

Rockhopper Penguins at the Auckland Islands

In 1972/73 the number of Eastern Rockhopper Penguins (*Eudyptes chrysocome filholi*) on the Auckland Islands was estimated at between 5000 and 10 000 pairs in 12 colonies (B.D. Bell in Yaldwyn, J.C., ed; 1975: Preliminary results of the Auckland Islands Expedition 1972-73. Department of Lands and Survey Reserves Series 1975/3).

On 1 and 2 January 1990, I accompanied members of the Penguin Fund of Japan on a search for Rockhopper Penguin colonies along the northern and western coastlines of Auckland Island from North Harbour to Victoria Passage and the southern coastline of Adams Island. We also visited the four localities on the east coast of Auckland Island where colonies had been recorded in 1972/73. The only previously recorded site not visited was that on Disappointment Island.

The coastline from North Harbour to a point below Mt Easton was checked from both a dinghy (by R. Russ) and the RV *Acheron*, and the rest was checked from the *Acheron* only.

A total of nine breeding colonies and one roosting area was located during the shoreline search (Figure 1). Through lack of time and difficult landings full counts could not be made, but all birds visible were counted. No evidence was found of two of the colonies previously recorded below Erlangen Hill or of those east of North Harbour, on Falla Peninsula, and near Griffith Inlet. All other colonies were thought to be very much smaller in size and numbers than in 1972/73 (R. Russ, pers. comm.). Three previously unrecorded colonies and a roosting site were found.

TABLE 1 — The colonies and numbers of penguins seen at them

Colony	Results
1	30 birds on rock ledge about 40 m a.s.l
2	32 birds on shore and 14 in the water
3	Colony spread over a large area among <i>Hebe elliptica</i> and <i>Poa foliosa</i> about 150 m a.s.l.; 400+ birds on shore
4	17 birds on shore
5	20 birds in small area of rock tumble at base of high cliffs
6	160 birds on large rock tumble
7	160 birds on large rock tumble at base of high cliffs. (Note: On 7 February 1991 Graeme Elliott, Kath Walker, Jean-Claude Stahl and Peter Dilks counted 190 birds at this location - G. Elliott, pers. comm.).
8	17 birds on rocky ledge; no sign of nesting. (Note: Elliott <i>et al.</i> counted 20 birds here on 7 February 1991 - G. Elliott, pers. comm.).
9	40 birds scattered along about 400 m of rock tumble
10	10 birds on shore

A cursory assessment made at the main colony (number 3) indicated that probably only 20% to 25% of the adult penguins present were visible from the boats. On this basis the population on the main island can tentatively be estimated as being as low as 2700 to 3600 pairs. Even assuming that the Disappointment Island colony (estimated at 100 pairs in 1972/73 – R Russ, pers. comm.) has not declined, it appears that there has been a significant decline in the species at the Auckland Islands since 1972/73. This presumption is not surprising, given Moors' findings at Campbell Island (Moors, P.J. 1986. Decline in numbers of Rockhopper Penguins at Campbell Island. *Polar Rec.* 23: 69-73).

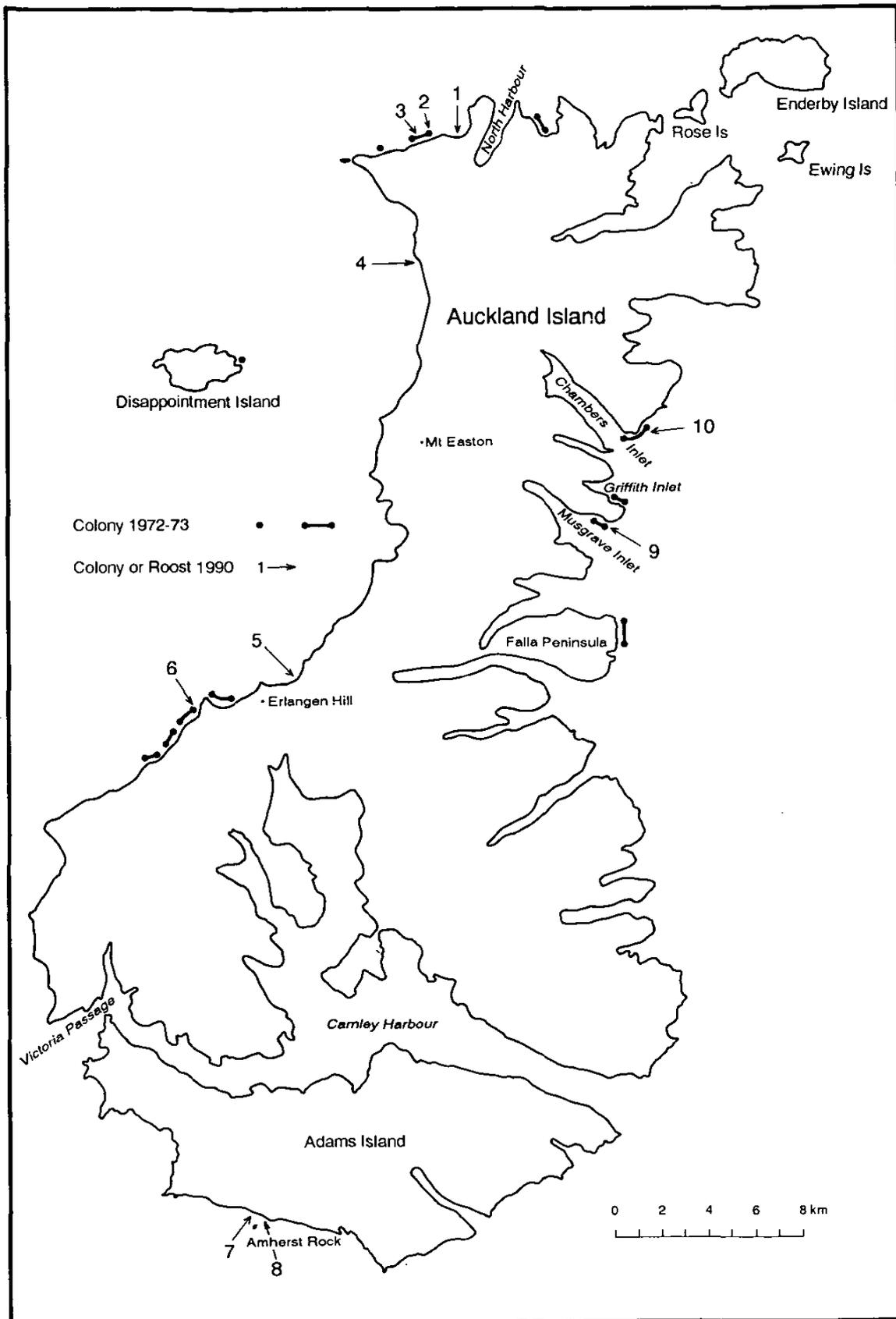


FIGURE 1 — Location of Rockhopper Penguin colonies

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