

Commerce vs Conservation - a Penguin's Perspective

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The yellow-eyed penguin is one of the rarest birds on earth. Only a few hundred remain on New Zealand's south island and sub-Antarctic islands. Unlike other penguins they don't flock, and demand a sizable territory to mate successfully. They're very sensitive to human activity.

Just a quiet walk along a breeding beach can be enough to result in breeding catastrophe.

The majority of breeding colonies on the south island are on crown land, and managed closely by New Zealand's Department of Conservation. Birds are monitored and public access is managed. Yet the number of breeding pairs continues to decline.

In contrast, the breeding colony on the Otago Peninsula is, by artefact of war-time resumptions, on privately owned land (an active sheep farm). For the past 11 years, the enterprising farmers have also been running 'penguin eco-tours', and as business has grown, these tours have replaced farming as their principal source of income. The number of breeding pairs has steadily grown.

The eco-tour operators inherently understand that they must conserve the penguins in order to have a sustainable business, and have developed practices to ensure just that.

Commerce underpinning conservation.

As they say in New Zealand, 'sweet as'.

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