

Yellow-eyed Penguin/hoiho early chick mortality post-mortems

Every year approximately a third of all hoiho that hatch on the mainland die in the first two weeks of life. Given the small and decreasing size of the mainland hoiho population, these early chick deaths have a significant negative impact on the conservation of this species. For the last three years, all early chick mortalities have received a full post-mortem examination. As a result, we now have a much better understanding of the causes of these early chick deaths, with some very successful management interventions implemented to reduce these deaths - however there is still much to learn.

Post-mortems allow gross pathological findings to be recorded (including photos), and samples to be collected for histology and molecular work. One of the aims of this work is to better understand the epidemiology of the yellow-eyed penguin virus, a novel virus described in 2022 (Wierenga et al, 2022). I am grateful to BoNZ for providing funding towards these post-mortems and sample collection via the Project Assistance Fund, allowing this important work to continue. This project is part of a wider PhD project investigating a causative link between the YEP-gyrovirus and Respiratory Distress Syndrome, currently the preeminent cause of early chick mortality and responsible for more than half of all early chick mortalities each season.

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