

Special shearwaters

By EMMA DANGERFIELD

The annual Hutton's shearwater translocation project starts next week and the Hutton's Shearwater Charitable Trust is keen to give the local community plenty of opportunity to come and have a look at the work being done at the peninsula colony.

The first of the birds are due to arrive at the colony on Tuesday, as long as the weather allows. They will be collected from the mountain ranges and brought back by helicopter to the man-made breeding colony established by the Department of Conservation (DOC) in 2005.

It is hoped the chicks will arrive at 2pm, when they will be given water and put into their burrows. They will stay in the burrows until they are old enough to fledge. Those involved hope this will be a fairly swift process, to minimise stress for the chicks, which are only about 2½ weeks old. The public are invited to come and welcome them.

The translocation itself will take between two and four days,

depending on how easy it is to locate and pick up the chicks. It is hoped that about 100 chicks will be transferred from the Kowhai colony to the peninsula this year. The chicks will then be fed a daily "sardine smoothie" by trust members and volunteers, until the last chick has fledged.

Translocation manager Mike Bell, a trust member and ecological consultant who has been contracted to manage the project this year, says it is important the chicks are given this time at the peninsula so that they become accustomed to the area and will then return to the same site to breed later in the year.

During the two or three weeks the chicks are at the peninsula they will be in and out of their burrows, learning their surroundings and imprinting their nesting site. This means they create a memory of the location of the area, so after leaving and spending three years in Australia, they will return to the Kaikoura Peninsula colony.

If you would like to come along on Tuesday and welcome the



Rare breed: Ornithologist and Hutton's Shearwater Charitable Trust trustee, Mike Bell, with a Hutton's shearwater chick extracted from its burrow at the head of the Kowhai Stream. The chicks will be relocated to a new colony on the Kaikoura Peninsula. Photo: SUPPLIED

birds, please meet at the South Bay Domain at 1pm from where the group will walk up to the colony. A powhiri will also be held to welcome the special birds.

To get the community involved

with the project, there will also be opportunities every Thursday and Sunday to go out to the site and have a look. Meet at the corner of Scarborough and Ward Sts at 10am every Thursday and

Sunday. No booking required.

Tuesday afternoon's welcome will be weather dependent, so for confirmation, check the trust's website on the day, at huttons-shearwater.org.nz.

Whales being studied

By EMMA DANGERFIELD

A vessel spotted close to shore on Monday morning had a number of people concerned in the wake of talks about deep sea oil exploration off the Kaikoura coast.

However, this time there is nothing to be worried about, says Department of Conservation ranger Mike Morrissey.

Mr Morrissey, who was due to head out on the boat on Monday morning for two days, said the crew on the boat were part of a research group spending the next two weeks studying whales in the area.

The plan was to track the



Don't panic: This vessel which appeared in Kaikoura waters overnight on Sunday is not linked to seismic testing or deep sea oil drilling — it is carrying researchers who are studying the behaviour of whales.

Photo: EMMA DANGERFIELD

whales to see how deep they dive, as well as monitoring other aspects of their behaviour, he said. The group of marine mammal observers, who have a permit from DOC, arrived from Wellington on Sunday night.

The vessel will remain some distance offshore for most of its stay. Mr Morrissey said they would not be including the local resident whales in their study as these would be likely to have tour boats and aircraft around them.

The information is being gathered for National Geographic, in association with Liz Slooten, a marine mammal expert from Otago University.

Unobtrusive technologies will be trialled, including suction cups which can be attached to a whale to measure the depth of its dive and remote-controlled helicopters with onboard cameras which will be able to hover above the whale's blowhole without causing a disturbance to the animal.

Visitor a rare sight

A juvenile Fiordland crested penguin was identified during a recent penguin survey conducted by Penguin Education and Awareness Programme (PEAP) around the Kaikoura peninsula.

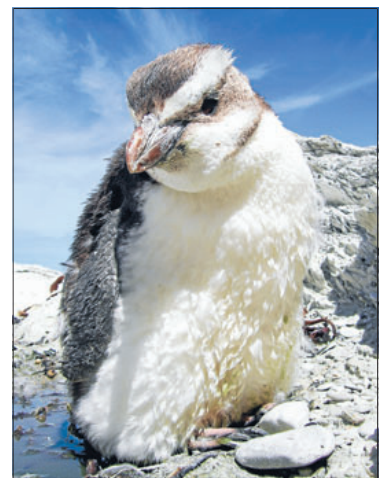
This endemic and vulnerable species has been seen here in Kaikoura on a few other occasions and usually during the moulting period.

Other occasional visitors to Kaikoura are Snares Crested, Yellow-eyed and even a Chinstrap penguin from Antarctica.

Last year an erect-crested penguin was seen in Kaikoura during moulting season.

Most penguin species go through one complete moult each year, usually after the breeding season. During moulting, new feathers push out and replace old ones, giving the moulting penguin a scruffy appearance.

Around New Zealand penguins can be observed coming ashore to moult in February and March, and the moulting process can take



Spotted: This Fiordland crested penguin is a long way from home, having come ashore in Kaikoura to moult. Photo: GARY MELVILLE

from two to four weeks. During this time their feathers are not waterproof so they need to remain on land and fast for the moulting period.

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