

Nest Box Placement Guidelines

A resource to help guide decision making when installing nest boxes for kororā/little penguins.



Introduction

Artificial nests are widely deployed for little penguins/kororā in New Zealand and Australia and are readily accepted by the penguins. They provide nesting opportunities particularly in locations where natural burrows may be difficult to create by the penguins, e.g., clay banks, or have unstable habitat that is prone to collapse, e.g., sand dunes. A removable lid or roof allows for easy and quick access for monitoring as well as extraction of adults and chicks for microchipping, or removal of dead penguins. The lid or roof can also be screwed shut to prevent disturbance by members of the public and harassment of the penguins. However, this also prevents access for monitoring. There are tamper-proof designs that exclude the public but allow monitoring among the different nest box designs available to download from our [website](#).

Where should nest boxes be placed, is a common question. The answer: place nest boxes where penguins are. It is important that you know your area and where the penguins are likely to be. Finding them and noting where they breed and moult will show the spots they have chosen and placing a nest box in those areas will increase the chance of a penguin finding it, exploring it, and hopefully claiming it as their next nest site. While general ideas are helpful to get started, nothing beats knowing your colony and knowing where the penguins hang out, where they prefer to be, and nest boxes can then provide them with a safe place to nest, moult, and loaf. Every colony is different and will need careful thought as to where to place what type of nest box. This document provides some ideas around nest box placement, and the nest box design documents ([nest box design](#)) can provide some ideas as to what type of nest box would be most appropriate for your colony.

Placement

For penguins to accept artificial nests, they need to be placed in a way that fulfil some basic requirements for the penguins.

1. The nest box has to be flat in its final position. If it is placed on flat ground, no digging is required. If it is placed on a slope, it needs to be dug into the slope so that the “floor” of the nest box is flat.
2. When the nest box is placed on a slope it is important to create a flat area in front of the entrance because the penguins socialise there and advertise their presence and ownership of their box. Chicks also wait in front of the entrance for the parents’ return when they are old enough to leave the nest box after dark.
3. Drainage is important to prevent pooling of water in the nest box.
4. Shade is preferred by the penguins and will help to keep the interior of the nest box cool.
5. Place nest boxes near penguin access paths – not on them, as more than one pair may be using the path, and a box will block the path. Placement near paths also facilitates discovery by the penguins when they are prospecting. Depending on the terrain, about 2m from the path.
6. The nest box entrance should be facing the access path so that a passing penguin will recognise it as a potential nest site, and the entrance should be open and clearly visible for the penguins.
7. Nest boxes should be at least 2m apart. If they are placed too close together, neighbours may fight, or one male might claim both boxes and won’t allow anyone else access to the other.
8. Nest boxes can be irresistible to curious humans, so, if possible, place nest boxes away from regular human presence. Nest boxes can also be disguised in the vegetation, among rocks or dead branches, but access for the penguins is still paramount.
9. If the nest boxes are disguised with rocks or branches, it is important that these are stable and won’t dislodge to block the access to the nest box and/or the entrance (which will cause death by starvation to any penguin unlucky to be in the box at the time) or to injury either penguins or people who are monitoring the nest box.
10. Avoid placing nest boxes in land slips as the unstable land can damage or sweep away the nest box, and potentially kill the penguins in it.
11. Avoid placing nest boxes in areas that could flood, either in river/creek flood zones or within tidal inundation zones.

You can use the list below to check that your nest box placement ticks all the boxes:

- box floor is flat
- box has flat area in front of entrance
- good drainage
- shaded
- near access path, facing it
- visible to penguins
- invisible to humans, and disguise is safe for penguins and monitoring
- safe from landslides and drowning by sea or fresh water