



## Chatham Island blue penguin *Eudyptula minor chathamensis* 40 cm

CHATHAM ISLANDS ENDEMIC SUBSPECIES,  
RANGE RESTRICTED

**Other names:** korora, fairy penguin, little penguin

### Identification

Blue penguins are the smallest of all penguin species. They have slate-blue upperparts with white below. Sexes are alike although males have longer and deeper bills. Six subspecies of blue penguin have been described, but further taxonomic work is required. Blue penguins are mostly nocturnal on land, and are often heard calling noisily from their nest sites at night.



Adult Chatham Island blue penguin, Star Keys. Photo: Adam Bester.

### Distribution and ecology

Blue penguins breed on Chatham Island, Pitt Island, Rangatira, Mangere, Star Keys, Houruakopara, and Kokope. Whilst there are large numbers breeding on Rangatira and Star Keys, the populations on the main islands may be declining due to feral cat predation. There are an estimated 5000-10,000 pairs of Chatham Island blue penguins. Blue penguins spend most of the year at sea, but come to shore to breed and moult. Nests are constructed in burrows, natural cavities or under rocks or buildings. Many birds nest close to the shore, but others will travel hundreds of



Pair of Chatham Island blue penguins, Rangatira. Photo: Graeme Taylor.

metres inland and up hill. Blue penguins can nest in loose colonies or as isolated pairs.

### Threats and conservation

The major threats to blue penguins on land are dogs, feral cats and pigs, which kill adult penguins and chicks if they have access to them. Norway rats may take eggs and young chicks on Chatham Island, but other rodents do not appear to be a threat. On Chatham and Pitt Islands, weka may also take eggs and young chicks. Cattle and sheep trample some nests, although most are protected in rock crevices or hollows in tree trunks. Fire is a risk to penguins, particularly when they are nesting and moulting.

The gazettal of Rangatira and Mangere as Nature Reserves, the removal of stock, and ongoing rodent quarantine measures, protect blue penguin populations on these two islands. The fencing of a number of coastal reserves and covenants on Chatham and Pitt Islands has also provided more secure nesting habitat for penguins. Penguins appear to have benefited from predator control undertaken to protect Chatham Island oystercatchers on northern Chatham Island beaches, but this has not been studied in any detail.