

Blue Penguins at Pilot's Beach – Discussion Issues

- ❖ Penguins are returning to Pilot's Beach in greatest numbers during peak tourist times as they nest from May to March, but only in good food years. Otherwise more likely to be seen from September to March. More penguins are about over summer as there is better feeding and chicks are young. This means that both adults come ashore, rather than one at a time.
- ❖ There is no fee to watch the penguins come ashore at Pilot's Beach and information on appropriate behaviour is only provided through signage. There is no formal supervision of the public's behaviour, although recently DOC staff have voluntarily provided a presence during the peak breeding periods.
- ❖ Erecting signage advertises penguins use this beach, and therefore probably increases the number of people visiting. If there were no signage would fewer people be aware of their presence resulting in lower visitor numbers? Or would the lack of signage increase the disturbance because of peoples ignorance (lack of awareness of how use of how use of headlights, blocking of their walking routes etc would stress them). It only takes a few people to cause a disturbance.
- ❖ Road to Pilot's Beach is closed temporarily to prevent vehicles driving in areas where the penguins are walking. Should it be closed all the time? Whose needs should be considered first – the wildlife or the visitors? This is a recreation reserve so this is a tough question. For the wildlife to come first the status of the reserve could need to be changed.
- ❖ The restaurant at the Royal Albatross Colony could attract more people to the headland at the end of the day – what impact would this have on the birds? This is a good opportunity to educate people before they go down to Pilot's beach at night. What other impacts could late opening of the restaurant have?
- ❖ Do you think people come to view this wildlife to enhance their awareness of biodiversity, conservation and the natural environmental? Or do you think they come just for the photo opportunity and to give them another thing to tick off their list and boast about? Hopefully most visitors are in the first category and for those in the second, some learning is done.
- ❖ As top predators, penguins provide information about the health of the marine ecosystem. We may not notice when the plankton dies off, but when seabirds and marine mammals die off, everyone takes note.
- ❖ Should the viewing of Little Blue Penguins at Pilot's Beach be set-up as it has been in Oamaru, where they have a large grand stand, people are charged an entrance fee and a guide supervises the publics activity and provides information about the birds. People complain about always having to pay and are more inclined to seek out non-paying ways of viewing, thus putting other wildlife refuges under pressure.
- ❖ Penguins are a non-threatened species so do we need to manage them? If they stop nesting at Pilot's Beach as a result of human disturbance do we need to worry – or will they just move somewhere else?