

Fernbird Are Here!!!

Carl Hayson



Photo Geoff Moon

The North Island Fernbird (*Bowdleria punctata vealeae*) is the 10th translocation of a bird species to Tiritiri Matangi. Without the full support and funding of the Supporters and ARC, this transfer would not have taken place.

The first fernbirds arrived late in June as a result of a rescue operation to save birds residing in the path of the new Northern Motorway. A transfer had been planned for later this year, but scrub clearance for the motorway began with little warning in June. Kevin Parker, a graduate from the University of Auckland who has been monitoring the population in regenerating bush behind Orewa, organised a rescue transfer. The Department of Conservation quickly processed the transfer permit and blessing was given by Ngati Paoa Kaumatua.

Stress is a major concern when transferring any new species and it was not known how fernbird would react to

handling. As a result it was felt that helicopters should be used for transferring birds when the ferry was not available. To date 13 birds have been transferred to the island.

The fernbird is a small bird approximately 180mm long, which inhabits areas of scrub and swamp. The name fernbird has been attributed to their preferred habitat and their long tail feathers, which get worn and frayed like the leaves of a fern. The upper body has longitudinal brown streaks and the underbelly is coloured white with brownish black spots. They are reluctant to fly, the flight been very laboured, with rapid wing beats and the tail trailing downward. However they are well at home in dense vegetation, typical of much of the regenerating scrub on Tiritiri. They have a characteristic "utick" call but they make a wide variety of calls ranging from bell like notes to rapid clicking in territorial disputes.

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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.

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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

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Editorial

One of the more surprising realisations for visitors, when they arrive on the island by ferry, is that, despite the presence of endangered species, any person may land on Tiri by private craft. It is most important that this continues to be the case and, provided they abide by the rules, they are most welcome.

There are many levels of protection offered to our treasured fauna and their habitat. The most important of these are the "scientific reserves" that are only visited by persons who actively contribute to the management of the species that they harbour. Complementary to these are the protected areas that do allow the general public to freely experience rare and endangered species.

On the surface, it may seem that by allowing unrestricted access, there is little value to the species that are present. However, on the grand scale of things, this is an essential tool when it comes to harnessing public support for the cause.

As a generalization, there are 3 attitudes to conservation to be found in society. There is us, the small percentage of ardent conservationists who appreciate the value of biodiversity and the need to protect our indigenous species. There is the even smaller group at the other end of the spectrum who, given the chance, would chop down every tree and turn the environment into a concrete jungle, especially if there is a dollar in it for them.

By far, the largest group are those that are relatively ambivalent towards environmental issues. In my experience, more people than not enjoy wildlife documentaries. Whilst such programs may stir some appreciation of our natural world, TV is no substitute for the real thing.

Open Scientific Reserves, of which Tiri is the "gold standard", are the perfect opportunity for experiencing what the documentaries portray. Such a tangible experience is often enough to trigger a desire to become actively involved in preserving the natural world. A lot of today's conservationists (myself included) were converted because of just one trip to Tiri.

As conservationists, it is only natural to try to educate others into our way of thinking. Once visitors begin their wanderings through the island, the birds do the talking, so to speak, but we should give every encouragement to others to visit the island.

Most importantly, children should continue to be encouraged to visit the island, both with their schools and their families. Hopefully, some of these will gain enough of an appreciation of what the island is about to become the conservationists of tomorrow, something of an insurance policy.

Simon Fordham

**Deadline for Spring Newsletter
31 October 2001**



From The Chair

Once, a new stretch of boardwalk was a major achievement for the Supporters.

As we've grown in size and influence, our achievements have likewise grown. Some are tangible, like the services facility, while others are less obvious but just as enduring.

It's 25 years since the island was first gazetted as a reserve and also the International Year of the Volunteer, two facts we'll be celebrating in style next month at our dinner. The progress since 1976 has far surpassed anyone's wildest dreams. Yet it's not attributable to one person, or even a few. It's attributable to the efforts of many thousands. If anything, it's been built on partnerships, three in particular: the community, DoC and the University of Auckland.

What stands out for me is the effectiveness of these partnerships, which in turn is built on trust. The island is technically a "scientific reserve" – and, until Tiritiri came along, these were always closed to the public. Making the island an "open sanctuary" was very much a trial, one which caused DoC's predecessor many misgivings. To their credit, they persevered – and their faith has been repaid many times over in the ability of this special place to harness massive community support.

Crucial to our success is our relationship with the Department. In Rob McCallum (the new Auckland conservator) and Bob Dickson (northern area manager in Warkworth) we have two passionate and energetic people, both committed not only to the success of the Tiritiri project but also to building an effective partnership with the supporters.

As for our achievements, the tempo just keeps increasing. In just the last two months, we've funded the transfer of 13 fernbirds from the Orewa motorway site to Tiritiri, at a cost of over \$4,000. We've also agreed to buy a replacement utility (as the current one is just about at the end of its life). In the next two months, the services facility will be officially completed, at a cost of some \$170,000 – all funded by the Supporters.

As for the future? We will also be building a new wharf shelter with funding from an old tourism grant to DoC, and are finalising design details. All being well, this structure should be built before the end of the year. We're now also looking at other species to translocate to the island – not birds, but other equally important species such as tuatara and giant wetas.

Today, the Gulf, tomorrow, the world

Peter Lee

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

Page 3 Bird



Silvereye

Zosterops lateralis lateralis
Tauhou

The silvereye (also known as the waxeye or whiteye) is one of the most abundant of our native birds. However, it is a relatively recent self-introduction to our shores, having arrived from Tasmania less than 200 years ago. This species is also common throughout Australia and many of the Pacific islands.

Slightly larger than the grey warbler (*Gerygone igata*) they are a predominantly olive green, have a grey back and a distinct white ring around the eye.

One of the reasons for the success of the silvereye is the varied diet. Although they predominantly dine on invertebrates, fruit and nectar, they may also rely on the offerings of humans such as mesh bags filled with lard and other goodies. A specially modified, bristled tongue allows them to feed on nectar.

Whilst most of the berries that they consume are from native plants, they do have something of a reputation for damaging commercial crops, particularly grapes, cherries and other small fruits. On the other hand, they do feed on greenfly and other pests, including woolly aphis. Because of this, they were also known as the blightbird.

It is believed that silvereyes have had a significant impact on indigenous forest ecosystems in that they have altered patterns of seed dispersal and also compete with other animals for food. They are also responsible for dispersal of seeds from many of our unwanted, introduced plants.

During the winter, they are usually seen in flocks but form territorial pairs once the breeding season arrives. According to food sources, the flocks do migrate, often to suburban gardens where they feed on winter flowering shrubs.

Despite their small size and relatively recent arrival, they were a food source for Maori. They were caught using live birds, suspended by their bills which, in turn, attracted others of the species.

Simon Fordham

Fernbird Release (continued)



Photo Ian Higgins

This was one of the species in the original 10 year working plan marked for translocation to the island but has not been given priority over other species such as the N.I. Robin, Kokako etc because of concerns over the difficulty of translocating this particular bird. An attempt to transfer North Island fernbird in the late 1970's failed but Codfish Island fernbird have been successfully transferred. The fernbird has not been extensively studied and knowledge of the North Island Subspecies is particularly scant. However, the rescue translocation will give an opportunity to study the habits of this species more closely which will be funded by the Supporters and hopefully provide valuable information on this interesting bird.

One of the exciting aspects of the fernbird on Tiritiri is that there are only two other sites in NZ where fernbird live in a predator free environment (Codfish Island and the subantarctic Snares Islands). Kevin Parker's research at Omaha showed a high level of nest predation but with no introduced predators on Tiritiri, they may move into different habitats if the food and cover are suitable.



Photo Ray Walter

In 1994, Tim Lovegrove from the ARC surveyed Tiritiri, identifying at least 28 hectares of wetland and upland manuka scrub ideal for fernbird and estimated this area alone could sustain a population of 200 pairs. Tim presented the translocation to DOC, but uncertainty

surrounding fernbirds translocations, lack of a studied source population and doubts over a successful outcome put the proposal on hold. However scrub clearance in RAP21 meant that fernbird in this area would be displaced providing an obvious source of birds for the first transfer.



Photo Anne Rimmer

The catching technique involved using mist nets, audio equipment with taped calls and a lot of patience. Kevin will outline the catching methods in more detail in a later article, but it has proved difficult, not only because the operation has had to be rushed, but also the birds themselves are very hard to net. Fernbirds are poorly flighted and do not get tangled in the net like stronger flighted species. Their wings are short and stubby which accounts for their poor flight. One particularly determined bird hit the net 8 times in succession before finally getting caught. Once caught, the usual process in previous translocations had been to transfer on the same day as the capture and have one bird per transfer box. However if a bird were caught in the evening, it would be held overnight before sending it via helicopter or ferry the next morning. The overnight stay did not unduly stress the birds and Kevin ensured they had plenty of food. Once on the island, there was an immediate hard release at Lighthouse valley, which has similar scrubby vegetation to the Orewa area. Unfortunately because of uncertainty

about how the birds would react, a public transfer was not possible for this species.

It is estimated that approx 20-30 birds will act as a founder population for the island and so this transfer is likely to be supplemented by a further release next year, possibly from Omaha. The numbers of birds left at Orewa is not fully known but it is probably not a large number and some birds must be left in the areas that the motorway will not disturb. The habitat at RAP (Recommended Area for Protection) 21 is an excellent example of regenerating forest with kauri and tanekaha. Tui, fantails, even tomtits were heard in the valleys and of course fernbird inhabit this beautiful and isolated area. However the motorway construction will change this scenery for good later this year.

On Tiritiri, Kevin spent time following up on the whereabouts of the released birds several weeks later. No

birds were heard at the release site, but several calls were heard in the bracken scrub adjacent to Bush 22 and Bush 1 and a bird has been seen on Wharf Road above the teal pond, indicating that while they are not strong flyers, they can still move long distances. With the breeding season due at the end of August, it is hoped that the fernbirds will settle down and begin consolidating their presence on Tiritiri and in due course become well known to visitors to the island.

Special thanks for this operation must go to Rosalie Stamp of DOC, Hariata Gordon of Ngati Paoa for organising the blessing, Te Warena of Te Kawerau a Maki, Tim Lovegrove of ARC, Dianne Brunton and Sandra Anderson of Auckland University and all the volunteers from University of Auckland and Tiritiri Supporters who have helped out in the field. Finally to Kevin Parker for organising the operation with volunteers and equipment and catching the little blighters.

News Briefs

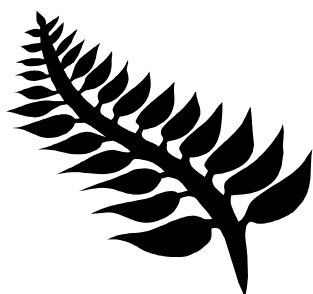
Congratulations!!!

... to Andreas & Sibilla Girardet, a daughter – Lilly Rene Trinity, on 17 May. Sibilla was the PhD student who worked on the little spotted kiwi.

... to Jan Velvin upon receiving the NZ Region IPPS (International Plant Propogators Society) "Award of Honour". The award only occurs as merited Jan is only the fifth New Zealander, and first woman, to receive this.

A keen conservationist, Jan has been associated with Tiritiri Matangi for 20 years and has participated in the replanting programme since its inception. Jan is well known to many SoTM members and, in more recent times, her activities have centred on guiding. She is currently involved in the preparation of a native plant / tree list, for Tiritiri Matangi, to assist others in plant identification.

SoTM can be justifiably proud of the unique honour that Jan has received.



Welcome!!!

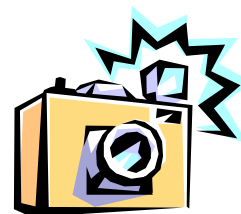
... to David Clarke, who is beginning his MSc. David is studying "The effect of restoration and succession on invertebrate communities of Tiritiri Matangi Island".



Photo Competition

This has now closed.

Entries will be judged shortly and it is hoped that results will be announced at the September dinner.



Competition Winners Visit Tiri

Text and Photograph by Cathy Catto

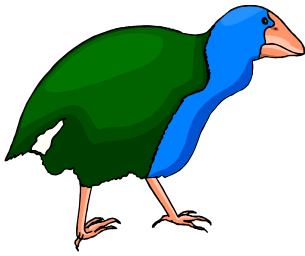
Ahumai Fenton-Cribb (left) and Elizabeth Shields (right) won the Flight Centre / Department of Conservation Takahe colouring competition. Their prize was a weekend in Auckland (with a parent) and a trip to see Tiri's takahe.

Elizabeth lives in Invercargill and it was her first trip to Auckland, also enjoying a number of other sights including Kelly Tarlton's and Howick Historical Village.

Ahumai lives in Rongotea (near Palmerston North) and this was her first time seeing Takahe.

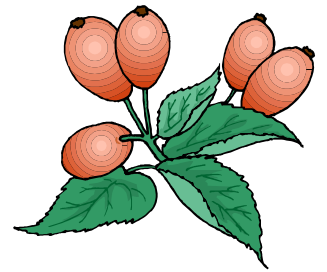
Both families were appreciative of their Tiri experience and thank everyone who made their trip so enjoyable.





Flora and Fauna Notes

Compiled by Barbara Walter



Flora

It has been a great year for kohekohe – stitchbird, bellbird and tui have all had a great time!

The wattles are still flowering and likely to go on for a while yet. Those supporters that visited for the bellbird trip were well rewarded.

Several Kowhai are in full flower and by late August / early September tui will be feasting on them, so if you didn't make the Bellbird Trip, try the Kowhai Trip (Sunday 2 September).

Kaka beak are looking their very best, more so at present as they are "decorated", giving the appearance of the festive season. Sandra Anderson, of the University of Auckland, is carrying out experiments on the "Dynamics of Pollination". Kaka beak, when originally classified, was considered to be the optimum plant design for bird pollination but, in practice, this may not be so. Sandra's experiments are aimed at determining whether they are bird, insect or wind pollinated.

Birds

(The Feather Report)

Fernbird

Number 13 arrived on the 9th August and proved to be a lucky one. Previous release have seen them disappear so fast that photographs have shown very little. This last one, released by Sandra Anderson, of the University of Auckland, was videoed by Sally Hally and performed beautifully. Excellent footage was obtained.

Whilst the fernbird have certainly held the limelight, plenty else has been going on in the avian community.

Takahe

Pounamu spends most of her time with Greg but has been back with Whakama for two short spells. Whakama has also been spending a lot of time with Iiti and Blossom.

Ray & Barbara have recently attended the Takahe Recovery Group meeting in Dunedin. They report that the total population is now only 220 (one less than last year). The distribution is Murchison Mountains – 129, Stuart Mountains – 6, Burwood Bush – 28, islands – 52, display birds – 5.

The new 5 year plan was discussed at length and mention was made of future sites for the release of takahe in both the north and south.

Kokako

All 10 have been sighted recently. Te Koha Waiata (TKW) and Cloudsley Shovell have been chasing their juveniles, Piccolo and Kahurangi, out of Wattle Valley, and appear to have succeeded with their eviction notice.



Photo Anne Rimmer

Stitchbird (Hihi)

During the month of June, 33 adults and 66 juveniles were sighted. With the flowering of the kohekohe, use of the feeders has been less.

North Island Robin

3 of the robins from the original translocation, in 1992, and 2 from the 1993 release still survive.

The population is currently around 75 to 80 birds.

Others

Saddleback, whitehead, kakariki, bellbird and tui are all abundant and kingfisher are being sighted in larger numbers than in previous years.

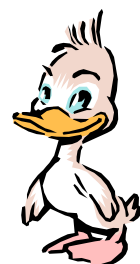
Goosey Nomates" has left the island but Gosford Goose" is still in residence in the Hobbs Beach / Wharf area.

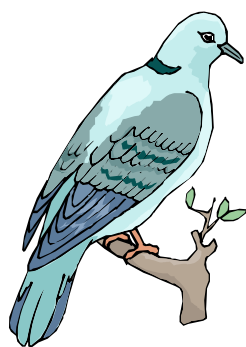
Masamine, a third year PhD student from Waikato University, reports that there are fewer penguins so far this year. Penguins in the nesting boxes near the wharf are now sitting on eggs.

Briefs

Ray reports that this is the wettest he has seen Tiri in 20 or so years on the island.

Tawapou has a new scientific name - *Pouteria costata*





Encourage Birds to your Garden!!!

Barbara Walter

Here is a list of plants that are useful food sources for native birds. Whilst some, such as the Nikau, are very, slow growing, others, such as the coprosma species, are not and can produce nectar and berries in a relatively short period of time. Many of these plants are available for sale on the island.

Nectar sources for birds:

<u>Botanical Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Size</u>	<u>Flowering Season</u>
<i>Cordyline australis</i>	Cabbage tree / Ti kouka	Small tree	Spring, summer
<i>Dysoxylum spectabile</i>	Kohekohe	Large tree	Winter
<i>Fuchsia excorticata</i>	Kotukutuku / Konini	Small tree	Spring
<i>Geniostoma ligustrifolium</i>	Hangehange / Maori privet	Small tree	Spring
<i>Knightia excelsa</i>	Rewarewa / NZ Honesuckle	Large tree	Spring
<i>Metrosideros excelsa</i>	Pohutukawa	Large tree	Summer
<i>Phormium tenax</i>	Flax / Harakeke	2-3 m	Early summer
<i>Phormium cookianum</i>	Flax / Wharariki	2-3 m	Early summer
<i>Pittosporum crassifolium</i>	Karo	Small tree	Spring
<i>Pittosporum eugenioides</i>	Lemonwood / Tarata	Small tree	Spring
<i>Pittosporum umbellatum</i>	Haekaro	Small tree	Spring
<i>Pseudopanax lessonii</i>	Houpara	Small tree	Autumn
<i>Pseudopanax arboreus</i>	Five finger / Puahou	Small tree	Spring
<i>Sophora microphylla</i>	Kowhai	Small tree	Spring
<i>Sophora tetraptera</i>	Kowhai	Small tree	Spring
<i>Tecomanthe speciosa</i>	NZ Bignonia	Climber	Winter
<i>Vitex lucens</i>	Puriri	Large tree	Year round

Berry and Seed Sources:

<u>Botanical Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Size</u>	<u>Fruiting Season</u>
<i>Aristotelia serrata</i>	Wineberry / Makomako	Small tree	Summer
<i>Beilschmiedia tarairi</i>	Taraire	Large tree	Autumn
<i>Beilschmiedia tawa</i>	Tawa	Large tree	Summer
<i>Coprosma species</i>	<i>Kanono, Taupata, Karamu</i>	<i>Shrub</i>	<i>Summer, autumn</i>
<i>Corokia species</i>	<i>Corokia</i>	<i>Shrub</i>	<i>Autumn</i>
<i>Cordyline australis</i>	Cabbage tree / Ti kouka	Small tree	Summer
<i>Corynocarpus laevigatus</i>	Karaka	Large tree	Late summer
<i>Dacrycarpus dacrydioides</i>	Kahikatea / White pine	Large tree	Late summer
<i>Dysoxylum spectabile</i>	Kohekohe	Large tree	Winter
<i>Fuchsia excorticata</i>	Kotukutuku / Konini	Medium tree	Spring
<i>Hedycarya arborea</i>	<i>Pigeonwood / Porokaiwhiri</i>	<i>Small tree</i>	<i>Summer</i>
<i>Macropiper excelsum</i>	Kawakawa / Pepper Tree	Shrub	Late summer
<i>Melicytus ramiflorus</i>	Mahoe / Whiteywood	Small tree	Summer, autumn
<i>Nestegis species</i>	Maire	Medium tree	Winter
<i>Pittosporum species</i>	Karo, Lemonwood, Haekaro	Small tree	Autumn
<i>Planchonella novo-zelandica</i>	Tawapou	Medium tree	Autumn
<i>Podocarpus totara</i>	Large tree	Large tree	Summer
<i>Prumnopitys ferruginea</i>	Miro / Brown pine	Large tree	Winter
<i>Prumnopitys taxifolia</i>	Matai / Black pine	Large tree	Late summer
<i>Pseudopanax lessonii</i>	Houpara	Small tree	Winter
<i>Pseudopanax arboreus</i>	Five finger / Puahou	Small tree	Autumn
<i>Rhopalostylis sapida</i>	Nikau	Small tree	Autumn
<i>Schefflera digitata</i>	Pate	Small tree	Autumn
<i>Vitex lucens</i>	Puriri	Large tree	Year round

Of Fernbirds, Firedrills & Flipping Big Sheds

Text and Photographs by Ian Higgins



In mid June, Ian Price and I headed to the island to build the second implement shed. We had already supervised the delivery of the shed, on a previous trip, however, it was with dismay that we realized that some of the base plates were missing.



Ray was unperturbed as it meant that we could lend a hand rebuilding the platform on the Kawerau Track. A day and a half later, the missing parts arrived and Ian and I started to transform the packet of steel into "Ray's" second shed.

During the construction, we were regularly interrupted by Ray (offering advice) and the need to supervise a steady stream of fernbirds arriving by helicopter from the mainland. It was really great to be present when yet another species was released onto the island.



After the first week, we had the superstructure up and a couple of sheets of iron on the roof. Unfortunately, the weather then started to blow and we had to move on to cladding the sides of the building. After 3 days, the wind abated and, with the help of willing volunteers, we managed to complete the roof.

Thursday of the second week and our peace was shattered as Gladstone Primary School turned up for their annual stay.

By this stage, the implement shed was fairly visible and it gave the guides something to talk about as they emerged from the Wattle Track. Comments such as, "where did

that come from?", "it wasn't there last week" and, "yet another man made structure visible from outer space" were received. We had obviously made an impression.

On returning to the bunkhouse, we remade our acquaintance with some of the teachers and pupils from Gladstone that we had met the previous year. Early the next morning (very early), the boys had had enough sleep and proceeded to wake the rest of the bunkhouse.

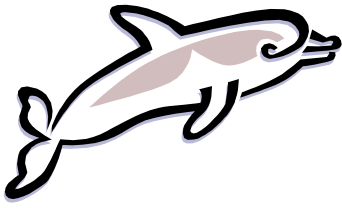


Ian and I decided that, the following night, we would reinstate a little known and seldom used institution, the bunkhouse fire drill, in the interests of safety, of course. At about 2.00 AM, we proceeded to raise everyone in the bunkhouse and marshal them in the courtyard. The kids took it well but, naturally, the teachers weren't quite so impressed.

In short, a successful and enjoyable 2 weeks was had. Thanks to all the volunteers who lent a hand and thanks to Gladstone school for being good sports.

Ray is thrilled with the new shed although he was heard questioning whether it was big enough. Dream on Ray!!!





The Day of the Dolphin

Simon Fordham



Sunday 3 June began like many other days on Tiri. Fine weather enticed many a day tripper to experience the "Singing Island". Many of these visitors were supporters, this being the annual Bellbird Trip. However, on this particular day, bellbirds were not the star attraction.

After another most enjoyable guided tour, I was standing, conversing, near the shop, when I noticed, to the south, disturbance on an otherwise flat, unbroken surface of the sea. Raised binoculars confirmed that these were fins of a mammalian nature.

The school were moving in a north easterly direction so by the time those in the bunkhouse were rudely interrupted during their lunch, the dolphins had moved below the treeline. It seemed appropriate, to some of us that hadn't yet eaten, to delay lunch and head down the wharf as this was the direction of cetaceans. Lunch could wait!!!

In the ten minutes it had taken us to reach the wharf, the dolphins had already passed and were cruising amongst the eight or so craft anchored in Hobbs Bay. A number of boaties had taken to their dinghies and man and dolphin mingled. We stood on the foreshore of Hobbs Bay and watched all of this, somewhat frustrated at not being able to get closer to the action. At one stage, however, some of the dolphins (we counted 8 in total) came within an estimated 10 to 20 metres from the shoreline. This was around two hours after a low, neap tide. Part of the entertainment package included vertical, airborne displays, an amazing sight under any circumstances but more so when seen amongst moored boats and ensuing dinghies.

I noticed a number of cameras in use so, when one of these photographers came ashore, I passed on my address in the hopes that they could provide a picture for the newsletter. Whilst this never eventuated, they were kind enough to offer the use of their dinghy whilst they explored the island. Needless to say, we were on board in a flash and set a speed record that Rob Waddell would have been proud of. In reality, following the dolphins was a futile exercise. Once out there, it was just a matter of

moving with the other dinghies and the dolphins followed us. At times, they passed within a metre of the dinghy and could often be seen under the water in about 3 to 4 metres of clear water. Their aerial displays continued and were spectacular from a few metres away.

Based upon their size, slightly longer than the dinghy, we suspect that these were bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*). Of the two species commonly found in the gulf, the bottlenose is somewhat larger than the common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*).

Word must have travelled quickly as, whilst we were busy on the water, many of the other "weekenders" from the bunkhouse had congregated on the beach. After around half an hour, we returned to shore, partly to give others a chance to view the dolphins up close and partly to return to the bunkhouse for a spot of lunch, stomachs by now crying out for nourishment.

At around three thirty, we were walking along the ridge track when we heard the sound of the departing ferry engines as they accelerated. Almost immediately, a cheer of amazement could be heard, something like you would hear at the circus as the acrobat flies through the air. We had no doubt that dolphins were indirectly responsible for this outburst. We later learnt that a number had followed the ferry towards Gulf Harbour. However, these were reported as Common Dolphins so maybe there was more than one school in the area. This possibility was given more credence when we passed along Hobbs Bay shortly after 5.00 PM and the original dolphins were still frolicking amongst the moored boats, some 4 hours after we had first seen them.

Whilst mammalian predators are not normally welcome at Tiri, these ones can come back any time.

Come to a Celebratory Dinner! - Monday 17th September, 6.30 pm

This year 2001 is the "Year of the Volunteer". It also marks the 25th anniversary of the first gazetting of Tiritiri Matangi as a reserve. Volunteers have played a major part in the development of Tiritiri. From the planting of trees, to the building of tracks and the raising of funds for numerous projects, volunteers have enabled Tiritiri to become the nature haven it is. Therefore it would seem only fitting to have a dinner in honour of volunteers and the beginning of the Tiri project!

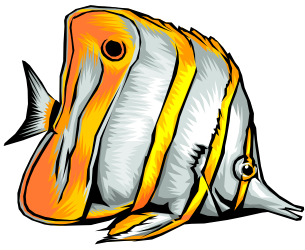
The British Council has once again assisted SoTM in bringing an international guest speaker, Professor Chris Baines, to our dinner. Professor Baines is a leading environmental advisor, author and broadcaster from the UK, whose regular contributions to the *BBC Wildlife* magazine always take a hard look at influences to wildlife and the World around us.

Bring your family and friends and celebrate with us at:

Alexandra Park Raceway – Top-of-the-Park, Greenlane, Auckland.

Tickets are \$45.00 a head for a full buffet meal, and there is a cash bar.

(For late bookings or additional registration forms, contact Mel Galbraith, Ph. 480 1958 or email melgar@ihug.co.nz)



Memories of Tiritiri Matangi

Dr. Roger Grace



I am a marine biologist and underwater photographer, and was brought up in Auckland. I have always had a strong fascination for the sea and marine life living on its shores and underwater, and spent many of my childhood holidays fossicking in rockpools at Red Beach where my family had a small batch. I began snorkelling in the late 1950's, and did my scuba training with the Auckland Underwater Club in 1960.

The Auckland Underwater Club frequently ran trips on a charter boat called *Onewa*, to the inner islands of the Hauraki Gulf. I clearly recall my first trip to Tiritiri, where I enjoyed a wonderful day snorkelling at Little Wooded Island and in Northeast Bay. This was probably in the summer of 1960-61.

The underwater visibility on that day was about 70 feet, or just over 20 metres! *Ecklonia* kelp covered most of the rocky bottom. Red crayfish feelers bristled from beneath ledges and rocks. I was 15, and used a thick woollen jersey to help keep warm, as wet suits were just in their infancy then. Thin rubber drysuits were still more common than wetsuits, but I could not afford either.

divers on the trips. Several keen spearfishermen used to spear kingfish on the bottom using scuba gear, which was quite accepted as a method in those days. One of their favourite spots for kingfish was Bollon's Rock, a submerged pinnacle off the northwest end of Tiritiri. They often used to come back with huge kingfish, sometimes in excess of 50 pounds (23 kilos).

Although I never dived Bollon's Rock, which requires careful timing as the tidal race there is very strong, I recall descriptions of the rock underwater as being covered in thousands of "pink faces". I know now they were referring to the jewel anemone *Corynactis haddoni*, which thrives in clean water with a strong current. It would be interesting to see if the rock is still covered with jewel anemones.

In the late 1970's, I was involved with a consulting firm investigating the then proposed sewage outfall pipeline route off the end of Whangaparaoa Peninsula. We mapped a suitable route through the reefs immediately south of Huaroa Point where the lighthouse is situated. Below the thick *Ecklonia* which stopped at about ten metres depth, fingers of rock extending offshore on to coarse shelly sand were covered with jewel anemones and small sponges and ascidians. Rock crevices were again bristling with crayfish feelers, although most of the crays on these deeper reefs were small, only a few being over the legal size limit. In the shallows, however, in this area, late summer was a good time to catch red crayfish around the 6 or 7-pound mark (2.7 to 3.2 kilos).

About five years ago I again dived near Huaroa Point, and noted a vast change in the condition of the reefs. After about 20 years of sewage discharge in this area, the reefs once clean and covered in jewel anemones and bristling with crayfish were now dead and grey and covered with silt. Not a crayfish was to be seen. The once clean coarse shelly sediments further into the Whangaparaoa Passage were now clogged with silt, and supported nothing like the diversity of rich sea-life present before the outfall was commissioned.

During a dive a year ago at Little Wooded Island with NERDS from NZU, I also noted big changes from those early days in 1960. Gone was the lush forest of *Ecklonia* kelp, progressively eaten out by hordes of kina, which have flourished throughout Northland and Auckland in the absence of sufficient crayfish and snapper to keep their numbers down. Not a crayfish to be seen, where once they bristled from every rock.



Jewel anemones at Tiri

I attempted to catch my first crayfish. I had no gloves, but a big red cray was clinging to a vertical rock wall out in the open in about two metres of water, and looked easy to catch. I swam down and reached out my hand. The cray was so big I could barely stretch my hand over its back. I plucked it from the rock face and shot to the surface. Never having held a crayfish before, I was scared of squeezing it too tightly and crushing its shell! So my grip was not as firm as it should have been, and the cray soon flipped its tail and swam backwards to the bottom and crawled under a rock! I had learned to hold crays firmly in future!

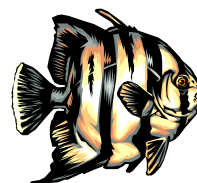
For several years I continued visiting Tiritiri and other islands, such as the Noises, Rakino, Motuora, Motuketekete, Waiheke and Kawau with the Auckland Underwater Club. Crayfish were commonly caught by



Tiritiri underwater scene - sponges and kelp

Can the underwater habitats of Tiritiri Island be restored? I believe the island is large enough to be substantially "self-sustaining" if a marine reserve protected the underwater reefs around the whole island with an adequate buffer zone extending well beyond the reefs and out on to the sediment bottom. This would allow good numbers of crayfish to recolonise the area over several years, as well as snapper. Both these species would then gradually restore kina numbers to lower natural levels, and we should see the *Ecklonia* kelp forests and their associated species regain their former glory.

Because of wider regional influences, it may not be possible to regain the wonderful underwater visibility prevalent in the early 1960's. Silt build-up in the area as a result of the discharge from the sewage outfall on Whangaparaoa will probably not dissipate unless the outfall is closed down and several years of natural dispersal forces are allowed to take their course. It is my opinion, however, that the ecological gains which predictably can be made by total protection of the marine life around Tiritiri, would be very worthwhile, and a valuable adjunct to the open sanctuary being created on the adjacent land of the Island itself. Future generations will cherish such an easily accessible land and sea reserve on Auckland's doorstep.



Recent Visitors

Schools – from Near & Far

Papatoetoe Intermediate – 1 Class
 Sunnynook – 3 Classes
 Orewa Primary – 2 Classes
 Whangaparaoa Primary
 Kristin School – 2 Classes
 Maungawhau – 4 Classes
 Omanaia (Northland)
 Kamo Intermediate
 Cambridge High School
 One Tree Point (Ruakaka)
 St. Cuthberts – Form 2's
 Northcross Intermediate – 2 Classes
 St. Cuthberts – 6th Form
 Gladstone School Conservation Unit



2001 Island Diary

Kowhai Trip
 Sunday 2nd September
 (book with Barbara - not Fullers)

Supporter Families (non work)
 Sat 6th – Sun 7nd October

Labour Weekend Working Bee
 Sat 20th – Mon 22nd October

Supporter Families (non work)
 Sat 3th – Sun 4nd November

Bookings – Barbara 476 0010

Working Bees

The work continues..... "great efforts".

North Shore Tramping Club
 Laid new water pipe

SoTM Queens Birthday Weekend
 Repairs to Bush 1 platform

2 working weekends were cancelled
 due to Easterly gales

Tiri Shop



2002 Diary with
 Beautifully illustrated birds

by Jane Seabrook

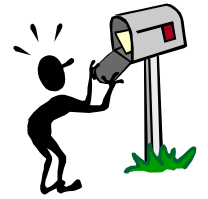
\$20

Telephone your order to
 Barbara

476 0010

Note: Overseas mail closes soon

Letters to the Editor



By popular request, we are delighted to give readers the opportunity to have a say. Last month's editorial, on harrier control for kokako protection, has certainly inspired some readers to take fingers to keyboard.

Dear Editor,

I have recently read the editorial of the latest Dawn Chorus (Bulletin 45) advocating the shooting of Australasian Harriers because of their perceived risk to kokako on Tiritiri. I am concerned that the editorial failed to raise wider implications and could set a dangerous precedent if such actions are adopted.

The article failed to point out that the kokako population has increased by 50% since release, despite confirmed predation by harrier(s). Even if predation by harriers does in future exceed kokako replacement, other options – such as protective screens for nests - should be tested before resorting to lethal solutions. Predation is a natural event and non-lethal solutions for translocated species have been successfully adopted in the past on Tiri - e.g. reducing brown teal predation by harriers and pukeko through construction of pond shelters. Tiri was born under the ethos of restoring the environment and re-constructing constituent communities and processes. It would be disappointing if such a prominent group as SoTM supported ecological deconstruction without considering actual risk and alternative options first.

There is also the risk that culling harriers will create a precedent for future 'easy' management of 'problem' species. As a herpetologist I look forward to the day that tuatara and other reptiles are returned to Tiri. However, I am under no illusions that reintroductions may be difficult given the large number of predatory ground-foraging birds that have already been reintroduced. Some young tuatara and lizards will undoubtedly get eaten by birds, but I certainly do not expect SoTM (or DoC) to advocate the shooting of Takahe, Little Spotted Kiwi, Kingfisher, Pukeko, Harrier, Saddleback and NI Robin. For reintroductions of threatened invertebrates (e.g. Carabid beetles or Giant Weta), the list of potential bird predators is even greater.

I fully support an informed debate on this issue and encourage a full analysis of the risk that harriers posed to kokako, including an assessment of alternatives to shooting.

Graham Ussher
Auckland

Editor's Note: *The editorial is personal opinion and, as with all articles in Dawn Chorus, is not necessarily representative of SoTM policy. SoTM has no policy on the control of predation of kokako by harrier hawks.*

Dear Mr.Ed,

I totally agree with your editorial regarding the Tiri Kokako.

When we have (say) fifty breeding pairs on the island then we can allow the Harriers to re-establish. I know of other bird restoration areas where both Harriers and Black Back Gulls are trapped. Sad (personally I like both these species very much) but necessary to protect the rarer birds. As for the silly argument I have heard that "the birds just have to get used to the Harriers" I can only say "dead birds don't tell tales"....speaking of which...

The page 3 bird I thought had nice legs but the nose was a bit big ! That feather cloak certainly leaves everything to the imagination. And the rare Misk Lark, is this species related to the Poly Tician, as it certainly looks like the female (Poly Filly) as against the male (Poly Fella) ?

Regarding Peter Lee's comments about the Bunkhouse, I suggest that those of us who spend a fair amount of time living in it, get together with the committee to decide on what the priorities are in the ongoing improvement of the Bunkhouse (for instance we may decide on new mattresses before new buildings).

I would like to thank the Tiri family members (including the godmother and godfather) who kept in contact with me during my long illness, you gave me great lifts of spirit.

Mike Siddens
Auckland

Dear Editor

Although I do not know whether you really sought any feedback with regards the Harrier predation on Tiri but, for what it's worth here are my thoughts!

These birds certainly do not seem to be in danger of extinction and I am sure they are intelligent enough to remember where they found Kokako for dinner. To kill the probable offenders and, when appropriate, any other possible offenders is surely the only reasonable option.

Spur winged Plovers are another bird whose behaviour concerns me greatly too. However I trust these are being dealt with surely and speedily, when the occasion permits, on Tiri.

Beryl Young
Whangarei

Have your say!!! Letters should be sent to the editor (details page 2) by the deadline. Length should be less than 400 words and, if possible, sent via email. If necessary, letters may be edited prior to publication.