



## Right whales visit Te Waewae Bay

**S**OUTHERN RIGHT WHALES, mercilessly hunted to the brink of extinction mid-last century, may be on the increase. For the first time in living memory a pod of about 10 of the great cetaceans took up residence in Southland's Te Waewae Bay during July and August.

Department of Conservation conservation officer Andy Cox says the whales appear to have moved into the bay for breeding.

Several sitings of southern right whales are usually reported along the New Zealand coast during spring, but according to Tuatapere fisher Les Chandler it is the first time he has seen large whales in Te Waewae Bay in ten year's fishing.

Between 1843 and 1846 more than 100 shore whaling stations along the coast hunted the whale. It was given the name "right" because it was easily reached by rowboat, swam slowly, floated when dead and yielded large quantities of oil and long baleen.

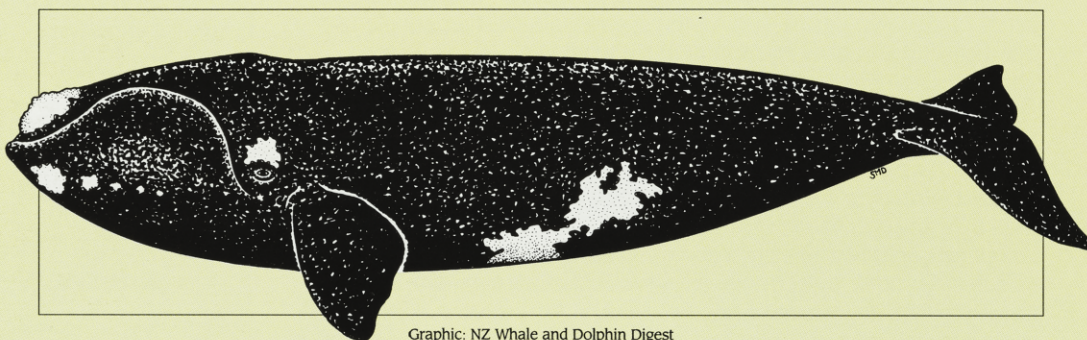
The species is distinctive because of the white callosities - raised patches of rough skin usually infested with parasitic worms, whale lice and barnacles - which cover the snout.

The total world population of southern right whales is estimated at only 3000. 🐋

**Tim Higham**



*The return of the southern right whale? Only time will tell but the signs are promising.* Photo: Tim Higham



Graphic: NZ Whale and Dolphin Digest

## Whooping it up for conservation

**W**ESTERN MOVIES have their detractors, not least because of the negative image they portray of North American Indians.

However, recent research on New

Zealand's seabirds owes a small debt to westerns, and is assisting endangered species such as the Chatham Island taiko.

Following on from work by Dr John Warham on the use of Indian "war whoops" to attract seabirds, DoC's Graeme Taylor and Forest and Bird researcher Alan Tennyson have recently fully tested the theory on a number of islands and on a number of unsuspecting species.

Dr Warham has suggested that human calls act as powerful sexual advertisement stimuli for gadfly petrels in the genus *Pterodroma*. In other words, the war whoops attract sexually active birds looking for a mate. Of all the species that were subject to war whooping, grey-faced petrels reacted most remarkably, as Tennyson and Taylor note in volume 37 of *Notornis*.

"Birds on the surface, in burrow entrances and in flight called immediately after stimulation. Some birds continued to call excitedly for several minutes after we had stopped calling. Some birds in flight landed, often crashing through canopy trees, within seconds of our making a war whoop call. Usually, these birds landed nearby but some landed up to 30 metres away. These and other birds on the surface scrambled towards us. When they came together they often fought. Others inspected burrow entrances, where they were sometimes attacked by the occupants."

The intrepid researchers also tested the war whoops on several gadfly petrel species on the Kermadecs, Mercury and Chatham Islands. Most birds tested were attracted by the war whoops or at least called from their burrows in response.

So what relevance do war whoops have to helping threatened seabirds? Warham, Tennyson and Taylor suggested that war whooping could be useful in finding burrows of rare species such as the Chatham Island taiko and petrel. Already several new colonies of grey-faced petrel have been found and population surveys of the rare white-naped petrel and Pycroft's petrels have been greatly assisted by using war whoops.

"We have found that some other loud noises, such as a "wolf howl", will elicit a strong response from *Pterodroma* petrels. However, the war whoops are easily used, carry well, and produce consistently strong responses," Tennyson and Taylor write.

Since the *Notornis* article was published, Graeme Taylor has through the use of war whoops caught four Chatham Island taiko in the three known burrows of the species. During the previous three seasons only one adult had been caught at these burrows. An expedition to search for burrows of the endangered Chatham Island petrel using war whoops was planned for January 1991.

**Gerard Hutching** 🐋



*A war whooping Forest and Bird researcher Alan Tennyson overcome by amorous white-naped petrels.*

Photo: Graeme Taylor