PELAGIC BIRDLIFE IN RELATION TO PREDATOR CONTROL AND TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF PENGUINS IN BANKS PENINSULA NEW ZEALAND

[Summary Report]

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Introduction
This report aims to examine and identify the outcomes of the Wildside project on Banks Peninsula in the Canterbury region of South Island of New Zealand. Penguins in Flea Bay are the focus of this study and the objective is to identify and assess the success of predator control program in relation to an increase in the number of penguins and boost in tourism on Banks Peninsula. This study was part of the requirements of a research methods course at Lincoln University.

Research Method
Qualitative data collection methods are used to collect data in natural settings to understand people’s behaviours believes and values. Research outcomes often are based on a small sample collected from various participants who have expertise on the setting. This research involved a series of semi-structured interviews (July-October 2014) with founding members of the Wildside project, individuals involved in conducting, coordinating and managing the project, tour operators in the Wildside, and a social scientist with an interest in the tourism sector. In addition a series of observations in the Wildside of Banks Peninsula were conducted. Direct quotes from the interviews are presented in the following report with codes to ensure anonymity of research participants. Participation in this research was voluntary and research information was provided before data collection. All interviews took between forty five minutes to an hour and participants were asked to sign a consent form. All interviews were recorded using a recording device with the permission of the participant. Short-hand notes were also taken during the interview. Participants were also allowed to withdrew their participation and the information they provided and had the right to withdraw from the interview at any time, for any reason.

Study Site
The Wildside is a “13,500ha area of Banks Peninsula in the Canterbury region of South Island of New Zealand” (DRLBB, VFFBH, and RMLBH). The Wildside is from Le Bons Bay to the Akaroa Headland (TRLBB, GFFBH) as shown in Figure 1 in appendix A with a “total of 30 landowners participating in the project” (KMLBH). It is an “area found rich in biodiversity during the first little blue penguin survey in 2000-01” (YRLBB, TFFBH). It is the vision of the community of the Wildside that conservation activities are carried out “within a productive farming landscape” (ERLBB). The project aims to contribute to a prosperous community, sustainable productivity, and flourishing native species and ecosystems with a vision ‘Healthy land, water, people from summit to sea’.
The Wildside Project

The Wildside project aims to restore the range of species found within an ecosystem and to protect the unique and iconic species that already exist on Banks Peninsula. The project manages the largest penguin colony on mainland Australasia of white-flippered little blue penguins, in “Flea Bay with a yearly 5% increase in breeding pairs” (RFFBH, GSFBH, and PMLBH). The colony has grown from “717 pairs in 2000/2001 to 1304 pairs in 2012” (LSFBH) which is a proven success for the community initiated project. The “last remaining titi colony went down to two pairs and now because of predator excluder fencing 34 chicks fledged in 2013” (PFFBH). Tuis were also “released on the Wildside of Banks Peninsula in 2010 and can be seen all around Banks Peninsula” (IRLBB, LMLBH).

Research Findings

The Banks Peninsula community is passionate about preserving their environment in various forms. They value wildlife and are struggling for a utopian place where human and wildlife live together happily without interference on/from one another’s lifestyles. A collaborative project of landowners, government and non-government agencies was started to protect endemic, threatened, rare and iconic biodiversity on the south-eastern bays of Banks Peninsula. The project accepts the fact that humans have exploited wildlife in various forms throughout settlement history (URLBB) but remain determined to protect and preserve the remaining wildlife and native bush. People started covenanting, fencing off native bush and became actively involved in predator control to protect the wildlife from predators like ferrets, stoats and cats.

New Zealand has been promoted as 100% pure destination in the world for more than a decade. Iconic species such as the yellow-eye penguins, white-flippered penguins, titi, tui, jewelled gecko and Hector’s dolphins in Banks Peninsula are major tourist attractions along with beautiful landscapes, history, indigenous culture and flora and fauna.

Establishment of the Wildside Project

In the 1980s landowners in south-eastern bays found that “penguin numbers were declining and the major causes were introduced predators, and human disturbance” (TFFBH). “Penguin carcases were found around the hillside and people were chasing penguins after dark” (RSFBH). Things were getting out of control and the farming community felt a need to protect the penguins from predators. With “little understanding of trapping and predator control, farming communities were swapping ideas and learning from each other” (EFFBH). Their passion turned into curiosity and a baseline survey of the whole of Banks Peninsula was conducted in 2000/01. During the survey it was obvious that “from Akaroa heads to Le Bons Bay the penguin numbers were the densest” (WRLBB, UFFBH). A proposal “(Burleigh initiative) in the form of an email was put forward suggesting a formal approach to expand the predator control and reintroducing some of the species that are gone from Banks Peninsula over the last 150 years of European Settlement” (PRLBB, EFFBH). It was this “email in which the word ‘Wildside’ was used and got used more and more and it became ‘the Wildside” (ORLBB). Leadership, motivation, devotion
and networking persuaded people to participate actively in the predator control program on a voluntary basis and the program grew organically.

Source of Inspiration and Primary Constraints
Community attributes like passion, devotion, and networking seem to be the key element which has motivated ordinary individuals to join hands for this important cause. A community driven project with a vision, an ambitious team and limited but wisely used resources resulted in the outcomes that we can now see first-hand. “Farming downturn, monitory constraints, did not stop them achieving their goals” (CFFBH, TSFBH) and “trap lines were built slowly” (DFFBH, TSFBH) and the community justified their work, passion and devotion to stop predators doing any more damage. “Over a 30 years span about 80 percent of the penguins disappeared” (WRLBB).

Success of the Wildside Project in Penguin Conservation
Akaroa is known for attracting tourists with specialised appeal including a unique volcanic landscape and species such as the yellow-eye and white-flippered penguins. “One of the most common questions asked by tourist in Akaroa is about penguins and is because of awareness created by the Wildside project” (URLBB). “Word of mouth over the years has made people responsive” (PRLBB). Experts believe that without community involvement, “government departments just don’t have the resources to effectively manage predator control in large areas” (YPCHD). This is because small communities are “more productive, caring, have a great sense of place, more inclined towards conservation and heritage preservation” (PPCHD, KSLBH). Landowners within the Wildside have become experts in trapping, learning more about the birds, their behavior, breading performances and published scientific papers. “Data collected by the farming community for the past 13-14 years on breeding performance is being used throughout Australia and New Zealand” (UFBH). People involved in trapping program are passionate about their job and see it as an “opportunity to protect the local birds” (CILBS). “In 1991, farmer(s) in Flea Bay were catching 40-50 cats and ferrets and in 2014 this number has gone down to zero cats and five ferrets respectively and the number of breading pairs have grown from 717 in 2001-2 to 1304 pairs in 2012” (IFFBH, XSFHB, JMLBH, and OJLBS).

Predator Control an Ethical Question
Predator control is killing a predator with the help of traps or poison. Perhaps “New Zealand is the only country in the world that deals with conservation by killing things” (SPCHD). This is a sensitive issue and easily gets criticised but “if you stop, the predators will build up again and you go backwards” (NPCHD, MJLBS, IRLBB, and UFBH). It means that more trapping and more killing of predators. Experts believe that so far the program “has been effective and it has got to be carried on for conservation of native species” (PPFBD, DJLBS).

“The whole process of predator control is the complexity of the program and is constrained by finance and availability of labour. This is why the community becomes so important, it is just going to require a sustained and multiple actions” (OPCHD).
Moreover, the New Zealand ecosystem is such that predator control is essential and without it would be hard to conserve ecosystems.

“You can't get a natural balance when you have species that have not evolved in the same habitat. These predators do not belong to our ecosystems, so therefore there is no chance of reaching a natural balance. The predator numbers go up, our wildlife goes down, and there is no way round it” (ZPCHD).

This gives us scientific reason to do an extensive predator program in order to protect native wildlife. “New Zealand fauna had its own predators, and that is ok...but introduced predators, no. And I have got no qualms about killing something to protect something else” (DFFBH). “The only way we are going to save [penguins] is by killing these other animals [predators]...and get some sort of balance, where the tips are in favour of native species” (WRLBB, EJLBS).

**Predator Control in Relation to Tourism – Economic and Social Impacts**

The tourism industry is ubiquitous and multi-faceted in nature. The Wildside community has worked hard over the years and has conserved native bush and birdlife and now people from all over the world visit to experience the tourism product. Wildside has significant importance for tourism not only on Banks Peninsula but to the whole of the South Island. The Wildside enjoys “the only two marine reserves in the east coast of the South Island” (ERLBB).

“People love to get in touch with nature where they experience nature in its most healthy form. For that people travel long distances and pay a lot of money. Conservation is the most important thing for a healthy tourism industry in the world and specifically in New Zealand” (TMLBH).

Tourists, during their visit to the Wildside, get to know the locals attitude towards conservation and can contribute by “staying longer, spending locally and by interacting with local people and understand the work they are doing towards conservation” (USRBT). Tourists take the conservation message of Kiwis back home and they also recommend other people to visit. “I am definitely going to take my guests on this tour” (Tourist-A). People visit New Zealand and they “prefer to settle here permanently because of beautiful landscape, amazing biodiversity and conservation” (Tourist-B).

“Tourism is the only way we are going to survive, I have been involved in farm tourism for 25 years, if it wasn't for tourism I wouldn't be here, it is as simple as that. We all make money out of tourism, exploiting the environment and the wildlife, but there is money going back into what we are exploiting, that is part of it” (GFFBH)

Because of tourism these farmers are now able to do conservation work in a more sustainable way. Without introducing the concept of tourism, conservation work would have been a dream as the program needs a lot of resources.
“We have got money to spend, for emergency stuff, to employ someone, to build nest boxes, to buy bait, and buy new traps. This is because tourism has supplied the money. It is a farm expense” (KFFBH).

People need to know and see the wildlife in order to support conservation. When they see the progress they will be sympathetic. “If people do not see they are less likely to support” (DPCHD). There is “huge demand for wildlife tours and people appreciate it if tour operators are involved in conservation” (ESFBH). “If you protect the wildlife, the wildlife is going to be here and you end up with tourism and if the wildlife goes away we have not much to attract people” (ESFBH). It is really good for businesses, wildlife and the local community to have increased in the number of tourists but it should be remembered that “it is not about the quantity of tourists rather it is about the quality of the tourists” (OSRBT). Businesses have noticed growth “because of conservation work, cruise ships, marketing, word of mouth and recommendations by our tourists” (LKAKE). Some selected picture of tourism activities in the Wildside are shown in appendix B.

**Challenges Faced by the Wildside Project**

Community projects always face challenges to manage the functioning of the project and to conduct research and to monitor outcomes. During this research I have noticed that funding has always been an issue. In the case of Wildside, funding has been targeted in the Wildside area only for the past ten years and has been very successful. “If you try to spread the money too thinly, you don’t have the same impact” (WRLBB, FFBH). “There is also a lot of talk about expanding the project and make a national park or regional park...that is the wrong way to go about it...you’ve actually got to test it in one part then roll it out” (QRLBB, RFFBH, and FMLBH). You have to be a bit patient, “I might not see it but the next generation might achieve it” (YFRBH). Wildside could be a prototype and once you achieve all your goals then it “will spread naturally and the interest will spread and the money will come and things will get bigger and brighter” (ERLBB, AMLBH).

Another idea is to grow towards a corporate model and expand its boundaries. The participants in this research favoured it to remain in the hands of community with a little input from corporate sector.

“The corporate idea probably does not work because you are dealing with a whole lot of individual landowners. People still have to live here and make a living here, so the community way is the better way to go about it” (TFFBH)

Another respondent(s) said, “I think you can have a nice mix of both corporate and individuals with corporate skills” (CJLBS, KMLBH).

“If [community projects] do not stay in the hands of community they are going to ultimately be exposed to failure. As soon as you get other corporate interests, drivers can be financial and economic. [Whereas] communities need NOT to be [economic and financial] they do it for the love, love of the project” (OPLBD).
Research and Reporting Back
Resources and expertise are often limited to monitor the project outcomes. “We have got two universities right next door and we hardly ever see any student over here” (ORLBB). “Most of the students [who have done some work] were from overseas” (RSFBH). This shows that [local] universities need to be more involved with community projects.

“Community groups desperately need research, guidance and sharing knowledge with the community. Universities do the research but they do not communicate back. Community groups have limited resources and some practices could be damaging. What and how they undertake the predator control might not be the best way to do it, this is why we need research” (OMLBH)

The diagram below shows a model of the Wildside project, from the idea of predator control and the community involvement and how it has led to tourism in the Wildside of Banks Peninsula.

![Diagram of Wildside project]

Future Research
Projects like the Wildside have more potential and offer a lot of themes to explore with regard to community initiated projects. Many themes emerged from my project from micro to macro level impacts and implementation of projects at community level and at national level. Due to time constraints I was unable to look into every theme in detail. I would strongly recommend future research on community level involvement, engaging youth, and creating awareness about conservation.
Concluding Discussion

Participants of this case study have proven that you do not need to have prior knowledge, specialisation, and huge financial support to make a positive difference to conservation. Passion, innovation, dedication, networking and a collaborative approach are all important elements to achieve conservation outcomes. Community involvement is very important in achieving the ultimate objectives and will be done gradually and letting things grow organically by engaging community. Research findings must be reported back to help conservation practices in a sustainable way. Individuals with expertise need to monitor and examine the whole process of predator control program to ensure best outcomes.

Developing sense of place in a community is very important to motivate individuals to contribute towards protection and preservation of iconic and rare species like penguins. Community driven projects are people-centred and their direct involvement is the key to achieve successful outcomes by involving them and letting them learn from history.

In-depth understanding, expertise and proper management is the key to make any community project successful. Collaboration with stakeholders, management skills, research and development can contribute towards the effectiveness of small group projects. Small groups attract individuals with similar interests and can be easier to manage than larger projects. Participants of community projects are proactive but need guidance. Effective and proper volunteer management is highly recommended to ensure operative outcomes. Research findings and project outcomes must be delivered to the general public in order to get public support. Hopefully, this will make projects financially sustainable through community donations and other donor agencies.
APPENDIX A:

FIGURE 1 WILDSIDE OF BANKS PENINSULA (SOURCE: IMAGE IS ACQUIRED FROM BPCT WEBSITE)
APPENDIX B: SELECTED PICTURES SHOWING VARIOUS ACTIVITIES HAPPENING IN THE WILDSIDE

PHOTO 1 BANKS PENINSULA NEW ZEALAND

PHOTO 2 KAYAKING ADVENTURE TOUR IN FLEA BAY

PHOTO 3 DISPLAY OF PENGUIN NEST IN FLEA BAY

PHOTO 4 CLOSE-UP LOOK OF PENGUIN NEST

PHOTO 5 PENGUIN SITTING ON AN EGG