

Westland black petrel

LARGE BLACK PETRELS crashing through the forest canopy as they return to their burrows, then calling and displaying are sights few have seen. However, the Westland petrels are set to become an important tourist attraction for the West Coast. Forest and Bird members, Bruce Stuart-Menteath and Denise Howard have built a boardwalk and viewing platform that allows easy viewing of the petrels at a nesting colony south of Punakaiki.

The world's only colony of Westland black petrels is scattered along the coastal ranges from Punakaiki to Barrytown. Typical of petrels, Westland blacks spend most of their lives at sea, returning to land only to breed. They are the largest burrow nesting petrel and only come ashore at night. At sea they range as far afield as South America and Australia.

Westland blacks are a powerful and aggressive species. This has allowed them to survive on the mainland despite some losses to introduced predators such as cats, dogs, stoats and rats. Most petrel species now breed only on relatively inaccessible offshore islands because of predation on the mainland. In the past, petrel colonies like the Westland black colony would have been common in coastal areas throughout much of New Zealand.

Visits

The earliest birds come ashore in March. The colony is most active from April to August but chicks can be seen until November. Visits to the colony take two



Westland black petrels preparing for take off. Photo: Bruce Stewart-Menteath.

hours, beginning 30 minutes before sunset and are available only by arrangement with Paparoa Nature Tours. All visitors are accompanied by a guide.

For more information contact: Paparoa Nature Tours, PO Box 36, Punakaiki, West Coast.

Mining threat

North Broken Hill Peko's proposal to mine 1300ha of the Barrytown Flats alluvial ironsands for ilmenite has recently hit the headlines. Local people are concerned that fragile wetlands and coastal areas will be destroyed by the mine, a scar created on the doorstep to the spectacular Paparoa National Park, and their idyllic rural area transformed into a large industrial mine site.

The giant mine, which would be New Zealand's largest by far, also directly threatens the future of the Westland black petrel. Most of the petrel burrows are protected within the Black Petrel Nature

Reserve and Forest and Bird's adjacent petrel reserve gifted to the Society by Fletcher Titanium before they sold the ilmenite project to Broken Hill.

The mining application area comes within 20m of nesting petrels, and the 25m high processing plant is to be sited directly in the petrel flight-path to the colony. Forest and Bird's West Coast branch has opposed the proposed plans to mine so close to nesting petrels and objects to the siting of the processing plant. Petrels will be attracted at night to the lights of the plant and mining dredges. They could be killed by flying into these structures. Fledglings will be especially vulnerable on their first flights from the colony. Increased human activity around the plant may result in greater numbers of dogs and cats being in the vicinity of the petrel colony and increased levels of predation. It remains to be seen whether the mining proposal could be modified to meet the environmental concerns. ✎

Alan Tennyson



The proposed Barrytown Flats ilmenite mine will be New Zealand's largest mine. Photo: Alan Tennyson.

Electricity efficiency clarified

A GREAT DEAL OF CONFUSION surrounds the subject of energy-efficient light bulbs. The August *Forest & Bird* article on 'Getting the green light' only added to the confusion according to Stuart Bridgman, an energy management specialist.

While the electronic lights recommended by Forest and Bird are about 20 percent more efficient than the light bulbs David Bellamy is promoting for Electricorp, the

'power factor' mentioned in the item is a red herring. Power factor has very little to do with efficiency and something of concern only to big consumers of electricity. If an appliance uses 100 watts, you pay for 100 watts (times the hours of use, of course) whether its power factor is 1 or 0.1.

Forest and Bird notes that on a straight cost comparison it is likely that the electronic light bulb has a longer payback

period, but it will also help put back the need for expensive new power stations that all consumers will have to pay for.

Another advantage of the electronic bulbs that is only just starting to receive attention is the total absence of flicker, either visible or invisible. In a controlled experiment in England using the bulbs as a light source, people reported a 50 percent reduction in the incidence of headaches or eyestrain. ✎