



Tawaki/Fiordland crested penguins, Lake Moeraki



Juvenile Kea, Arthur's Pass

1st January 2022

Greetings from New Zealand's two Wilderness Lodges, Lake Moeraki and Arthur's Pass

All of us at New Zealand's Wilderness Lodges hope you enjoyed a wonderful Christmas and can look forward to a rewarding New Year for 2022.

We really appreciate your support for the Wilderness Lodges. It has been our most challenging year for tourism. The opening of international borders remains uncertain for 2022 with the arrival of the Omicron variant.

With your kind support, our NZ family-owned Lodges are open with a small staff and we have really enjoyed sharing our protected wild places and their special wildlife with people from all over NZ.

In this Wilderness Lodges update:

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3. Tawaki Penguin Rescue makes NZ national news.
4. Carbon storage commitment at Arthur's Pass.
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8. Superb Wilderness Lodge meals.

We re-opened both the Lodges in late-September 2021, delayed by the unexpected national lockdown in early September that heralded the arrival of the Delta variant.

On our Facebook page **Wilderness Lodges of New Zealand** (Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)) are stories about what has been happening at the Lodges.



Anne Saunders & Dr Gerry McSweeney



Hannah Bedford & Michael McSweeney

1. Great Wilderness Lodge Guided Adventure Trips

Wilderness Lodge Lake Moeraki

- *The Hard Wilderness Seacoast Walk through pristine rainforest to a remote coastline where waterfalls tumble over basalt cliffs, NZ Fur Seals rest on a wilderness beach and Tawaki penguins come in February to moult their old feathers and grow new feathers.*
- *Seacoast walks to see Hector's Dolphin and search for gemstones. Enjoy green-shelled mussels cooked in garlic, wine and butter over a driftwood fire as we compare all the treasure rocks and amazing-shaped driftwood we collect on the beach.*
- *Guided Kayak safaris on Lake Moeraki to see freshwater fur seals, picnic on Glacier Beach and visit the largest matai tree in the valley, estimated to be 2,000 years old.*
- *The wonderful fern and rainforest walk into the Upper Moeraki River on the Historic Paringa to Haast benched old highway (1885-1965) to the Moeraki Rapids and the 116-year-old Blue Hut. This hut has been beautifully restored by DOC staff.*



Kayaking on Lake Moeraki



Guided seacoast discovery walks

Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass

- Dawn kayaking on beautiful Moana Rua/Lake Pearson or Lake Sarah beneath towering Sugarloaf.
- Alpine Garden, flowers and waterfalls discovery in the Upper Bealey Valley of Arthur's Pass National Park.
- Explore the remnant snowfields and gaze at the soaring Otira Face of Mt Rolleston/Kaimatau on our hardest guided walk into the heart of the Southern Alps.
- Travel east into the dry tussocklands and limestone castles of the Craigieburn Forest Park to see strange scree plants and big sky country.
- Walk from the Wilderness Lodge into the Rainbow Valley Nature Walk, Broad Stream Gorge or the strange dry shrubland of the McKay Moa Forest.



Kayaking on Lake Pearson



Upper Otira alpine flower walk

2. Record Tawaki Penguin Breeding Success for the 2021 season

For the Tawaki Penguin breeding season 2021 we recorded the highest level of breeding activity in 32 years of observations. On our daily guided trips we record penguin movements between the coastal rainforest breeding areas and the Tasman Sea. Underpinning our count is the principle that more chicks demand more food. If more penguin chicks are raised then adults must make more trips to the sea to get food. As the chicks get bigger during the breeding season they also require increased amounts of food. In the last 6 weeks of the chicks time at the breeding area, they are grouped in creches. Now both parents then go out daily to get them food and that explains the spike in activity from mid-October onwards.

Our counting system over the last 26 years is a standard measure that does not require nest disturbance by humans. Such human intrusion risks scaring away the breeding penguins, transmission of disease (e.g. avian influenza) and the risk of leaving a human scent trail that predators might follow. Our standard measure is for a consistent time (90 minutes), at a similar time of day (early afternoon) and our guides use the same penguin identification and recording techniques.

Graph One (below) shows that penguin activity at the Monitor Beach roughly doubled over 20 years (1999-2019) as shown by comparing the average movement counts for the 4-year period 1996 to 1999 (Blue) against the average count for the 4-year period 2016 to 2019 (Orange). For 2021, the penguin activity count through the peak season shows an activity level nearly double that recorded for 2016-2019.



A waddle of Fiordland crested penguins pose on exposed basalt reef

In summary:

1. Tawaki Penguin activity at our monitor site has approximately tripled between 1996 and 2021.
2. In the early 1990s there were approximately 30 pairs of penguins nesting at our monitor colony site (DOC nest surveys 1990-1992). 30 years later we estimate that there are around 90 pairs of penguins now nesting here.
3. This means that at our Monitor Beach there is now a total of about 180 adult birds together with their chicks. This is some 4 to 5% of the estimated world population of 6,000 to 7,000 Tawaki/Fiordland Crested Penguins.
4. Most wild bird breeding populations worldwide are in decline because of habitat destruction and human impacts. It is great that here we have recorded a major increase in the Tawaki penguin breeding population over the last 26 years.

- *The Penguin coastal rainforest breeding areas are legally protected as DOC stewardship land.*
- *Dogs are prohibited because since 1994 these breeding areas have been designated as a Wildlife Refuge under the Wildlife Act.*
- *Greater public awareness of how special Tawaki penguins are combined with our caretaking of the monitor beach has reduced human disturbance at this special site.*
- *Regular aerial 1080 control by DOC of rats, possums and stoats throughout these forests reduces the impact of predation in the colony*
- *For the last 20 years there has been a two nautical mile (3.7km) wide set net ban the length of the West Coast reduces the risk of penguins getting entangled and drowning in nets. This is a problem for Hoiho/Yellow-eyed penguins on the Otago coast.*
- *There is no commercial fishing along this part of coast for the smaller fish that are the main diet of Tawaki penguins.*
- *In 2021 a proposed Maitaitai customary fishing designation from the Paringa River to Knights Point by Te Runanga o Makaawhio if established will prohibit commercial bottom trawling close to this coast. This will further protect the penguins.*



On 23 November 2021 Lake Moeraki Lodge co-owner Dr Gerry McSweeney received a call for help from the Department of Conservation. They asked him to go as quickly as possible to Monro beach, 45-minute walk from the Lake Moeraki Lodge where visiting Irish tourists had found a very sick penguin. It took Gerry only 7 minutes on his bicycle to get to the beach. There he assessed the shark-bitten Tawaki penguin, bundled it into a backpack, and bike back to the Lodge. That started an amazing 18 hour, 500km journey to the South Island Wildlife Hospital in Christchurch. The Tawaki penguin was helped on its way by staff from Development West Coast, Department of Conservation, Glacier Shuttles Franz Josef and by Air New Zealand. Wildlife Hospital volunteer Karen Talbot and vet Pauline Howard eventually operated on the penguin and it is now making a full recovery. The full story can be read using the link below:

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/environment/127209437/rare-penguin-rescued-after-shark-attack-on-the-west-coast>



"Gerry" the Tawaki rescued from Monro beach after a suspected shark bite

4. Carbon storage commitment at Wilderness Lodge at Arthur's Pass

Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass property and Lodges Managers Michael and Hannah McSweeney are in the final stages of negotiating a carbon-crop management agreement under the NZ Emissions Trading Scheme. Since purchasing 2400-hectare Cora Lynn Station in 1994, we have focused on protecting the native forests, shrublands and wetlands as well as on running our eco-tourism operation and a sustainable high-country farm. At the Wilderness Lodge we aim to sequester carbon and reduce our demand for fossil fuels.

Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass has an energy-efficient design and we have a renewable-energy only electricity contract. We focus on walking and kayaking rather than fossil-fuel hungry helicopter flights/jet boat trips and we also focus on the protection of nature and forest restoration. The emergence of electric vans, utes and tractors will herald a new era in sustainable energy use.

100 hectares of the McKay Moa Forest and Cora Lynn face are in the process of assessment as a permanent carbon sink. These are all areas where there has been dramatic regeneration of beech forest and shrublands since 1994.

5. Record Merino wool, grass-fed lamb and Angus calf prices

Supply-chain restrictions, much more home cooking with Covid movement restrictions and a return to sustainable natural products have all combined in 2021. There has been soaring prices for the super-fine merino wool, grass-reared lambs and store Angus calves raised on our Wilderness Lodge high country farm.

Part of our story is that we have combined nature protection with sustainable farming. As the old saying goes, It is hard to be green when you are in the red so these improved product prices are helping us to protect natural areas on our farm. Good prices also acknowledge the efforts of Farm Manager Neil Wood and his wife Leonie for all their hard work getting the stock through the high-country winter and feeding them on our best quality pastures. Our merino wool goes to a number of fashion houses throughout the world.



Merino wool from Cora Lynn woolshed



Farm Manager Neil Wood

6. Summer and Autumn Three Night stay escape specials feature the best of both Wilderness Lodges

Join us this summer for a nature holiday in style at NZ's two Wilderness Lodges.

Located in the heart of the Southern Alps and amongst pristine native forest, wetlands and wild seacoast of South Westland, the two family-owned Lodges were established in 1990 and 1996. 30 years later both Lodges are still owned and managed by the McSweeney/Saunders family. Anne and Gerry run Lake Moeraki. Hannah and Michael run Arthur's Pass.

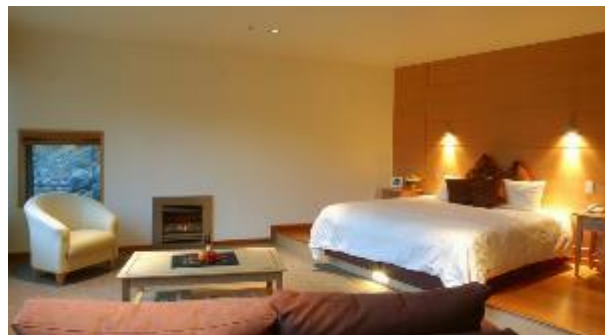
The Wilderness Lodges provide superb accommodations, gourmet food and great nature adventures. On our trips you will discover the wild heart of our country. In keeping with our eco-tourism focus, we have never offered fossil-fuel hungry helicopter, jet boat or quad bike tours. We instead offer a network of superb nature, forest, seacoast, river and mountain walks at both the Lodges and we also have a fleet of kayaks. You can explore the wilderness on your own or with our guides and even help with our nature protection projects.

This summer you still can't holiday overseas. New Covid variants mean that international travel will continue to be a challenge in 2022. Instead of crowded airports and long-haul flights that may or may not depart, come and enjoy wonderful hospitality at our NZ family-owned Lodges.

From 15 December 2021 until 31 March 2022 both Wilderness Lodges are offering a "Summer Escape Three Night Special".



Riverview Room, Lake Moeraki



Alpine Lodge, Arthur's Pass

These 4 day/3-night stays include accommodation, all meals and a range of guided nature adventures including a half day guided Alpine Flowers and Waterfalls Discovery trip at Arthur's Pass and a guided Wilderness Hector's Dolphin and Gemstone Beachcombing Seacoast Walk at Lake Moeraki.



7. Long-tailed Bats/Pekapeka discovered at Lake Moeraki.

Over the 32 years since we opened Wilderness Lodge Lake Moeraki we have always suspected that threatened long-tailed bats/pekapeka were living in the tall lowland kahikatea-dominated forest all around the Lodge. In 1986-88 Ecology Division DSIR carried out studies in the Moeraki-Paringa River catchments and recorded some long-tailed bats. However, over the next 35 years there was no follow up and the conservation focus was mainly on how to better protect native birds through landscape-scale pest control. There is an abundance of insect food here. There are tall kahikatea trees with hollow trunks as good nest sites for bats. The aerial 1080 and ground-based pest control here also means that predation levels by introduced rats and stoats should be low.



Long-tailed bat/pekapeka. Photo: Colin O'Donnell DOC

This year DOC South Westland Ranger Sarah Mockett came to our assistance. Sarah supplied Lodge Manager Darren Creighton with 5 bat detectors. Over spring 2021 Darren put these out where there are long corridors of open space between tall kahikatea and silver beech trees including over water. In early December 2021 the audio-detectors recorded the high-frequency (40Hz) night-time calling of bats along the Moeraki River. We are now expanding our survey work to determine how many bats are here and how widely they are distributed.

In 2021, the long-tailed bat/pekapeka was ranked “Bird of the Year” in the Forest and Bird annual competition. Yes, it isn’t a bird, but with only two bat species including the critically endangered short-tailed bat, a “Bat of the Year” competition would be no contest.

It is fantastic for a second native mammal, the bat, to join the NZ Fur Seals on Lake Moeraki as two NZ mammals that call this valley home.

8. Wilderness Lodge Gourmet Food

Our Lodges are in remote locations but after an exhilarating day outdoors nothing beats great food once you get back to the comfort of the Lodges. Head Chefs Kim Manalo (Lake Moeraki) and Jamie Mulhern (Arthur's Pass) have both worked in fine restaurants within NZ and overseas. They delight in the small, personalised meals they have the freedom to prepare and serve at both the Lodges. We feature our best lamb from the Wilderness Lodge farm, superb sea fish caught locally, the best vegetables available in the South Island and wonderful stone fruit from Central Otago, only 180km south of Lake Moeraki. Kim and Jamie are also very experienced in catering for special dietary requirements including vegetarians and vegans. We pride ourselves on a diverse wine list featuring the best of New Zealand and Australian wines.



Chef Kim Manalo preparing gourmet meals at Lake Moeraki

New Zealand Mistletoe for Christmas 2021 and New Year 2022 and have a great year ahead

It is customary to hang mistletoe over doorways in many parts of Europe. At both the Wilderness Lodges we celebrate with live mistletoes now in far healthier condition than when we started the Lodges over 30 years ago. New Zealand mistletoes are all incredibly vulnerable to being browsed and destroyed by introduced brushtail possums. 30 years of possum control at both the Lodges as well as hand-propagation of mistletoe seeds onto beech trees mean that healthy mistletoe can be seen in abundance growing on the beech trees around both the Wilderness Lodges (see photo below).



*Scarlet Mistletoe (Peraxilla colensoi) on silver beech.
Riverside Nature Walk, Wilderness Lodge Lake Moeraki*



*Golden Mistletoe (Peraxilla tetrapetala variety)
Rainbow Nature Walk, Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass*

Like the successful protection of mistletoe, we wish you bright prospects for the 2022 year. Thank you for your kind support. We look forward to hosting you and your friends over the coming year. Please share this newsletter with anyone who is interested in the Wilderness Lodges and who might also want to come and visit us. Email us at lakemoeraki@wildernesslodge.co.nz or arthurspass@wildernesslodge.co.nz.



Wishing you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

Anne, Gerry & Darren



WILDERNESS LODGE
LAKE MOERAKI

Hannah & Michael



WILDERNESS LODGE
ARTHUR'S PASS