



VOLUNTEERS PROTECT PENGUINS

📍 Miramar Peninsula, Wellington 📅 20th of October, 2015



Goodnature A24

Summary

Forest & Bird's Places for Penguins project is controlling pests around Wellington's Miramar Peninsula to give Little Penguins a fighting chance, and has found it is increasing the region's biodiversity at the same time.

The Background

Little Penguins/kororā are the world's smallest penguin. Their nests are predated by rats, weasels, stoats, and hedgehogs, while adult penguins face other risks in urban areas, such as cars and dogs.

"Kororā can only breed successfully in areas where the environment is compatible with their habitat requirements, which includes good, intensive pest control." An example of this is Matiu/Somes Island which has everything kororā require for successful breeding. Peter Hodge who coordinates the Places for Penguins trapping programme spoke of his experience at the island. "The penguin numbers there are phenomenal. It's inspirational to hear the penguins calling at night, largely because there are no predators on the island."

Inspired to increase nesting success of the local kororā population, backed by the Wellington City Council, Greater Wellington Regional Council, and a committed core group of volunteers, Places for Penguins' project team has stepped up its conservation efforts by increasing the density of Goodnature A24 traps around kororā nesting boxes.

Predator Control

Nesting boxes are placed on the seaward side of the road to minimise penguin crossings. Volunteers currently maintain a network of 100 various traps around these sites.

"We're using the A24s for targeted and localised control close to penguin nesting sites. The A24s are fantastic as you can deploy a bunch and knock out the rat population in an area pretty fast. They are stellar performers" Peter remarked. Because the A24 traps reset themselves they are available to kill multiple times between checks. "I set an A24 behind a penguin nesting box, came back a couple of days later, and found three dead ship rats there" Peter said.

"Other predators quite often scavenge dead pests away" explains Kerry Shaw, a member of the Places for Penguins committee. To track results, all kill data is recorded through the use of Digital Strike Counters on the A24s. Each Goodnature trap is fitted with a counter, which Peter describes as essential "so that we know how many pests are being killed and in which locations." The counters also play an important role in keeping volunteers motivated, as they can see the impact each trap is having on pest populations.

A combination of Goodnature A24 traps, DOC 200s, modified Victors, as well as bait stations are used. Each trap line consists of one type of trap as they require different management regimes. This simplifies training, ensuring volunteers are familiar with the traps they are responsible for checking. It also speeds up the maintenance checks.



Peter Hodge on Wellington's south coast.



Refreshing the lure for a Goodnature A24.



Results

Targeted pest control with Goodnature A24 traps was established in September 2014. Between this date and October 2015 the group's 35 A24 traps have killed over 200 pests. As female rats can have up to 5 litters per year, and their young can begin reproducing at around 5 months, the conservation gains are exponential.

The group is achieving their aim of maintaining kororā numbers on the mainland. There has also been an increase in the number of tūi in the area. Native birds and insects are safer thanks to the group's trapping efforts as Kerry points out. "There are beneficial spin-offs for other species".

Forest & Bird's Places for Penguins project committee has plans to expand the project and will work closely with its volunteers to ensure any project growth is sustainable.

To ensure the success of a community project, committed, enthusiastic and engaged volunteers are the key. "We're lucky to have a great bunch of volunteers," Peter says. "Without fit and keen people, none of this is possible."



Recommendations to Others

Peter and Kerry say that feedback is essential in sustaining the motivation of volunteers. "We keep the team informed about trapping and monitoring results, about plans for further expansion, and about fresh opportunities, like penguin monitoring, working with new technology (like the Goodnature traps), or setting out new trap lines. Some people like variety, or they're interested in learning practical conservation skills — we've got to a point where we can offer a range of interesting things for people to do".

They have further advice for community groups involved in conservation work, or individuals keen to establish a new group:

- Plan the project and set protocols for checking traps and recording data
- Create a roster that does not overburden volunteers — "conservation should remain a passion, not become a chore"
- Thoroughly train volunteers in how to safely operate traps and identify pests
- When using a combination of trap types, install one type of trap per line
- Maintain volunteer momentum by providing feedback on the project
- Digital counters are an essential tool to collect data on Goodnature trap success
- Be prepared for setbacks and frustrations — keep in mind the bigger game, and move on
- Start small and build the project up, and don't over-reach

As Peter notes, for any successful project "it takes a combination of ambition and realism".

Robbie's thoughts:

Goodnature traps are labour saving devices that are easy to use meaning everyone can get involved in pest control. The traps are durable and lightweight. An able-bodied trapper can carry 30 A24 traps, that is 720 kills, on their back and single-handedly provide protection across large tracts of forest. The monthly maintenance check requires no consumables to be carried. "Volunteers will find that checking a line of A24 traps is a walk in the park, literally."

Tips for success:

- Refresh the lure at least once a month to keep your traps attractive to pests
- Replace the gas and lure every 6 months so that your traps always have the ability to strike
- Use Goodnature Digital Strike Counters to collect data to feedback to the group
- For larger projects, use a method such as tracking tunnels to monitor pest populations



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