

A Political Ecology of the Yellow-Eyed Penguin in Southern New Zealand: A Conceptual and Theoretical Approach

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Abstract

Here, we engage with the political and ecological story of the yellow-eyed penguin (*Megadyptes antipodes*), a major tourist attraction, during four years of dramatically declining numbers of breeding pairs (New Zealand Department of Conservation in Unpublished census of yellow-eyed penguin breeding pairs 2015–16, 2016). One site, Long Point, is useful for presenting the possibilities of thematic integration since, using the principles of reintroduction biology (Seddon et al. in *Conserv Biol* 21(2):303–312, 2007; Armstrong and Seddon in *Trends Ecol Evol* 23:20–25, 2008), it is being used specifically to produce habitat for seabirds, rather than the more traditional restoration ecology approach. Also, the demands of tourism, for example to show respect through product offering (Zhang and Shelton in *Tourism Anal* 20(3):343–353, 2015) are, from the outset, being reinterpreted and integrated into the design and management of the site. Political ecology of tourism (Mostafanezhad et al. in *Political ecology of tourism: communities, power and the environment*. Routledge, London, pp 1–22, 2016) potentially is a fruitful analytic tool for formulating such thematic integration of ‘wildlife tourism’, ‘applied ecology’, and ‘environmental education and interpretation’. Political ecology emerged as a critique of an allegedly *apolitical* cultural ecology and ecological anthropology, and illustrates the unavoidable entanglement of political economy with ecological concerns (Zimmerer in *Prog Hum Geogr* 32(1):63–78, 2006). Also, political ecology has been described as ‘an urgent kind of argument or text ... that examines winners or losers, is narrating using dialectics, begins and/or ends in a contradiction, and surveys both the status of nature and stories about the status of nature’ (Robbins in *Political ecology: a critical introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell, New York, 2004, p. viii). Relevant examples of such narratives include Shelton and Tucker’s (*Tourism Rev Int* 11(3):205–212, 2008, p. 198) text that constituted ‘the restoration narrative ... central to the long-term viability of tourism in New Zealand because environmental preservation, conservation and restoration facilitate the continuation, and possible expansion, of nature-based tourism’ and Reis and Shelton’s (*Tourism Anal* 16(3):375–384, 2011, p. i) demonstration that ‘nature-based tourism activities are highly modulated by how Nature has been constructed in modern Western societies.’ It is

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this textual, discursive approach that differentiates political ecology from other approaches to issues surrounding ‘natural area tourism’, for example, the impacts approach of Newsome et al. (Natural Area Tourism: Ecology, impacts and management. Channel View Publications, Bristol, 2013).

2.1 Background

2.1.1 Long Point and the Yellow-eyed Penguin

The Long Point project has been described briefly elsewhere (Shelton 2013, pp. 192–194) as exemplifying neoliberal environmentalism (Fletcher 2010, p. 172), a managerial and economic approach to conservation, but, in that description, there was no formulation of the site fitting more broadly within a political ecology framework, even though the phenomena described in that article gestured in that direction. Mostafanezhad et al. (2016, pp. 1–21) provide a broad introduction to the nature of political ecology. Long Point is in the Catlins region of the South Island of New Zealand, which is experiencing a rapid increase in guided and self-drive visitation. Before the coastal road was sealed, rental car companies would not offer insurance on their vehicles, since damage from flying stones was common. Now that the Southern Scenic Route road-sealing project is complete, it is estimated the area may attract 70,000 visitors annually. This growth, and the promise of the area simultaneously allowing visitors to ‘get away from it all’ means there will be a marked increase in the number of vehicles on secondary roads also, particularly where any of these roads leads to a beach.

Long Point, and its beach, lies at the end of one such road and, at first glance, looks similar to much other local grazed farmland. The promontory is well known for its surf break and local, national and international surfers have come to expect vehicle access over farmland, with the permission of the farmer. Historically, over the period 1790–1839, from Cook’s voyage of exploration until the signing of *tiriti o waitangi* (the Treaty of Waitangi), European activity along New Zealand’s southeast coast increased, largely unregulated (Church 2008). This increase took place alongside the establishing and consolidation (1650–) of power in a single, dominant Maori tribe, Kai Tahu (Anderson 1998).

The ‘conservation and control’ narrative, where conservation legislation is viewed as a tool to regulate or ban cultural harvesting of resources by indigenous people, is tempered by the fact that ‘New Zealand is unique to the extent that there is one treaty, *tiriti o waitangi*, that permeates all interactions between the indigenous Maori people and the Crown (the government)’ (Shelton and Tucker 2008, p. 202). This formal, bicultural, relationship between

indigenous and settler society overtly recognizes the political nature of the use of land, including the beach, foreshore and seabed, which is yellow-eyed penguin habitat. Maori never have given up their claim to some land currently designated National Park, resulting in various, recent, co-management arrangements, for example with the *Tuhoe* people of *Te Urewera*.

Later in the European settlement process, during the 1860s and 1870s, the political economy of the Catlins included ship-building, (McPhee 2009), and *Manuka* was wrecked on an inshore reef at Long Point (Collins 2004), giving the site a European historical cultural attraction. For fewer than 100 years (1879–1971) the Catlins branch line of the national railway operated, (Tyrrell 1996) primarily to service the logging industry, as part of a larger story of that aspect of settler society commonly labeled pioneering (Tyrrell 1989). Long Point’s ‘existing forest was converted into poor-quality pasture ... until 1984 often under direct or indirect government subsidy’ (Shelton 2013, p. 193).

In 2009, the farm which included the promontory became available for purchase and, through generous support from government, various individuals and conservation-minded organisations for example, the New Zealand Forest and Bird Protection Society, the promontory and some adjacent land was divided-off and sold to the Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust, an environmental non-governmental organisation (ENGO) dedicated to protecting remnant coastal assemblages of flora and fauna, particularly those refugia, places where small ecosystems persist, involving yellow-eyed penguins (*Megadyptes antipodes*) (Fig. 2.1). Some of these refugia operated still at a whole-of-ecosystem scale of complexity. The Long Point project is part of a larger coastal seabird habitat production project. The latest governmental approach to conservation has been labeled a ‘partnership’ model and this project illustrates how this new approach is intended to work. This project may be used as a model for many such habitat restoration projects throughout the country.

Early in the ecological restoration project, the Trust invited various experts to suggest broadly how best to rehabilitate the site, and commissioned reports which formed the basis of the current management regimen (Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust 2008, 2012; Wildlands 2014). When planning to undertake ecosystem rehabilitation, typically there is a choice to be made between ecological restoration and reintroduction biology (Armstrong and Seddon 2008). The Trust

Fig. 2.1 Yellow-eyed penguin in New Zealand. *Credits* Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust



Fig. 2.2 Long Point site, New Zealand. *Credits* Otago Daily Times



chose to pursue the latter approach, accepting that reintroduction strategies deliver highly visible, tangible conservation outcomes, easily grasped in the short term by project participants and bystanders alike; a very productive way to mobilise public support (Ewan et al. 2008). This project is occurring during a time of significant changes in government environmental conservation policy, the roles of ENGOS, nationwide engagement with ecosystem services and increasing indigenous tribal aspirations both for the ownership and management of various protected areas.

The Long Point site is large enough (50 ha) that, for the foreseeable future, it will require grazing by sheep and the adjoining farmer pay a grazing lease (Fig. 2.2). Gradually,

suitable habitats will be produced through earthworks, the provision of nesting boxes, and deliberately-dug tunnels, working through the nesting needs of a list of twelve seabirds, species-by-species. In such a degraded environment, a difficult early management task is deciding how to rank the different species in order optimally to allocate conservation effort.

Three ways of doing this is: by privileging the World Conservation Union (IUCN) threat status as a way of ordering or, by ease-of re-establishment or, by focusing on increasing the numbers of birds of a species already nesting in the area. The ease-of-re-establishment approach achieves relatively easy and rapid results and, within a few years,

should be able to form the basis for wildlife tourism, appropriately monitored (Hadwen et al. 2007). Already, local entrepreneurs have approached the Trust, enquiring if and when concessions to operate wildlife tours are likely to be granted.

The initial ‘raw material’ for any such tours would be sites earmarked for transformation into seabird and, later, lizard and invertebrate habitat. Having tracks and hides built first, around which are the constructed nesting sites, increases the opportunity to use habituation as a deliberate management technique (Shelton et al. 2004; Higham and Shelton 2011). This ‘production of protection’ (Shelton 2012) is intended to be applied to the various endemic and native flora and fauna of Aotearoa/New Zealand which will in the future inhabit Long Point. It is the addition of this process to the political economy of Long Point and the Catlins that invites a political ecology formulation of its being inextricably bound up in a universal web of connectedness and power relations.

The yellow-eyed penguin is a species the IUCN, in the 2010 Red List, has labeled as ‘Endangered’ (Seddon et al. 2013). Ensuring a future for this iconic bird is enmeshed within the usual myriad ecological, economic and political positions, processes and contexts. Over the last four years, yellow-eyed penguin numbers at Long Point, and at most of its other breeding areas, have decreased significantly.

2.1.2 Long Point, and the Yellow-eyed Penguin, Within Political Ecology

A political ecology approach to engaging with the Long Point project is warranted since, in contrast with the outcomes of natural processes, ‘land change’ at Long Point is ‘something people do’, a condition of the political ecology approach, and that historical land management at this site has been what Robbins labels a ‘chaotic seesaw’ (Robbins 2004, p. xvi).

If we were to follow an ‘impacts’ line of inquiry, we would discuss, not completely ironically, ‘the impact of the spread of tourism habitat’ (Mostafanezhad et al. 2016, p. 2) as a metaphorical way of highlighting the connectedness of human and nonhuman species. Throughout their range, yellow-eyed penguin habitat and human habitat frequently overlap but what, though, compels us to write differently about this penguin at this time, and what is this political ecology within which we are operating?

Robbins (2004, pp. 5–7, 2012, pp. 15–16) provides a concise intellectual history of the concept political ecology and outlines three characteristics of a political ecology approach to the production of knowledge, in our case knowledge of a particular penguin species, at a particular site, at a particular historical juncture, and the role in wildlife

tourism of these phenomena. First, there is the notion of action; ‘political ecology as something people do’ (Robbins 2012, p. 4). Announcing ‘I do political ecology’ may be viewed as being similar to a scientist announcing ‘I do ecology’, or ‘I do physics’ where *do* means to engage in the theory and practice of that field of study.

Second, in contrast to any encouragement that all environmental restoration projects should in some way be reported, Robbins argues that for such reporting to fit within a political ecology approach to the production of knowledge there must be more than simply a collection of ‘separate and distinct cases’ but also consideration of ‘the common questions that underlie them’ (Robbins 2012, p. 4). New Zealand currently is confronting such common questions about the lag between a significant increase in tourist numbers, now over 3 million annually and expected to reach 5 million (Tourism New Zealand 2016), and provision of the infrastructure required to manage them. This topic, until recently, was of limited interest to the lay public but now, with a nationwide debate occurring about the desirability of ‘freedom campers’, rental vehicles parked at the side of the road overnight and thus paying no fees, it is to the forefront, especially in areas like the Catlins.

Third, political ecology ‘constitutes a community of practice and characterizes a certain kind of text’ (Robbins 2012, p. 5). Our position is that the practice involved in this community of practice is the production of political/ecological knowledge through the overt demonstration of the elements and processes involved in the wider notion of political economy; in other words, praxis. Texts that present and represent the overtly politicized ecological knowledge produced, that is, discourse, then qualify as political ecological texts. We hope this chapter, itself text, fulfills these requirements.

This third characteristic appears to make available a rubric, a set of instructions, to apply to the question, if posed; does any particular knowledge, produced by a political economy approach to study, qualify as political ecology in a way analogous to how connectedness may characterize the knowledge produced by a community of scientists involved with biological ecology?

‘In contrast (to political economy’s focus on commodity chains and globalization), poststructuralism and neo-Marxism have come to the fore in an analysis of how people remake nature through their everyday interactions and broader societal understanding of the relationship between people and nature. Tourism ... programs bring together people that have very different understandings of nature and society. Considering these nuanced understandings, a contextual analysis of political, economic, social, and ecological relations ... has the potential to provide a broader understanding of the power structures concerning people and nature. As such, the conceptual framework of political ecology provides a contextual lens for analyzing the problems and potentials of sustainable tourism in the context of people, nature, and power’ (Douglas 2014, p. 12).

Such a focus on context is entirely compatible with a view of political ecology as an interdisciplinary field of study that examines ecological matters from a broadly defined political economy perspective (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987), involving the entanglement of political economy with ecological concerns (Stonich 1998, p. 28). Political ecological perspectives illustrate how power and structural relations at different scales have implications for local people's natural resource and land use practices. In addition to various scales of analysis, political ecological analysis also is diachronic, it has developed over time, through its attention to historical factors that contribute to land use change and variability, as well as being involved in human–environment relations (Stonich 1998, p. 29). As an aside, O'Riordan (1976), Morton (2007) and Reis and Shelton (2011), offer reflexivity-based, bi-directional, critiques of such a cause and effect term as 'human-environment' and, it should be noted that amongst political ecology texts, there is a persistent lack of conceptual and philosophical clarity on this issue. Mostafanezhad et al.'s (2016) subtitle, 'Community, power and *the environment*', serves only to perpetuate the confusion.

With respect to 'community of practice', penguin tourism projects may be problematised by attending to layers of context, a characteristic way of engaging with neoliberal thought. We raise and respond to issues in ways able to be applied to other projects engaged in the production of ecological assemblages explicitly involving, if not overtly privileging, human visitation, and each ultimately enmeshed within the late capitalist economic system mentioned above. New Zealand offers a good opportunity for such an analysis through being an almost fully developed country. We say 'almost' because, within a public health and income context, the indigenous Maori population, and the social groups of Pacific Island ethnicity, experience enduring 'diseases of poverty', for instance rheumatic fever, not experienced to the same level by the rest of the society.

Academic publications dealing with political ecology of tourism typically involve developing countries and their aspirations for sustainable development through nature-based tourism, often involving wildlife viewing. Much less common are political-ecology-of-tourism studies situated within developed western economies. Through the observance of *te tiriti o Waitangi*, New Zealand is a bicultural (Maori, non-Maori) society, and through legislation is a multilingual (Maori, English and signing), Westminster-style small democracy. Tourism, comprising largely sightseeing, is the largest export industry by value. Whatever affects actual or potential successful land use is perceived to have the potential also to affect tourism and thus the political economy of the country. We use the term political economy since '(t)o invoke political economy or historical materialism is to recognise that economies can't be explained in

economic terms alone' (Kunkel 2010, p. 18). This claim is true particularly when applied to the 'conservation economy' introduced below. Nonetheless, it is the case also that certain economic precepts can enter widespread lay thought, certainly about how to value wildlife. Kunkel (2010), reviewing Piketty's (2014) *Capitalism in the 21st Century*, comments that:

'he (Piketty) is one of very few contemporary economists eager to revive the old-fashioned spirit of political economy ... economic life as a matter of individuals harmonising their preferences ... has filtered into common sense ... The biggest difference between the marginalists and the political economists concerned the question of economic value ... for the marginalists, *value was a function of marginal utility*' (Kunkel 2010, p. 17, italics ours).

For the visitor to New Zealand, what is the marginal utility of yet another spectacular view, uncut forest or body of clean water? The then Minister of Conservation made it clear that:

'(w)hen I talk of the conservation economy, the danger here is that some will incorrectly read into that phrase a lack of appreciation of the traditional and intrinsic conservation values—running the whole gamut from the preservationist view (and there must be a place in this wonderful country for the preservationist view to hold sway) to more mainstream public views ... The government will work to protect the resources that tourism providers rely on—clean air, clean water, and unique landscape ... The logic is simple enough. Healthy natural biodiversity means healthy ecosystems, and healthy ecosystems deliver well-functioning ecosystem services. Together these things form natural capital' (Groser 2009, p. 2).

The Minister desired a 'broadening of the long-term level of public support for conservation' (Groser 2009, p. 2), achieved through a mixture of ecosystem services and tourism. Every subsequent Minister of Conservation has made similar statements. In New Zealand, 'where conservation and tourism are inextricably linked' (Shelton and Tucker 2008, p. 198) the linking of ecosystem services and tourism then makes environmental protection inseparable from the functioning of the late capitalist economic system (Felluga 2016), of which tourism, with its typically poor wages and job insecurity, is an exemplar.

The scene for the presentation of the conservation economy had been set over a decade earlier when '(t)he Brundtland Commission (1987), invoking natural environments as a set of natural resources, drew ecotourism to a position within political economy' (Mostafanezhad et al. 2016, p. 2) but, within the 'sustainable development' project, the report presented gave scant attention to the idea of connectedness that permeates political ecology.

Another analytic layer further down, now as a part of late capitalism, environmental protection, as promised by the conservation economy, then falls within the business model of adding value and extracting revenue; in other words, the

production and consumption of protection. At a national scale, contestably transforming the status of land and sea into protected areas constitutes the process of adding value. Revenue is then extracted by charging the tourists who are attracted by the protected status. Many NGOs have embraced this 'neoliberal economic model' (Palley 2005), of adding value through the production of protection, whether or not they list tourism as a primary activity of their organization, or simply as a by-product of the application of some more intrinsic set of values they hold. These intrinsic values often are representative of a public service model of the production and delivery of protection, usually through a government agency. Some NGOs want this model to be retained, and lobby against, in particular, the Department of Conservation, the government agency responsible for conservation on Crown land, divesting certain core conservation tasks to NGOs, who are all too eager to step up to the plate.

These actions, merging conservation and economics, made explicit a process that has been in train implicitly since the neoliberal economic reforms of the Fourth Labour Government of 1984 and the formation of the Department of Conservation (DOC) in 1987. DOC's function was, at its inception and has ever since been, a mixture of conserving and making available; 'fostering recreation and allowing tourism on conservation land, providing the use is consistent with the conservation of the resource' (Department of Conservation 2000). The recent overt championing of various iterations of *The Conservation Economy* (Groser 2009), above, whatever words are used to describe it, makes it now unavoidable 'to recognize that capitalist policies and values, and often neoliberal policies and values, pervade conservation practice' (Brockington et al. 2008, p. 3).

NGOs need what Rappaport (1977) called 'loot and clout'; how much money, time and expertise is required for an environmental group to be effective and, effective on whose terms? There is another, very recent loot-producing economic activity emerging; crowd-sourcing, using some form of the notion of directly 'giving-a-little', or, in some cases a lot, and it has had an almost instant impact on the funding of all sorts of projects. Every one of these projects originates from some sort of relatively unfiltered emotional response to experiencing some aspect of the human condition.

Does each dollar raised and spent in this way impact negatively on the allegedly more rational current methods of gathering and distributing of conservation dollars? Must NGOs change the way in which they obtain and distribute funds? As NGOs otherwise move to adopting more business-like corporate structures do they, in this age of connectivity, risk estranging themselves from 'the new givers', people who have no particular loyalty to the NGO

and who will donate project-by-project? The political ecology question is whether performing this act of giving is simply another form of ecocriticism, that is, nature writing, fuelled by the Romantic aesthetic and the ideology of charity, and is not ecocritique, that is, ideological engagement and enactment, that first step in developing a truly ecological, fully connected, future (Morton 2007). At Long Point, this progression requires an important shift of focus, from merely performing the donation, that is, writing money as text, to engaging with the subject/object the money is spent on, and all its connections; that is, acting politically. Consequently, all NGOs perform within a particular politics, whether or not that politics is overtly acknowledged.

Ollman (1993, p. 11), argues that such processes, as in moving from ecocriticism to ecocritique, act to form a dialectic, which means:

'... replacing the common sense notion of 'thing,' as something that has a history and has external connection with other things, with notions of a 'process,' which contains its history and possible futures, and 'relation,' which contains as part of what it is its ties with other relations' (Robbins 2012, p. 94).

The four-year decline in yellow-eyed penguin numbers at Long Point may usefully be viewed, not so much as the fates of a group of individuals, but as a process, the determinants of which remain unknown.

2.1.3 The Yellow-eyed Penguin Within Nature

Wildlife tourism, treated here as an element of applied ecology, needs a location in which to occur. The setting most frequently proposed to host these notions is nature. We subscribe to the view that, in order to be justifiable, the notion of nature needs to be rigorously interrogated. Nature and its conservation is a problematic concept economically and socially (Scandrett 2010), philosophically (Soper 1995; Jamieson 2008), linguistically (Morton 2007, 2010a, b) and as a basis for environmental analysis (Castree 1995; Mels 2009). We acknowledge how it would seem important to recognize:

'the multiple roles which 'nature' can be called upon to play in ecological discussion ... the 'metaphysical', the 'realist' and the 'lay' (or 'surface') ideas of nature. Employed as a metaphysical concept, which it mainly is in the argument of philosophy, 'nature' is the concept through which humanity thinks its difference and specificity ... One is invoking the metaphysical concept in the very posing of the question of humanity's relation to nature. Employed as a realist concept, 'nature' refers to the structures, processes and causal powers that are constantly operative within the physical world ... Employed as a 'lay' or 'surface' concept, as it is in much everyday, literary and theoretical discourse, 'nature' is used in reference to ordinarily observable features of the world: the 'natural' ... This is the

nature of immediate experience and aesthetic appreciation; the nature we have destroyed and polluted and are asked to conserve and preserve' (Soper 1995, p. 156).

Soper goes on to submit that:

'(W)hen the Green Movement speaks of nature, it is most commonly in this third 'lay' or 'surface' sense: it is referring to nature as wildlife ... (b)ut when it appeals to humanity to preserve nature ... it is also of course employing the idea in a metaphysical sense to designate an object in relation to a subject (humanity), with the presumption being that subject and object are clearly differentiable and logically distinct. At the same time, by drawing attention to human transformation (destruction, wastage, pollution, manipulation, instrumental use of) nature, it is, at least implicitly, invoking the realist idea of nature' (1995, p. 156).

Wildlife tourism requires wildlife as its raw material; what the Brundtland Commission termed a natural resource. The yellow-eyed penguin, within its 'natural' environment, engages with all three of Soper's concepts of nature, as does applied ecology and environmental education and interpretation. Each of the concepts requires language to represent (or construct) it, and language is tricky. Morton (2007, p. 14) refers to the 'metonymic list' of figurative language that constitutes 'nature, a transcendental term in a material mask.' If everything in the universe is able to stand-in for nature, which is what metonymy implies, then nature becomes everything, and, simultaneously, nature becomes nothing.

'Nature' occupies at least three places in symbolic language. First, it is a mere empty placeholder for a host of other concepts. Second, it has the force of law, a norm against which deviation is measured. Third, 'nature' is a Pandora's box, a world that encapsulates a potentially infinite series of disparate fantasy objects' (Morton 2007, p. 14).

Also, Morton (2007, p. 1) proposes the concept of 'properly ecological forms of culture, philosophy, politics, and art' rather than ones based on some aspect of reified nature.

Picking up on the political aspect of Morton's vision of 'ecology without nature' leads to political ecology and its concerns with 'claims about the state of nature and claims about claims about the state of nature' (Robbins 2012, p. 87). Nature seems to be central to many claims; for example, '(a)ny sophisticated political ecology must contain a phenomenology of nature' (Watts and Peet 2004, p. 20). This claim does not address the 'everything and therefore nothing' objection to nature but does introduce the notion of multiple natures. For example, Fletcher (2014, p. 6) claims there is 'a long-standing tradition of research in political ecology exploring the complex and multidimensional relationship among political-economic institutions, cultural practices, and nonhuman natures'. This suggestion, that there are human and nonhuman natures, implies that humans

exist outside of nonhuman nature; another version of O'Riordan's (1976) reflexivity problem, raised above.

From this very brief discussion, it seems clear that situating the yellow-eyed penguin within some notion of nature, although naively appealing, is deeply problematic since any attempt to use 'nature' as a descriptor, or analytic tool, rapidly produces no more than a circular argument, or tautology; what is nature, everything and nothing. Where then, conceptually, should the penguin be situated?

2.1.4 The Yellow-eyed Penguin Within Nature/Society/Environment

Fletcher's (2014, p. 6) claim revisits the notion of a human-environment binary, a claim extensively and deeply contested since O'Riordan's (1976) book *Environmentalism*.

Douglas explains:

'Broadly speaking, political ecology scholars seek to understand how the human-environment relationship is produced, reproduced, and altered through discursive and material articulations of nature and society' (Douglas 2014, p. 9).

This suggests discursive articulations of nature, and material articulations of nature, may profitably be combined with society to form 'the environment'. Douglas again:

'The production of nature thesis touts a negotiated understanding of environment and society as an unremitting space of interaction, portraying the relationship of people and nature through the myriad processes of production. However, this relationship goes beyond that of a material nature to one of people's conceptual understanding of the natural world' (Douglas 2014, p. 9).

Clearly, Douglas and Morton are at loggerheads over 'material nature'.

'Finally there is the very important question of the environment in political ecology ... since so much of political ecology in the last decade has turned increasingly to nature itself. The questions are, of course, what passes for the environment? What form nature takes as an object of scrutiny? ... political ecology rests on the dialectic of Nature and Society in which environment can be approached in a number of ways ... what political ecology has done obviously is to open up the category of the environment itself and explore its multiform representations. Knowledge of the environment itself is examined—why particular forms of knowledge predominate, circulate and how' (Watts and Peet 2004, p. 19).

We accept this point, and work within the notion that any phenomenology of environment should include assemblages of human and nonhuman subjects and objects, acknowledging that the human, or any other, body is not a discrete entity but is, in itself, another assemblage; material or linguistic (Morton 2010a, b).

2.2 Thematic Integration at Long Point of ‘Wildlife Tourism’, ‘Applied Ecology’, and ‘Environmental Education and Interpretation’: A Political Ecology Approach

Fairhead and Leach (1996, p. 483) locate forest quality and biodiversity in the influence of past land use practices ... ‘vegetation patterns are the unique outcomes of particular histories not predictable divergences from characteristic climaxes’. This is true of Long Point; pre-contact Maori and European settlers’ ‘past use practices’ altered Aotearoa/New Zealand’s flora and fauna to the point where it never can be recreated. Callicott’s concern is with how:

‘fields of endeavor that have been informed by ecology will have to take account of the paradigm shift in ecology (from a ‘balance of nature’ [e.g. Suzuki 1999] to a ‘flux of nature’ paradigm) that is now virtually complete’ (Callicott 2008, p. 571).

This concern underlines a fear that a combination of social constructivism, and a lack of any credible scientific model of stable and unchanging ecosystems, the notion of fixity, removes authoritative support for environmental protection. If everything around us is changing, why preserve or conserve what is here currently?

In New Zealand, a good example of a challenge to ‘a scientific model of fixity’ is a process at work in the ‘beech (*Nothofagus* sp.) gap’.

‘Beech forest is absent from south-central Westland today but is widespread to the north and to the south of this region. Previous pollen records from Westland have suggested that this ‘beech gap’ was narrower prior to the Last (sic) interglacial than today ... (and) it has been suggested that suppression of beech in this region is due to the combination of severe conditions during glacial stages and the competitive dominance of podocarp forest during interglacial stages ... showing successional development towards a podocarp forest climax’ (Newnham et al. 2007, pp. 527–8).

This process of succession and (temporary) climax fits within a ‘flux of nature’ paradigm. At Long Point, the pre-1984 refugia ready to re-colonise land currently in pasture will not produce the assemblages characteristic of the pre-clearing state since an uncounted number of ecological niches have been destroyed.

‘Notwithstanding Worster’s (1977) warning that disequilibria can easily function as a cover for legitimating environmental destruction ... the rethinking of ecological science can be effectively deployed in understanding the complexities of local management (for example ... pest management)’ (Watts and Peet 2004, p. 16).

2.2.1 Narratives

The persistence of the notion of a balance of nature, the equilibrium model, has consequences; for example how the lay members of the Long Point Management Committee envisage ecological ‘best practice’. Equally, restoration ecology, if applied at Long Point, implies some sort of equilibrium will eventuate. Presenting this balance/flux tension as part of guided wildlife tourism may well be challenging both for the guides and for the clients since the ‘balance’ narrative, which underpins ‘restoration ecology’, is powerful (Shelton and Tucker 2008).

Robbins (2012, p. 21) identifies five dominant narratives in political ecology. The first is the ‘degradation and marginalization narrative’, where: ‘(t)he first assumption is that degradation of environmental systems, especially after passing an unidentified threshold, tends to require as much or more energy and investment to restore to its former state as was expended in its initial transformation’ (Robbins 2012, p. 160). There is no dispute that (re)creation of seabird and other habitat eventually will cost far more than ever was spent clearing the land of forest.

2.2.2 Texts

Political ecology ‘characterizes a certain kind of text’ (Robbins 2012, p. 5) so it is important to note the form of such text. Morton (2007) reminds us that mimetic writing about nature, for example a standard commentary provided to wildlife tourism guides, known as ecocriticism, remains primarily and inescapably an act of writing, and is therefore a work of art, informed by an aesthetic, which in the case of nature remains the Romantic. This aesthetic, as with any aesthetic, is itself generated by an ideology, albeit often one that remains unacknowledged. The balance/flux narrative and the ‘ecological restoration/reintroduction biology’ narratives constitute such texts.

‘To move from ecocriticism to ecocritique, a first step in developing a truly ecological future, the influences at play in these narratives must be acknowledged and made transparent. This first step requires an important shift of focus, from merely performing the work of art, as noted above with respect to donating money, that is, writing text, to engaging with the subject/object of the work, that is, acting politically. Political ecology texts are mimetic only to the extent that any political text that engages in critique must engage with ecocritique and never with ecocriticism, so, the texts must be political texts and not mimetic ecocritical texts. This division is important in any attempt fully to contextualise the yellow-eyed penguin. Peter Fritzell delineated a difference between naively mimetic and self

reflexive forms of nature writing. In the latter, ‘what nature was really like’ is often not what nature was really like (or, for that matter, what it is)’ (Morton 2007, p. 14).

‘Timothy Luke employs the term ecocritique to describe forms of left ecological criticism ... Ecocritique is permeated with considerations common to other areas in the humanities such as race, class, and gender, which it knows to be deeply intertwined. Ecocritique fearlessly employs deconstruction in the service of ecology ... In the name of all that we value in the idea of ‘nature,’ it thoroughly examines how nature is set up as a transcendental, unified, independent category’ (Morton 2007, p. 13).

The ecological subject/object, here the yellow-eyed penguin, is engaged in this truly ecological restoration but, for it to be effective, ‘(s)ubject and object require a certain environment, in which they can join up together’ (Morton 2007, p. 22). As stated above, such an environment may be simultaneously material and linguistic both.

2.2.3 The Kinds of New Zealand Texts Characterized by Political Ecology

It is the nature of these texts that separates political ecology from any insistence that all acts of conservation should be the subjects of allegedly straightforward reporting; political ecology texts must instead reflect ‘the politicized state of the environment and the politicized nature of accounts about the state of the environment’ (Robbins 2012, p. 6). These texts then, themselves polemical, may be understood as narratives; accounts of material and political processes that occur over time. Shelton and Tucker (2008), with their at-first-glance oxymoronic title *Managed to be Wild*, identified the politicized state of the New Zealand protected-areas spatial environment, claiming that; ‘describing boundaries is an act that takes place *within the context of power relations*’ (p. 202, emphasis ours). This focus on power relations and ‘tensions between the restoration narrative and the multiple-use narrative’ (Shelton and Tucker 2008, p. 203) invite a political ecology reading of these texts.

Attempting to answer these, and other closely related questions, posed in different language, has led to the most significant restructuring of DOC since it was established. Thirteen years after being established, DOC produced *The New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy: Our chance to turn the tide* (New Zealand Department of Conservation 2000), a strategy and vision document later supplemented by *Adapting to a Changing Climate: A proposed framework for the conservation of terrestrial native biodiversity in New Zealand* (Christie 2014). Over recent years, DOC’s *Annual Report to Parliament* was characterized by a general worsening of the biodiversity situation nationally. This decline instigated a response from government that the state alone

could not supply all the conservation effort required; there needed to be increased community and business involvement. Also, there was to be an increased focus on recreational and tourist use of conservation land (Groser 2009). The proposed model was presented by the Minister of Conservation and DOC senior staff at a national conference organized by the Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust in 2013 specifically for that purpose.

The government intended increased community involvement to be delivered, at least in part, by such ENGOs, using a contestable model for the allocation of funding. The Minister made it clear that, ideally, government hoped to be lobbied by only one, united, conservation voice. With tourism becoming ever more integrated with conservation, both at a local and national scale, the government believes it is reasonable to situate the visitor at the centre of the planning and delivery of conservation effort.

Under the new DOC structure, all things being equal, there is to be more support for such conservation effort, directed at sites situated close-by human habitation, and visited by tourists, rather than being directed at sites that are distant and not often visited. This move from total state control of, and delivery of, conservation, to retained state legislative and regulatory control of conservation but mixed-agency delivery, involves a rearrangement and renegotiation of the power relationships involved. In particular, negative feelings previously directed by various groups, in an almost ritualized fashion, exclusively toward DOC because of its legislated authority under various Acts of Parliament, now may be targeted also at whatever ENGO is engaging in projects that, to some other individuals and groups, are unwelcome.

The documents the yellow-eyed penguin exists within fulfill the political function of, for example, ‘providing good science’ to inform ‘best practice’ or giving evidence of due process, for example: brainstorming solutions, developing management documents, creating a habitat advisory committee that keeps minutes of meetings, a willingness to change geographical boundaries through purchase and sale and, indigenous consultation.

2.2.4 The Act of Integration

One way to address the issue of whether or not it is legitimate to contextualize the Long Point project within political ecology is to use Robbins (2012) as a sort of checklist.

First: is there the notion of action? can the Long Point project be viewed as ‘something people do’ (Robbins 2012, p. 4)? Our answer is yes; the site is being prepared for wildlife tourism based on the yellow-eyed penguin, for whom this site is natal, and a range of seabird species which

previously inhabited the site and will now be reintroduced to habitat produced to meet their individual needs. Tourism infrastructure will be in place before the birds are returned and habituation will be used as an active management tool.

Second: is the project more than simply one of a collection of ‘separate and distinct cases’; does it also consider ‘the common questions that underlie them’ (Robbins 2012, p. 4). Again yes; we argue that currently New Zealand in general is confronting such common questions as; how best may we represent wildlife? Are the terms ‘nature’ or ‘the environment’ useful when being used to represent projects involving applied ecology? Also, should wildlife guides’ commentaries attempt to explore the broader issues of representation or should they be restricted to explaining phenomenology through using some form of conservation narrative; for example, balance and/or flux.

Third: since political ecology constitutes a community of practice, is that the case for this project, within the national ‘conservation community’? We say yes; the Long Point project offers insights of interest and importance to any other ‘land-use-change’ project nationally and internationally. Choosing to adopt restoration ecology or reintroduction biology is a complex process which, while offering some general components, must end up being tailored to the unique demands of every specific project.

Fourth: political ecology ‘characterizes a certain kind of text’ (Robbins 2012, p. 5). Do the textual elements of the Long Point project; its scoping document, its management plan, the minuted meetings of its advisory committee meetings, including visitor performance, qualify as just such texts? Again, we say yes; all of these texts are brought together to act within a matrix of power relations. What is the effect when textual material is granted post hoc status of being legitimately available for a political ecology reading? If, through reading Robbins (2012), the reader comes to believe their *oeuvre*, either written or performed, sits well within political ecology, what are the implications of this realization? The purposeful adoption of political ecology (Robbins 2004, p. 11) involves approaching an ecological issue expecting politics, inequality and the local effect of global economic forces.

The yellow-eyed penguin as subject/object is brought in to being by these texts.

‘Concern for the subject in political ecology ...means seeking to explain the way people’s environmental actions and identities fit together, and the way these are together the products of power’ (Robbins 2012, p. 76).

The 2009 introduction to New Zealand of the conservation economy, ‘signals a move from intrinsic valuation of the (conservation) estate to extrinsic valuation: the question being, what are the ecosystem services delivered and how is tourism serviced?’ (Shelton 2013, p. 184). Features of

‘conservation for a new generation’ (Knight and White 2009) include decentralization of resource governance to local authorities and non-state actors such as NGOs (Fletcher 2010, p. 172). This decentralisation more easily allows the community of practice of political ecology to offer critique of any given project, rather than being forced to confront a monolithic state agency.

2.3 Conclusion

Currently, most visitors to Long Point stumble upon it. There are, as yet, no interpretation material and no tourist operators; only sheep, some wildlife and geomorphology commonly labeled sublime or spectacular. This will change. It is intended that the development of wildlife tourism:

‘facilitates a process of ceaseless capital accumulation via the body by selling an experience that withholds final fulfillment and thus leaves tourists constantly wanting more’ (Fletcher 2014, p. 6).

Perhaps such capital accumulation will occur but, that is only one possible consequence out of many. We appreciate ‘tourism ... (is) not merely rooted in (such) developmentalism, but (is) fundamentally political, economic, social, and ecological’ (Douglas 2014, p. 11). The vision remains:

‘The science of seabird conservation has made very significant advances, placing Long Point on the research map nationally and internationally. Leading researchers in all conservation disciplines visit regularly, staying at the well-appointed Long Point research station’ (Long Point Vision Document 2008).

Our political ecology reading of the Long Point project, then, is situated within soft constructivism, where the material world, as metaphor, is to be read as a collection of texts. Robbins (2012) makes the point that a problem with ‘soft constructionism’ is that it focuses on:

‘social constructions or political influences that are responsible only for misunderstandings of the environment (but) it doesn’t allow social influences to also account for correct understandings of the environment ... Yet the political ecological world is filled with entanglements of knowledge, power, and landscape that are fully symmetrical’ (Robbins 2012, p. 11).

This is a positive sentiment for the Long Point project; it may, through robust, ongoing, critique bring about such symmetry. Definitely, there are overlapping arguments about the nature of political ecology and there is the problem of dealing with these overlapping arguments while doing political ecology, especially where the doing involves labeling the enactment of wildlife tourism as performance, just as constrained as seabird behavior, but at another level of analysis; and to see both as suitable for a textual metaphor. In Long Point’s:

'very human landscape, complicated ecological interactions create a world of unintended consequences and surprises defying even the most careful political assessments or predictions ... In a curious way, political actors create the ecology of (Long Point) but not the (Long Point) of their choosing' (Robbins 2004, p. xvi).

This is an ongoing tension; Robbins (2004) claims political ecology to be; 'a field that seeks to unravel the political forces at work in the environment; access, management, and transformation' (p. xvi). With respect to the yellow-eyed penguins of Long Point, we concur. Definitely, there are political forces at work, at all levels of government, forming conservation policy and needing to be unraveled. These policies then influence the nature-based tourism industry, especially in terms of access to wildlife viewing and the construction of interpretation narratives surrounding iconic species, of which the yellow-eyed penguin is one. Unraveling the political dimensions of site and species management is an endless task and is situated within ongoing transformations of land use. It is this ability to engage politically in a multi-faceted way that makes political ecology such a useful analytic approach to the study of wildlife tourism, applied ecology and environmental education and interpretation.

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