki home, where she is busy preparing food for a local event. We jump in her car to travel to Katiki Point and chat about the history of the site as we drive.

A few tips on the importance of safety and how not to lose my hand to a pest trap, a short walk through tall grass and down a bank and we arrive at a walkway providing access to many traps.

The traps are set up under wooden boxes, each with a hole wide enough for a pest animal to get inside.

And they do. Each trap we check contains a dead rabbit or rat, all fat from whatever egg or flora they have eaten.

The traps are easy to open for a professional conservationist, but I'm more of a cliktavist cheerleader who has never really had to deal with dead animals up close.

Needless to say I am not very good with maggots, nor discarding dead animals. Mrs Tipa will not be selecting me for any post-apocalypse survivor camps.

The morning is spent learning how to safely set traps and learning about the importance of conservation at Katiki Point and why the point is so valuable to the community.

Mrs Tipa started trapping at the site about 18 months ago.

"I wanted to do something to help with the kaupapa (cause). However, I didn't have a lot of time, but there was trapping — I didn't mind getting my hands dirty."

She is trying to build a support base for the future of the site.

"One of my cousin's daughters comes in the holidays. She's 16 and we're

Hoiho and Katiki Point

▶ Largest colony of yellow-eyed penguins on the New Zealand mainland.

▶ 45 penguin nests at present

▶ Tended by Penguin Rescue, a charitable trust operating from the lighthouse at Katiki Point since 1983.

▶ Yellow-eyed penguins' average lifespan 8 years, but several have reached over 25

▶ Steep decline in nest numbers in the 1980s, followed by a mass mortality event in January 1990 which reduced the total number of nests to as low as 140 pairs on the entire Otago coast in the following season.

▶ Natural predators include barracouta, sharks, seals and sea lions. Injuries from barracouta are the most common.

looking at succession planning and she comes around with me. So what we're trying to do is instil a love of our home and people will come back.

"There's very few opportunities here. There's no shops, no job and no affordable housing so what can we do, but instil a love of our home.

"It's about getting people to love the kaupapa. Everybody says they love the penguins, but until recent times nobody wanted to fund it."

Mrs Tipa says the future of the colony depends on female birds — at present the colony is male-heavy.

Her theory for that is that because there are not enough fish at sea penguins are starving, allowing predators like barracouta to attack the weaker ones.

"Females are smaller



Such skill . . . Te Runanga o Moeraki member Nola Tipa empties traps of rats and rabbits. PHOTO: SHANNON GILLIES

and lighter, so they could be more susceptible to big predators."

The manager of the trust that looks after the birds at Katiki Penguin Rescue, Rosalie Goldsworthy, agrees with Mrs Tipa. She believes each beach community should care for their stretch of land.

But the Government must adequately fund conservation to help the penguin population grow, she says.

"New Zealand is famous for pushing things to the brink and maybe celebrating when they claw it back.

It's a very expensive way to do conservation."



Finding a mate . . . A male yellow-eyed penguin looks out for a potential mate at the colony. PHOTO: SHANNON GILLIES



Gone bunny . . . After having removed a dead rabbit from the trap that snared it at the Katiki colony, North Otago reporter Shannon Gillies displays her prize. PHOTO: NOLA TIPPA