

Weed management to optimise seabird habitat in the Phillip Island Nature Park

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Summary The Summerland Peninsula, as part of the Phillip Island Nature Park, is home to the second largest Little Penguin colony in the world, and is subsequently home to the world famous Penguin Parade that attracts over 500 000 visitors per year. The penguin population is a healthy 32 000; however this has not always been the case.

The Summerland Peninsula was subdivided in 1927 into 774 lots. This housing estate did not take off until after the first bridge was built across to the island in 1940, and by 1985 the estate contained 183 houses, a motel, a shop and a museum—all right in the middle of the penguin colony.

By 1985 the Summerland Peninsula was the last remaining penguin colony on Phillip Island, after at least another 10 colonies had gone extinct over the previous 100 years. This last colony was also now seriously threatened, and studies in 1985 estimated that there would be no more penguins crossing the beach at the Penguin Parade by 1997.

The major threats included habitat loss, road mortality, dog predation, fires, and weed infestations.

This brought about some drastic action and brave decisions by the then Victorian Government, and a Penguin Protection Plan was initiated in 1985. An integral part of this plan was the Summerland Estate Buyback Program. The Government set aside \$1 million per year to repurchase the houses and land in the Summerland Estate.

It took until 2010 for this buyback to be completed, however the work had just begun. The Nature Park received a \$3.4 million grant in June 2011 to rehabilitate the Summerland Peninsula back to Little Penguin habitat.

We are now into the 3rd year of this project, which has involved removing and demolishing the remaining houses, putting the power underground, controlling weeds through a number of methods, revegetating with over 120 000 native plants, and installing 2000 penguin boxes.

The penguin population has since increased to 32 000 and the Summerland Peninsula is returning to a natural landscape.