

## A Tale of Two Prime Ministers

Peter Lee

Sunday 25 February witnessed an unusual, if very noisy, group of aerial arrivals - a fleet of helicopters. Was it a re-enactment of Vietnam? Was the Air Force making a last-ditch stand? No, it was the arrival of the Prime Ministers of New Zealand and Australia.



Photo Eve Manning

As part of John Howard's visit to New Zealand, the Prime Minister's Office decided that an ideal three-hour break would be our little island paradise - and a great success it was, too. Its genesis was Easter 2000, when Mark Prebble from the PM's office visited Tiri with his family. So impressed was he that he (unbeknown to us) recommended Tiritiri to his boss. Apart from Ray and Barbara, only Rolien Elliot (from DoC) and myself (representing SoTM) were informally invited - this was not to be an official visit!

So, what happened?

Firstly, a deployment of police and detectives set up station around the lighthouse area, which had been roped

off. From 11.30am on, the helicopters arrived - media, Helen Clark and finally John Howard. Both Helen and John were introduced to Ray, Barbara and then us, and then it was on to the lighthouse where a grinning John Howard seized the opportunity to be photographed next to a troupe of six grinning young female college students! The official party had their lunch (sadly, us plebs were not invited) before we helped escort the party on a short walk through the upper part of Wattle Valley. By 2.30pm, they'd all departed, leaving the island to its normal routine.

As far as we could tell, all the visitors greatly enjoyed their stay. Chalk one more milestone for Tiritiri!

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## Dawn Chorus

Dawn Chorus is the official newsletter of the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi Inc. It is published four times a year. Contributions (including photographs) are gratefully received.

## Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi Inc.

PO Box 34-229, Birkenhead, Auckland 1310

The Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi is a non-profit conservation volunteer group. Founded in 1988, to further the aims of the Tiritiri Matangi habitat restoration and species translocation project, our four aims are:

- To promote and enhance the open sanctuary of Tiritiri Matangi and to ensure the continuation of the project.
- To provide financial, material and physical support for the work on Tiritiri Matangi.
- To heighten public awareness of the existence and role of Tiritiri Matangi as an open sanctuary
- To do all such other lawful things as are incidental or conducive to the foregoing objects or any of them.

The annual subscription is:

- Adult / Family / Corporate - \$20
- Overseas - \$25
- Student / Child - \$5

## SoTM Contacts

### Chairperson

Peter Lee 418 1332 plee@clear.net.nz

### Secretary

Olga Brochner 625 9444 akwbt@ahsl.co.nz

### Treasurer

Lois Wilson 376 0233 loiswi@gosling.co.nz

### Membership Secretary

Carl Hayson 479 4217 carlh@biolab.co.nz

### Newsletter Editor

Simon Fordham 274 1828 simonf@clear.net.nz

### Committee

Mel Galbraith 480 1958 melgar@ihug.co.nz

John McLeod 631 5664

Val Smytheman 278 9309 vjess@ihug.co.nz

Vicky Young 575 9760

Sally Green 836 5963 sallygreen@xtra.co.nz

Gaye Hayson 479 4217

### DoC Field Officers

Barbara &  
Ray Walter 476 0010 tiritirimatangifb@doc.govt.nz

Bunkhouse / Assistant Ranger 476 0920

## Editorial

10th August 1997 was a special day for Tiri. This was the day that Kokako were released on to Tiri. Three birds were released, two males and one female. Not long after release, one of the Mapara birds went missing. The transmitter was found and evidence suggests that he was the victim of predation by a Harrier Hawk. It is fortunate that the remaining two proved to be a breeding pair and produced two chicks during their second summer on Tiri.

7 months after the initial release, four more males were released. One of these, Te Karere became a regular attraction as he sung from tall trees adjacent to the nursery. February last year, the singing suddenly stopped and Te Karere was never seen again. About the same time, the remains of Rie, one of the offspring from the previous season, was found. Analysis confirmed that Rie was indeed the victim of Harrier predation. It is likely that Te Karere also suffered the same fate.

Late last year, Te Koha Waiata and Cloudsley Shovell, nested again. However, the nest failed and may have been predated. Fortunately a second attempt was successful. It was with excitement that we noted the pairing of Te Hari, a male from the second release, and Shazbot, one of the first pair hatched on Tiri. They built a nest and this was observed closely. Within two days of the assumed hatching of eggs, the activity suddenly stopped. The following morning, three of us observed a Harrier closely inspecting the nest site. The way this bird arrived indicated some local knowledge. It was no doubt the culprit. A second nesting attempt by this pair failed relatively early in the piece.

The current population of Kokako on Tiri is ten. Whilst we are very appreciative to have these birds, this is only three more than were introduced three to four years ago. We could have reasonably expected to have substantially more by now. Whilst this is partly due to a high male / female ratio and poor breeding at Mt. Bruce (from where we expect more birds) predation is a significant factor. Harriers are the only known Kokako predators on Tiri.

The suggestion has been made that the Harrier population on Tiri be culled. Against this argument is that these birds don't normally reside and/or breed on Tiri and, if birds are culled, others will replace them. In favour, is the possibility that only one or two birds are the offenders, having learnt to identify Kokako and how to locate their nests.

Although the Harrier is a protected native under the Wildlife Act, the Department of Conservation does have the power to cull them if appropriate. Harrier Hawks are abundant whilst, with only around 1400 birds left, the Kokako is very much endangered. A lot of money is spent on the Kokako Recovery program and it would be foolish not to protect this investment for the price of a few bullets.

I believe that we must cull the Harrier population on Tiri, not just once but as often as necessary. If we don't, who will be next ..... Cloudsley Shovell? Te Koha Waiata?

Simon Fordham



## From The Chair

For an organisation that's committed to restoring the environment, the Supporters itself has been remarkably tardy at being environmentally friendly.

Many businesses are leading the way by not only becoming better 'good corporate citizens', but requiring their suppliers to demonstrate a similar commitment. This is a worldwide trend which is also gathering force here in New Zealand.

It's now time for us to do likewise.

The committee has agreed that, where possible and appropriate, it will choose suppliers that are striving to minimise their environmental impacts, have better community policies, and in general show a commitment to long-term sustainability. In business it's called the "triple bottom line", i.e. environmental and social as well as economic performance.

We cannot go on without asking the question: are our suppliers, people and companies with principles consistent with ours?

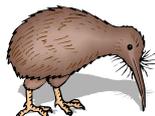
The question naturally occurs: how will we select such businesses? A start will be to ask our existing suppliers about their practices. We could also look at groups such as NZ Businesses for Social Responsibility and the NZ Business Council for Sustainable Development, which together have over 220 members ranging from small printing firms up to major corporates such as 3M, The Warehouse and Fletcher Challenge. Within their members will be potential suppliers. I've had increasing contact and involvement with both organisations and am impressed by the calibre.

Is it enough? That's the difficult question. Our answer must be: it's better than doing nothing.

Business concepts have an increasing role to play in groups such as ours. This is one that we must adopt. Otherwise, we make a mockery of our core principles.

Peter Lee

**Peter's 2000/2001 Annual Report, as presented to the AGM in March, can be found on Page 11.**



**The opinions of contributors expressed in Dawn Chorus do not necessarily reflect those of the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi Inc.**

**Deadline for Winter Newsletter  
31 July 2001**

## Page 3 Bird

### Variable Oystercatcher

*Haematopus unicolor*  
Torea

When walking from the wharf to Hobbs Beach, one can often see this prominent shorebird. Although the population around Tiri present a jet black appearance, there are 3 distinct phases (black, pied and intermediate) hence the name variable. Even the Tiri birds display some white patches under the wings. The ratio of black oystercatchers compared with the other phases increases with latitude south.

Although the "VOC" may appear to be quite common, particularly in the north, it is still considered rare with only around 4000 birds in total. During the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were declining quite rapidly, predominantly due to hunting. They have been legally protected since 1940 and recent trends have seen the population double in the last 30 years.

Unlike the related South Island Pied Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*), also known as the SIPO, the slightly larger VOC is endemic to New Zealand. The VOC can be easily distinguished as they are most commonly found in small groups, typically 2 to 4. In the pied or intermediate phases, no two birds have exactly the same markings.

The SIPO generally congregate in flocks, each bird appearing to have identical markings. Sometimes the VOC can be found amongst flocks of Pied Oystercatchers. During the summer, breeding SIPO migrate to South Island riverbeds to do their bit for the species. On the other hand, the VOC remain, and breed, in the same territory for most, if not all of the year.

A number of Variable Oystercatchers reside, and are known to breed, around the shores of Tiri. Unfortunately, although breeding is observed in the wharf / Hobbs Beach area most years, this year's only known nest was washed away due to a combined spring tide and offshore wind.

Despite the name, the main diet of the Oystercatcher is a range of molluscs, worms crabs and small invertebrates. Rarely is it oysters.

Simon Fordham



# Argentine Ants Decimated on Tiri

Chris Green, Department of Conservation



Recent editions of our bulletin have included reports of the presence of Argentine Ant on Tiritiri Matangi.

During February this year billions of Argentine ants on Tiritiri were killed. The five-year program to eradicate this significant pest species from the island started with a tremendously successful kill. The latest results of post-poison monitoring show that 99.98% of the ants have died.

Argentine ant, as reported in SoTM Bulletin 41, autumn 2000 edition, is one of the world's most notorious pest ant species. Nests can be very large, with workers numbering hundreds of thousands and feature many queens. Where there are good food sources available there can be a very high density of nests per hectare. They feed on any sweet foods such as honeydew from scale insects and nectar, as well as any source of animal protein. Overseas research has shown that they kill a wide range of other invertebrates, and can kill young chicks, especially just after hatching. They will lock up nectar and honeydew resources thus preventing other fauna, including birds, from feeding. Thus there was considerable concern for all the nectar feeding and insect feeding birds on Tiritiri after the discovery of Argentine ants in March last year.

On 29<sup>th</sup> January 2001 a team of 14 ant specialists and volunteers from around New Zealand arrived on the island and commenced preparations for the start of the eradication. Prior to our arrival all the paperwork had been completed and permissions gained. I had also spent many days on the island determining exactly how far the ants had spread. The boundary of the infestation, plus a 20 metre buffer, was then marked out with a continuous line of flagging tape. About 11 hectares was marked off, centred around the wharf.

Special Argentine ant bait was manufactured by Landcare Research Ltd Nelson and laced with an insecticide, Fipronil that, even at very low concentrations, is particularly effective against ants and wasps. The concentration used was 0.01% active ingredient. Argentine ant bait needs three main components to be successful, a sweet component to attract worker ants, a protein component for the worker ants to take back to the nest to feed to their young (and larvae or grubs), and a slow acting insecticide. Prepared as a paste formulation the bait is applied using mastic guns – see photo of the team ready to do battle with the ants. The entire area was covered with 1.8 g baits every 2 - 3 metres in grid fashion. The baits were, if possible, placed in the shade at the base of trees and covered with litter to avoid exposure to the sun. If exposed to the sun for long the bait tended to rapidly dry out and become less palatable.

Last year a number of tests were carried out on Tiritiri birds to determine the level of interest in the bait. A non-toxic version, lacking the insecticide, was used for these tests. Two takahe, Greg and Bellamy, were tested and

after some initial disinterest Bellamy decided it was edible, then Greg decided he couldn't miss out on this green mushy stuff. We thought it would be the other way around, Greg teaching Bellamy, but not this time. Some pukeko and brown quail also thought it was worth a nibble. The only forest birds to show any interest were the always attentive robins which we tested in various places. All robins that pecked at the bait immediately spat it out and wiped their beaks vigorously to remove all trace of the bait. It appeared a classic reaction to a distasteful substance, probably due to the very sweet nature of the bait. Those birds that would have liked the sweetness, namely stitchbirds and bellbirds, showed no interest at all. A range of other invertebrates were attracted to the bait, including other ant species, various beetles, and millipedes.

During the poisoning period the only takahe that sometimes wandered into the Argentine ant infested area were put in a pen, ...eventually, after escaping twice! All open areas, such as grassland and road-sides, were baited at night both to prolong bait life and to ensure that pukeko did not remove the bait before the ants could get to it. Covering the baits with litter reduced the risk of quail eating it. All these measures were designed to allow the right amount of bait to remain on the ground for the Argentine ants to consume. Overseas tests on the Fipronil insecticide used in the bait showed that any bird would need to consume physically impossible amounts to suffer any ill effects, especially at the very low concentration used on Tiritiri.

A range of other invertebrates that would feed on the bait could potentially have been killed. However, Argentine ants are extremely efficient foragers and get onto new food sources much quicker than most other invertebrates. They then dominate that food source until it is consumed; that is why they are so successful as a pest. Thus in many cases the bait would only have been eaten by the Argentine ants. In addition, all these other invertebrates would be the species to suffer most through competition with Argentine ants so, if the ants had been allowed to take over the habitat these others would have mostly died out anyway. This was already evident in most Argentine ant infested areas where no other species of ants could be found. Elsewhere on Tiritiri 12 other species of ants have so far been recorded, which is quite a good diversity for an area the size of the island.

Some visitors to the island noticed the very high ant numbers around the wharf and huge trails on some trees nearby. These have gone completely now, with just a few very thin trails with the odd Argentine ant evident. There were previously so many ants living under the wharf shed that it was a bonus to see it still there each time I visited – I half expected to see it moved off its foundations and heading off down the beach!!

All the nests seen since the poison operation are very small, some don't even appear to have brood (eggs, larvae and pupae) and there seems to be only the odd queen. All this points to the possibility that there may be further die off during winter, particularly if it is a bit cooler than those we have had recently.

The plan is to conduct a second poison operation in the spring and hopefully this will knock off all the remaining survivors. Intensive monitoring will be carried out over the next four years to ensure that eradication has been achieved. If so it will be the first such eradication over such a large area in New Zealand.



The ant baiting team ready to do battle with Argentine ants on the slopes. Included, (left to right) were Shaun (DoC), Rosalie (DoC), Richard (Landcare Research), Ian (DoC), Chris (DoC), Phil (Environment BoP), Andrea (DoC), Karli (Forest and Bird), Rachel (DoC), Brent (AntiAnt – Flybusters), Lucus (volunteer), Viv (AntiAnt – Flybusters) and Jo (Landcare Research). Amelia (MAF)

Photo Amelia Pascoe

## News Briefs

### Congratulations!!!

.... to Rolien Elliot (DoC Warkworth Area Manager) and husband Michael, on the birth of twin daughters, Ariana and Sarah. Rolien is taking leave from her position, during which time Bob Dixon will assume her duties.

.... To Rosalie Stamp, who has been appointed as DoC Threatened Species Officer whilst Shaarina Boyd is on maternity leave.

.... To Rob MacCallum on his appointment as DoC Auckland Conservator.

### Thank You!!!

.... to North Shore branch of Forest and Bird for donating a further \$5,000. This group have a history of supporting our project, both financially and as volunteers.

.... to the Conservation Alliance (Australia) for donating \$1,343 to SoTM.

### Congratulations & Thank You!!!

... to Belinda & Darren Cottingham who, in lieu of gifts, asked guests at their recent wedding to make a donation to SoTM. As a result a significant contribution was made.



### Photo Competition



Don't forget, this closes 31 July. If you require additional entry forms, please contact Simon Fordham (see page 2 for contact details).

We already have a number of sponsors. These will be acknowledged at the prizegiving and in the Spring issue of Dawn Chorus.



John Howard and Helen Clark meet the "Lighthouse Gang".

Photo Eve Manning



# The Sky at Night – Almost!

Olga Brochner



There are numerous stars on Tiritiri Matangi, the Takahe, Kokako, re-planted trees and Ray and Barbara Walter, to name but a few! But on the night of 19<sup>th</sup> January, those visiting Tiri were also hoping to see stars of the celestial variety.

DoC officer Linda Bercusson joined together with education officer John Dunlop at Auckland's Stardome Planetarium to organise this special event. Sort of a "See Tiri by night" scheme that gave visitors an opportunity to have a dark sky site for astronomical observing coupled with the chance hear and maybe even see some of the Island's night birds, such as Little Spotted Kiwi and Morepork.

Everyone was advised to bring warm clothing instead of the usual sun block, and to arm themselves with red-cellophane covered torches. The red colour is not only less distressing to the birds, but also means our eyes can retain their dark adaptation and so be better suited for observing in the dark.

Barbara organised Tiri Supporters guides for the night while John was in charge of rounding up various intrepid members of the Auckland Astronomical Society, including yours truly, to do the universe guiding. The planets Jupiter and Saturn are currently visible, plus numerous star-studded constellations, so it was a grand time to be on an Island looking into space.

The event had been well published by Fullers and was completely booked out with 120 people. (In fact they had to turn over 40 more away!) The 19<sup>th</sup> arrived, and it was sunny and warm day, so when Ray phoned in at midday everything was looking set for an exciting night. Normal ferry commuters must have wondered what was happening that evening, as the ferry area was crammed with people of all ages, plus a variety of telescopes and binoculars.

We set off from Auckland a little later than planned and the inside of the ferry soon turned into a picnic site as evening meals were eaten while watching the city recede.

Unfortunately, we were also watching the clouds building up – not a promising sign.

It was becoming dark by the time we landed on Tiritiri, so the planned guided tour changed into a quick welcome to everyone from Barbara and Ray followed by a brief outline of the night's activities.

In fast vanishing light the visitors were led up the Wattle Valley track to the lighthouse. I don't think many saw or even heard any birds, but there was a definite excited chatter in the air surrounding this very positive group of people.



Photo Olga Brochner

Up in the lighthouse area, the shop was visited, the visitor's book was signed and people sat on the grass and got stuck into more "picnic" foods. You would have sworn it was a normal weekend group of visitors – however, it was dark and they were all eating under the glow of the red-coloured torches. A great site!

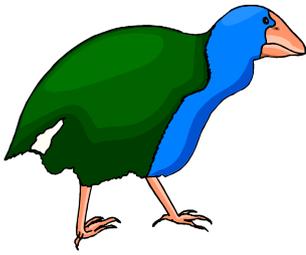
Meanwhile, up on "Coronary Hill" we were setting up the telescopes while watching a stunning sunset of amazing red tones splashed against the clouds. Yes, those clouds had not only rolled in and covered the sky, but they looked like they were there to stay.

People came up the hill to see what there was to see, and to look through the telescopes aimed at some of the lights of Auckland City. Ok, not exactly a ringed planet, but at least it gave folks a chance to see how a telescope works! We answered astronomical questions, discussed various telescopes and listened to Kiwi until it was time to head back to the landing for the 2300 hour ferry.

Of course, once everyone was loaded on the ferry, a few stars started to appear! Typical eh? But it was a great night and we received lots of positive feedback. Everybody seemed to have had a very good time, despite the clouds. Many were even full of plans to return to the Island again during daylight hours, plus there were numerous requests for a repeat of this event but next time without the clouds!

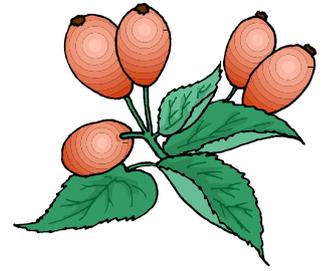
PS. Ray tells me there is an old telescope up in the watchtower on Tiritiri, but I think he only uses that to watch sunbathing Takahe not the night skies.





# Flora and Fauna Notes

Compiled by Barbara Walter & Simon Fordham



## Flora

It may be a good year for kohekohe as many are covered with buds. The last two seasons has seen very little flowering and practically no fruit.

The tawaroa tree in Bush 1 has an abundance of fruit attracting the kereru.

Some mahoe have flowered yet again and there has been more fruit than in any previous year.

Wattles are flowering profusely. Karo fruit is plentiful with saddleback and whitehead busy feeding on it

## Birds

### (The Feather Report)

#### **Takahe**

All birds are in excellent condition after the moulting season. Both juveniles have been banded and sexed. The new addition to the "Lighthouse Gang" is named after Rosehill School. We hoped it would be "Rosie" but, unfortunately, Rosie turned out to be male so he is Ross and will probably be referred to as Rossie.

Kristin and Ahikaea's juvenile has been named after St. Cuthbert's College and is called "Blackwatch". Blackwatch is the tartan used in their school uniform.

Both of these schools have been supporting Tiri for many years.

Greg has been continuing to entertain visitors on Hobbs Beach and, on busy days, this meant volunteers being seconded to "Greg watch" duty to make sure he was not fed by visitors. However, he is now back with his former lady, Pounamu, so Greg watches are, at present, not necessary! Whakama is, once again, all alone ..... what will happen next?

#### **Stitchbird (Hihi)**

So far, 32 adults and 64 juveniles have been sighted. 90 chicks were produced from 3 clutches and there is now a preponderance of males. Previous seasons (except the first, when there were 16 males and 4 females) there have been more female chicks.

8 juveniles, raised in captivity at Mt. Bruce Wildlife Centre, have been released in Wattle Valley. 6 of these have survived. 3 more adults, also from Mt. Bruce, were released in early May.

#### **Kokako**

All 10 have been sighted recently.

Cloudsley Shovell and Te Koha Waiata's juveniles (Piccolo & Kahurangi) are seen regularly in Wattle Valley and, at times, have been venturing away from there.

The new breeding pair of Shazbot and Te Hari unfortunately lost their chicks again. Once again, a harrier was the suspected culprit.

Good news from Mt. Bruce! For the first time in 3 seasons, they have had success with kokako breeding. Of much important was the fact that one of the parents is a Taranaki bird. 2 chicks hatched. Unfortunately, one of these died. Had the other been a female, then it would have most likely been translocated to Tiri. Unfortunately for us, it turned out to be a male.

#### **North Island Robin**

27 pairs of adults have produced 56 fledglings. So far, 28 of these have been found leaving a confirmed population of 82.

A second planned translocation to Wenderholm Reserve, north of Auckland, never eventuated.

#### **Brown Teal**

In addition to the 4 or 5 (all females) that we were aware of, a pair were sighted in the water at Hobbs Beach by Morag Fordham.

#### **Others**

Pukeko nested later this year, with very few chicks.

Brown quail nested very late, with chicks seen at Easter that were "bumblebee" size.

We now have 2 geese, in different parts of the island. Our white goose, "Goosey Nomates", reported in the last bulletin, has "tamed up" somewhat and now resides along the ridge track. The new arrival, a brown goose, "Gosford Goose", can be seen anywhere from Hobbs Beach along to the wharf.

An almost totally white male blackbird is being seen regularly near the northern entrance to Wattle Valley. Whilst not a true Albino, he has been named "Albie".

Saddleback, whitehead and red crowned parakeet are being seen everywhere.

### **A New Species Seen on Tiri**



Photo Eve Manning

### **The Misk Lark**

# Implement Shed – Concrete Evidence of Stage 2

Text and Photographs by Ray Walter

How things change. Twenty years ago, if you passed a Ministry of Works contractor wheeling a wheelbarrow of concrete down the road, it would be a sign of major works on Tiri.

Since then, contracts have got bigger and bigger:

- 1983 – the building of the nursery
- 1988 – the rebuilding of the road from the wharf
- 1997 – the building of the new wharf
- 1999 – the building of the sea wall
- 1999 – start of stage one of the implement shed

The latter was the largest job ever undertaken by the “Supporters” and saw an operation that involved 4 barge trips and the landing of 6 of Stevenson’s concrete truck for the pouring of the first shed floor.

Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> to Friday 30<sup>th</sup> February saw the busiest time on Tiri that I have seen. Supporters and DoC combined to carry out a contract that included the pouring of the floor of the 2nd stage of the implement shed and the pouring of the concrete at the turn around area at the wharf, including the steep section of road to just short of the first dam.



The first day saw two trips by Subritzky’s powered barge “Port Kennedy” to bring in materials, contractors’ vehicles and equipment from Gulf Harbour. This included 11 metres of builders mix, 2 trucks (one containing the new building for the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of the implement shed), an excavator and a bobcat.



The next 2 days were the busiest with the arrival of 19 concrete trucks, each with 4.5 metres of load. The Port Kennedy made 3 return trips each day, from Gulf Harbour. At one time, there were 6 concrete trucks parked on the road at the entrance to the station.

The total cost of the contract was \$56,000, which included \$15,000 worth of work for the Supporters’ new shed.

It was a well planned and executed operation by the contractors, Coast Concrete Construction, Stevenson and Sons and Subritzky Shipping.

What Next – The new Visitors’ Centre???

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## Tiri Weeding Report 2000-2001

Ian McLeod, Conservation Officer

Our war on weeds on Tiri continued this year with the assistance of a Lotteries Board grant submitted by the Supporters of Tiritiri.

Shaun Dunning managed the weed program from the Warkworth Area office. I was the on-site supervisor. Three extra staff were hired over the summer to assist with the weed control program. Stanley Booy, who had previously been volunteering and working for DoC in Turangi, was hired as a supervisor who could take over while I caught up on my other duties. Toby Barach and Danielle Shanahan, who both turned out to have been flatmates whilst at Otago University, filled the last two places in the team.



Stage one was implemented over an 8-week period starting in November 2000. This stage focussed on eliminating Japanese Honey Suckle (JHS), an aggressive climbing vine that has the potential to restrict regeneration. Over 150 hectares of the island were meticulously searched for invasive weeds and some plots which had never been grid-searched before were investigated. The large area grid-searched this year reflected the effectiveness of the previous years weed control programs, many of the largest infestations had been eliminated resulting in more time searching and less time spraying weeds.

Most weeds were sprayed with Escort kindly supplied by Dupont, although some areas were sprayed using a new product called Answer on a trial basis. In the 1999/2000 season 1128L of herbicide was used to kill 1740 adult and 265 juvenile JHS. Much less herbicide was used this year, 140L killing 872 Juvenile and 58 adult JHS. Other weed species targeted were mothplant, banana passionfruit, Mexican devil, periwinkle, mile a minute and montbretia. Some weed species such a Mexican devil were hand pulled.

Stage two the control of boxthorn growing on the north-eastern side of the island. Boxthorn is a very hardy scrub introduced from South Africa, and has the ability to shade out seedling coprosma and pohutukawa. Boxthorn also poses a physical threat to seabirds- think petrel shish kebabs. Other species targeted during stage two included sweet pea and pampas grass.

Unfortunately, and much to the disappointment of the weed team, the abseiling course which would allow us to weed the cliffs was cancelled at the last minute. Weeding was therefore restricted to those cliff faces, which were accessible on foot. A lot of time was also spent clearing

away dead boxthorn from previous years efforts. Toby and Danielle's grid-searching expertise was utilized in late January when they were the 'local experts' assisting the team poisoning the Argentine ants.

Wet days were thankfully infrequent and spent on variety of tasks. These days were spent making up stitchbird boxes, digging out sweet briar, scrubbing the generator battery terminals and general cleaning and maintenance of spray equipment. Early starts were part of the job, the 6.00am challenge quickly became the 5.30am challenge in an attempt to avoid the afternoon sun. Most working days were concluded with a quick dip at Hobbs Beach. Our Periodic Detention- like overalls assured us of plenty of space on the beach.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff and volunteers who helped make the weed program this year a success. Thank to Lucus Habib, a volunteer who assisted us as official lunch mule over a two-week period in January. Finally a special thanks to the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi who made this all possible with their continued support.

## Facelift for SoTM Website



Thanks to the efforts of new SoTM committee member Sally Green, our website has undergone a dramatic and long overdue reconstruction. And, as all websites should be, it will be ever changing. Well done Sally. Thanks also to Gary Benner of Corporate Software New Zealand Limited for generously giving our website a home. The address is [www.123.co.nz/tiri](http://www.123.co.nz/tiri). Take a look .....you'll be impressed!!!

# Tiri Birds at the Auckland Museum

Brian Gill  
Curator of Land Vertebrates

Auckland Museum has collected bird specimens since its foundation in 1852, and the bird collection now numbers about 12,000 specimens.

This is one of four major bird collections in New Zealand, the others being at the Museum of New Zealand (Wellington), Canterbury Museum (Christchurch) and Otago Museum (Dunedin). Between them, the four main museums have about 112,000 bird specimens, and about half of these are bones.

Thanks to the interest of DoC staff and visitors to Tiritiri, who retrieve birds that they find dead, and thanks particularly to the efforts of Barbara and Ray Walter, who label and freeze the birds, Auckland Museum has obtained many good specimens from the island. There are now more than 100 birds from Tiritiri in the Auckland Museum collection, belonging to 25 species, and going back to 1907. They are a resource for future study.

The museum's best mounted specimens of New Zealand birds are on display in the galleries, the part of the museum that the public is most familiar with. Auckland Museum has recently opened four new natural history galleries: "Origins" (dealing with the development of New Zealand's distinctive flora and fauna), "Land" (dealing with terrestrial habitats), "Oceans" (marine habitats) and "Human Impacts". Birds are spread throughout all four galleries, and also a fifth one dealing with the Maori relationship to the natural world.

However, most of the museum's birds are behind the scenes in the "Bird Store". They are preserved mostly as study-skins, which allow the plumage to be examined easily and measurements taken of the wing, tail, foot and bill. There is also a very important collection of bones, an essential resource for identifying bits of birds,

such as fragments of seabirds found washed up on beaches, or bones from Maori midden sites recovered by archaeologists. Other types of specimen in the collection are nests, eggs, spread wings, and birds preserved whole in alcohol (with their internal organs available for future study).

The specimens in storage are used by staff and visitors for research or as reference material for identification. Post-graduate students have used the collection for their thesis research, and researchers from Australia have routinely collected data from the collection for the multi-volume "Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds"--the most important account of New Zealand birds to date (five volumes now published). Bird artists also use the specimens to confirm fine details for their illustrations.

Most New Zealand species are represented in the collection, with a bias towards those of the northern North Island. All the specimens are documented with the collecting locality, name of collector and date of collection. The sex and age where known are also recorded. Without Documentation the specimens would have little scientific or historical importance. Nearly all the registration records have now been computerised and it is easy to obtain listings of specimens in various formats (including geographical listings).

While DoC staff and the Tiritiri supporters are focussed on the important job of ensuring the survival of our birds, my task as a museum curator is to ensure the survival of specimens--including those from Tiritiri--for the benefit of researchers and artists now and in the future.

## Recent Visitors

### Schools – from Near & Far

8 Classes from Rosehill Intermediate  
2 Classes from Willowpark School  
2 Classes from Mairangi Bay School  
Tamaki College Biology Students  
Glenfield College Language Students  
Tauranga Girls College  
Edgecumbe College  
Rotorua Girls High School



## Working Bees

.... With a thank you from Ray, Barbara and Ian for their input of which some have been helping for many years:

OSNZ  
Auckland Tramping Club  
Ivan & Barbara O'Reilly's group  
Louise & David Gauld's group  
Iwikau group  
Helen Lewis' bushwalkers  
SoTM Easter Working Weekend

### 2001 Island Diary

Queens Birthday Working Bee  
Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> to Monday 4<sup>th</sup> June  
Bellbird Trip – Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> June

### 2001 Island Diary (cont.)

Kowhai Trip  
– Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> September

## Tiri Shop

### For Winter Warmth!!!

Tiri Sweatshirts (Navy & Jade) –  
Is yours faded? \$38 - \$40

Polar Fleece – Dark Green  
Available soon - \$70

Telephone your order to  
Barbara

**476 0010**

# Chairperson's Report

Presented by Peter Lee to the Annual General Meeting, 19 March 2001

2000 was yet another successful year for the Supporters.

Perhaps the most tangible sign of that was the construction of half of the services centre. When completed, for the first time all the island's machinery and vehicles will be under cover, and under one roof. Though only half-completed, it's already made a big difference to Ray's working life!

The building is a major commitment for the Supporters. When completed later this year, it will have cost over \$170,000 – funded entirely by the Supporters. We can all feel proud of our efforts in making this happen.

As for the proposed visitors' centre, DoC has approved the plans in principle. We are now going through the process to obtain a lease before we move to the next stage. With a likely cost of some \$250,000, it's clearly going to need a major injection of funding. If you know any good corporate sponsors, now's the time to tell us!

In contrast, responsibility for building the wharf shelter is once again back with DoC. This is a major relief for us as it significantly reduces the time required for approval. The Supporters may tender to build this structure.

Finally, we are discussing the construction of a new accommodation wing near the bunkhouse. This would take pressure off the existing building – those who have stayed there recently can testify to the impact this has!

Turning to matters financial, the Supporters is now a significant business – with the attendant headaches. As the financial report showed, we earned over \$151,000 last year, from a mix of subscriptions, donations, shop profits, guiding fees and a couple of other items. In the past year a number of organisations have donated in money or in kind. Fullers Ferries now carry our guides free; Dilmah supply the tea, and Forest & Bird North Shore and Australia's Conservation Alliance each made substantial donations. I'd like to thank those organisations for their invaluable support.

In contrast, the biodiversity front was relatively quiet. The Argentinean Ant was the big story and big threat – fortunately, DoC seems to have the matter in hand. We're still working with NZ Underwater to evaluate the feasibility of a marine reserve. On the down side, the much-delayed tuatara translocation seems no closer to reality.

Of course, the key to any organisation's success is the people involved, and on behalf of the committee I'd like to thank all those who have made our successes possible. First of all are you, the members, without whom little could be accomplished. In passing I wish to recognise the past efforts of Ray Ridgeway, who sadly passed away in the last year. Community involvement is also as strong and important as ever. I'd like to thank my committee for their enthusiasm and commitment and their willingness to stay on for another year. This stability is important. In particular I wish to thank Trevor Buckley, our departing treasurer. The Treasurer's job is the hardest one of all, and in his time Trevor has put so much into the Supporters.

Finally, of course, are the two individuals who are synonymous with Tiritiri, and who do so much for the place. I'm referring, of course, to Ray and Barbara. The special nature of the island is due in no small part to them, their enthusiasm and their dedication.

Last year the Supporters received an award in the Auckland Regional Council's Environment awards, in the stewardship category. It was nice to have this public recognition. Mel Galbraith, former chairperson, and I co-founded the Auckland Conservation Forum, a loose network of conservation groups around Auckland. We think there's lots we can all learn from each other. In fact, we have so much experience to share that we almost have a moral obligation to do just that.

Our Bulletin continues to be a great source of communication, and Simon Fordham has done an excellent job as editor.

So, where to from here?

As I mentioned last year, we are going down the path of setting up a trust. This would and could take over management and funding for major projects, leaving the Supporters free to do what we're best at – people. We've secured the services of a major law firm pro bono, i.e. free, and I'll keep you informed.

Some time ago, the Committee also drew up a draft mission statement. We felt there were many things we could learn from the corporate world, and this was one of them. Our draft is as follows:

"To develop and promote Tiritiri Matangi as a model of sustainability, through conservation of New Zealand biodiversity, ecotourism, education and effective management".

I'd like to see us finalise this, as it gives us a better guide into the future. If you've got any thoughts, please let me know.

# Phytoplasma Suspected to be Abundant on Tiri

Claire Stevens

This was the answer I got from a question to Dr Ross Beever at the AGM of the Auckland Botanical Society on 7 March 2001 regarding the large number of dead Coprosma on the Island. The following is from notes taken down from Dr Beever's speech.

The species is *Phytoplasma australiense* and is the only *Phytoplasma* known in New Zealand. It is a specialised bacteria in plant cells and in some insects. It produces what is called yellowing disease. The disease is passed from plant to plant by the insect but is not transmitted through the seed of the plant. The bacteria is native to Australia and New Zealand and could have been taken to Australia with flax plants in the early 1900's when they were trying to set up a flax industry over there. Land Care Research found the Bacteria by working on the DNA of cabbage trees.

Yellowing disease was first recognised in flax in the Manawatu in 1908 and was the cause of the flax industry dying around that time in that region. In the case of the flax the vector is the flax plant hopper which is largely restricted to the flax plant and was first recognised in the 1950's.

Dr Beever said that they have now confirmed that it is this bacteria which has caused *Coprosma* species to die at a

site near the North Western Motorway. They also believe that strawberries being affected in the Bay of Plenty by the bacteria may be related to dead coprosma in the vicinity.

The problem that has not been solved is what the vector is that is causing the cabbage tree yellowing disease and Coprosma deaths. They are also querying whether phytoplasma is attacking puriri and Mamaku ferns as well. There has been some work on the passion vine hopper and another species of hopper but no sign of the bacteria has yet been found in the specimens tested.

Ross Beaver said that they have taken samples from the Coprosma on Tiritiri Matangi but have not completed the tests as yet. For the last couple of years I have been concerned about the number of dead Coprosma on Tiri and have queried the cause. It looks like the answer may shortly be revealed. The question is what do we do then with the information?



## Rescue Bird

Mark Davison



On our trip out to Tiritiri Matangi last Thursday (5<sup>th</sup> April), we (SoTM) released an immature gannet and two little blue penguins. These birds had been nursed back to health by Sylvia Durrant of Bird Rescue.

It was fantastic to see the little blue penguins diving as soon as they hit the water. They swam strongly as though they had spent their whole lives in the sea. This is a reflection of the care Sylvia puts into the penguins with a sprat/herring diet and regular swims in rock pools to build their strength.

Sylvia, affectionately called The Bird Lady, is well known for her full time but totally voluntary work in caring for sick and injured birds. Nearly every day Sylvia is presented with yet another bedraggled or injured bird.

Sylvia has a natural empathy with birds and knows intuitively how to feed and care for birds from day-old fantail chicks to adult gannets and wood pigeons. Think of the times many of us have tried to revive a fledgling in the hot water cupboard only to find it dead in the morning.

Sylvia has a soft spot for little blue penguins and many of them are brought to Sylvia with an array of injuries. She

restores most of them back to full health after many late night feeds and trips to the rock pools at the beach. When she takes the penguins for their swim, she is always surrounded by enthusiastic children, of whom many become helpers for Sylvia, feeding and cleaning the birds.

Sylvia has a wealth of knowledge about our native birds after years of "quite literally," hands on experience. Her tiny house can be the home for close to a hundred birds, some needing feeding every two hours. Some birds stay a few days for a warm bed and a good feed but others stay for months until they are strong enough to be released.

**If you come across an injured bird, Sylvia can be contacted at Bird Care Rothesay Bay, Ph (09) 478-8819. She will welcome any bird at any time.**

**South of the Harbour Bridge, injured birds can be taken to Pam Howlett in Panmure. Her phone no. is 570 4750.**