



Bird spotting: The man-made hutton's shearwater colony at Kaikoura Peninsula.

Photo: ANNA WILLIAMS

Great chicks this year

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"We want them here for a long enough period of time so that we can reprogramme their GPS and make them think that this is home," Mr Bell said.

The birds are weighed daily during feeding time to allow the team to manage their diets carefully and to monitor how close they were to fledging.

Most weighed between 450 and 700 grams but in the last three to four weeks before they fledge they drop down to between 360 and 400g so they are able to fly.

"They start coming out here and exercising their wings," Mr Bell said. "It's usually about seven to 10 days of coming to surface and practicing flying before they take off."

When the birds reached fledging

age, usually between 11 to 12 weeks, they head to Western Australia and return to Kaikoura three to four years later in September to breed.

A metal band is tied to the birds leg and a platform transmitter terminal (PTT) tag is injected in its back. The burrows have automatic recorders that monitor when the bird goes into the burrow.

When the birds come back they try to find a mate and their own burrow to nest in.

A male and female couple would share a burrow, but two females would be more likely to live in one burrow than two males as they would probably fight, Mr Bell said.

He is pleased with the progress the team is making so far this season.

"A lot of people have been helping. The birds have so far been well behaved and easy to feed," he said.



New home: Dianne John about to put a shearwater chick in its new burrow.

Photo: FAIRFAX NZ

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Feeding time: Wildlife Management International field assistant Mark Fraser, left, and Dave Boyle feed a hutton's shearwater chick a sardine smoothie formula.

Photo: ANNA WILLIAMS