

Fewer chicks aboard for early flight

Half normal number relocated

By ANNA WILLIAMS

Fewer than half of the expected 100 endangered hutton's shearwater chicks were plucked from their nests and relocated to the man-made colony on the Kaikoura Peninsula due to the late breeding season.

The chicks had an average age of 8 weeks when they were taken from high in the Seaward Kaikoura Ranges and flown by helicopter to the peninsula on Tuesday last week.

Wildlife Management International owner Mike Bell, contracted by the hutton's Shearwater Charitable Trust to run the translocation project, said the birds would stay at the colony for two to four weeks.

"We only have half the birds this season," he said.

"It's a bit later than normal and all of the chicks are a bit too young. We don't want to have them here for more than four to five weeks."

It is the first time in the five years he has been involved with the translocation project that only 45 birds had been collected.

"We aim for 100 each year," Mr Bell said.

"It's the first time we've hit this snag. There are plenty of chicks up there, but they're too small."

The team will go back to the Seaward Kaikoura ranges tomorrow to fetch the remaining 55 chicks.

The population of the hutton's shearwaters is estimated at 200,000 breeding pairs split across the head of the Kowhai River catchment and about 10 kilometres north on Puhi Peaks Station.

The chicks were a good looking bunch this season, Mr Bell said.

"There must have been a krill explosion because they're all nice



Good-looking chick: A hutton's shearwater at the Kaikoura Peninsula colony gets ready to be fed.

Photo: ANNA WILLIAMS

and fat," he said.

During their time at the peninsula colony, the birds will be in and out of the artificial burrows and will be fed a sardine and soya oil smoothie daily.

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Quiet time: A hutton's shearwater is placed into a man-made burrow on the Kaikoura Peninsula colony.

Photo: ANNA WILLIAMS

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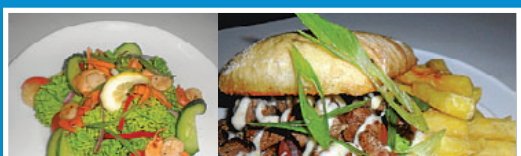
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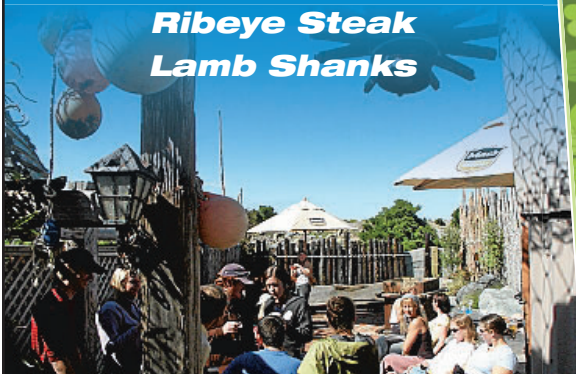
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