

# Dawn farewell to the shearwaters

By LJANA SLIGO

The hutton's shearwaters were ceremonially farewelled for winter on Sunday morning by 60 supporters of the endangered seabird that breeds only in Kaikoura.

White feathers were released at the hutton's shearwater colony on the Kaikoura Peninsula in early morning sun during a karakia led by DOC ranger and Te Runanga O Kaikoura member Brett Cowan.

The inaugural farewell ceremony was organised by the Hutton's Shearwater Charitable Trust to celebrate the successful relocation of the birds from their sub-alpine home in the Kowhai River Valley to the new colony on the peninsula. After walking out to the colony, supporters were treated to a breakfast and an update from the trust.

Hutton's shearwaters leave Kaikoura in April to migrate to Australian coastal waters and return in September to breed. Three of the relocated birds returned to the colony this summer, along with an unbanded bird. While the young birds' eggs were infertile, that was not a surprise as first-year breeding birds are known to be unsuccessful.

Trust member and DOC biodiversity manager Phil Bradfield says the Kaikoura Peninsula colony project was started in 2004 as an insurance policy for the seabirds, which have only two colonies left in Kaikoura, both in the



**Bye bye birds:** Department of Conservation ranger Brett Cowan leads supporters as they release white feathers at the farewell for hutton's shearwaters at the Kaikoura Peninsula on Sunday morning.

Photo: SUPPLIED

sub-alpine zone, which has provided natural protection over the years.

About 300 fledgling birds were transferred to the new colony between 2004 and 2008 and put in artificial burrows, he said.

The relocated birds come out of their burrows at night to "imprint" the sky and landscape before leaving the colony for the winter. This imprinting means they return to the new colony site.

With 100 artificial burrows

behind the new predator-proof fence on the peninsula, Mr Bradfield hopes the colony will one day hold up to 10,000 birds.

Loudspeakers at the colony play recorded hutton's shearwater calls at night to attract other shearwaters flying back to the mountains over the new colony.

The Hutton's Shearwater Charitable Trust raised funds for the new predator-proof fence, native planting and trapping inside the new colony. Now the

trust is focused on finding where the birds go during the winter and on their summer foraging trips from Kaikoura.

Small geolocators were attached to the leg bands of 20 birds which were then tracked off the northwest coast of Australia, with some of the birds travelling almost to the Antarctic waters on their return to Kaikoura.

Trust member Lindsay Rowe says GPS locators were also attached to birds for up to two

weeks at a time to discover where they feed.

"The birds fly directly out from Kaikoura on foraging trips that can last up to a week and cover over 600 kilometres," Mr Rowe said.

Event organiser and trust member Nicky McArthur says the farewell ceremony was a great success and will continue to grow into an important event for Kaikoura. A welcome home event for the birds is being planned for September.