

# Media Release

## Penguins Join Kiwi and Tuatara Under One Roof in Franz Josef

Franz Josef Glacier, West Coast – Saturday, 18 October 2025

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The West Coast Wildlife Centre is set to unveil its newest attraction, the *West Coast Penguin Encounter* — making it the only place in New Zealand where visitors can see live kiwi, live little blue penguins, and live tuatara together under one roof, in a purpose-built all-weather facility.

The \$2.5 million, 250m<sup>2</sup> extension to the award-winning building includes a world-class 173m<sup>2</sup> penguin enclosure, filled with over 50,000 litres of fresh water and equipped with under and over water jets and a stream to keep the penguins healthy, stimulated, and playful.

At launch, the Encounter will be home to seven ambassador little blue penguins (kororā) that cannot be released back into the wild. The centre has a capacity for up to 22 penguins, providing a permanent home for injured or non-releasable birds from all over New Zealand — birds that in the past would have faced certain euthanasia.

“Our mission has always been conservation first. The Penguin Encounter builds on our proud track record of working with DOC and our mana whenua partners, Ngāti Māhaki, to protect and celebrate New Zealand’s taonga species,” says Director Richard Benton.

Adding to the excitement, four penguins will arrive from Auckland Zoo on Monday, 6 October 2025 — flying courtesy of Air New Zealand — before settling into their new West Coast home later in the day.

## Conservation Leadership – Kiwi, Tuatara and Now Penguins

The West Coast Wildlife Centre is already one of the South Island’s most successful rare kiwi incubation and hatching facilities, operating in partnership with the Department of Conservation (DOC) and collaborating with other world-class captive facilities across New Zealand, which are also involved in various stages of the kiwi return to the wild process. The centre has played a vital team role in bringing both the rowi and Haast tokoeka kiwi back from the very brink of extinction.

353 rowi kiwi for release into the wild have been hatched and incubated at the West Coast Wildlife Centre.

141 Haast tokoeka, adding to the wild population, have also been hatched and incubated at the West Coast Wildlife Centre, with further hatching scheduled to take place in late September 2025.

“This development is not only another win for wildlife conservation, but also for the West Coast community. With the support of Ngāti Māhaki, it strengthens Franz Josef as a must-visit destination that connects culture, conservation, and tourism.” Says Director Richard Benton

## Partnership with Ngāti Māhaki

This milestone has been achieved with the valued support and partnership of Ngāti Māhaki, mana whenua for Franz Josef Glacier (Waiau). Their guidance and collaboration ensure that the centre's work reflects and honours cultural values while protecting New Zealand's taonga species for future generations.

"This is an incredibly special milestone," said Lisa Stevenson, Operations Manager at the West Coast Wildlife Centre. "The Ambassador Penguin Encounter adds yet another unique dimension to our conservation work, while continuing to inspire visitors with the remarkable stories of some of New Zealand's rarest and most iconic species."

## Event Details

The *West Coast Penguin Encounter* will officially open to the public at 9:00 am on **Saturday, 18 October 2025**, at the West Coast Wildlife Centre in Franz Josef. This development strengthens Franz Josef's position as a must-visit destination for wildlife, hiking, walking, and outdoor conservation enthusiasts from all around the world.

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## Photo Details

*Boo and her three female friends at Auckland Zoo are eagerly awaiting their Air NZ flight to the South Island*

- ❖ ❖ **Boo, Auckland Zoo.** (Female) patiently waiting to fly with Air New Zealand to the South Island. Found in the wild, emaciated and refusing to dive. Rescued in the Coromandel and rehabbed at Waiheke Island Bird Rescue.

*Arnold- one of 3 Ambassador Penguins patiently waiting in Christchurch.JPG*

**Arnold,** (Male) Currently under the care of Pauline Howard at South Island Wildlife Hospital. Found at Pohatu Marine Reserve. Likely hit by a jet ski, with head trauma and balance issues.

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