



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS CHALLIES

rapid decline of mainland colonies has resulted in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) recently listing white-flipped penguins as 'endangered' in terms of their 'Red List' criteria — or one step closer to extinction than the much higher-profile, yellow-eyed penguin which is classed as 'vulnerable'.

'Blue penguins are declining in numbers everywhere on the mainland where they are not being protected from predators, and are now surviving in greatest numbers on offshore island refuges,' Dr Challies says.

In an article on the plight of blue penguins generally, in *Forest & Bird*, February 1992, Alan Tennyson's gloomy conclusion was that without active intervention all sub-groups of these smallest of all penguins were almost certainly doomed to disappear from New Zealand's mainland coasts. What he believed was required to prevent this happening was:

- a nationally co-ordinated detailed survey of penguin populations;
- identification of areas where active management is required;
- establishment of dog-free zones around colonies;
- habitat restoration and formal protection of all penguin colonies; and
- education programmes in areas where home owners or the public might cause problems for penguins.

The only organization capable of overseeing such a recovery programme is the Department of Conservation. But while DoC has been involved in several individ-

ual blue penguin protection operations (for example, assisting with the protection of a colony of about 1200 southern blue penguins at Oamaru's coastal quarry — see *Forest & Bird*, November 1992) no significant steps have yet been taken by the department towards formulating either a national recovery programme or a recovery programme for a particular sub-group.

While the plight of mainland populations of blue penguins generally awaits greater recognition at a national level, the future has been looking somewhat brighter for the Banks Peninsula colony of white-flipped blues at Flea Bay. Over recent years, local farmer and *Forest and Bird* member Francis Helps has undertaken a voluntary programme of trapping predators and monitoring breeding.

Having lived in close proximity with penguins since taking over the 700-hectare Flea Bay farm in 1969 — initially he had trouble getting to sleep because of the noise they made when nesting under the house and nearby sheds — Francis found himself wondering more and more about why this particular colony had managed to survive when others seemed to be declining. Was it the environment? The local availability of food? Or the isolation and lack of human disturbance?

Such meditations eventually led to Francis taking a more active role in securing the colony's future welfare. This began in the late 1980s with trapping ferrets, stoats and feral cats, and warning set-net users of the dangers their nets created for penguins.

By 1996 this work had been extended to

