

## Little Spotted Kiwi Census

### A Species Doing Really Well!!!

Story by Wendy Hare

In 1993 16 Little Spotted Kiwis were released onto the island. Two of these birds are known to have died fairly soon after release. A subsequent survey in 1997 resulted in an estimated population of 20 - 25 kiwi. During that expedition 11 birds were caught, 7 from the original release and 4 island-bred birds.



This year a team of able kiwi sniffers Olly (By Golly), Oscar and Fern, supported by DOC handlers Hugh Robertson, Rogan Colbourne, Natasha Coad and 3 volunteers arrived on July 7th for a 5 day expedition. Despite windy & sometimes wet weather, listening surveys were carried out over the whole island. Then teams set out to catch birds by attracting them to taped kiwi calls. Birds caught had transmitters put on to assist with identifying territories and also to find them by day and possibly catch their mate too.

A total of 14 birds were caught this time, of which 3 were from the original release, 3 were island bred and caught in 1997 and 8 were new (unbanded, island bred). One male weighed in at 1540g and a female at 2040g, both the heaviest Little Spotted Kiwis, for their sex, ever recorded! The estimated population for this survey is 50 plus birds!

Yeah! GO TIRI!

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This newsletter has been  
Kindly sponsored by 3M  
New Zealand



## 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

Carl Hayson 479 4217 cgpartners@clear.net.nz

### Secretary

Julie Cotterill 812 8402 julieatpiha@xtra.co.nz

### Treasurer

Lois Wilson 376 0233 wilsonfalconer@clear.net.nz

### Membership Secretary

Val Smytheman 278 9309 vjess@ihug.co.nz

### Newsletter Editor

Simon Fordham 274 1828 simonf@clear.net.nz

### Committee

Cathy Catto	629 3903	higcat@actrix.co.nz
Sally Green	836 5963	sallygreen@xtra.co.nz
Gaye Hayson	479 4217	cgpartners@clear.net.nz
Peter Lee	418 1332	peter@naturaledge.co.nz
John McLeod	631 5664	jmcleod@ihug.co.nz
Graham Ussher	815 6622	g.usher@auckland.ac.nz
Vicky Young	575 1114	vicky@lonelymiaow.co.nz

### DoC Field Officers

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

Bunkhouse / Assistant Ranger 476 0920

## Editorial

There is an old Irish saying:

"It doesn't matter who you vote for, you still get the government".

Lo and behold, we have just voted in another one. So what do we expect from this crowd?

No doubt, our overall expectations are wide and varied but we are hopefully unanimous in supporting a brighter future for the native flora and fauna of New Zealand.

The last government delivered on its promise to protect the forests of the West Coast. Work has also begun to ensure further protected areas, both marine and terrestrial. But what of the future?

There is a target to increase, to 10% by 2010, the amount of coastline with some form of marine protection. What about setting a target for the amount of native forest that this land can boast, bearing in mind that we only have about 20% of the country in native bush.

It is interesting to note that Japan is about 67% forested of which only 40% is plantation.

Whilst we do have some beautiful forests, there is much land that appears to have gone to waste. I think, in particular, of much of the land on the East Coast of the North Island, from Poverty Bay south. Some areas may be beyond hope as erosion has bared rock face, thereby preventing planting, but much can be replanted, both to prevent further erosion and to provide native forests for centuries to come. We have to think beyond our own lifetimes.

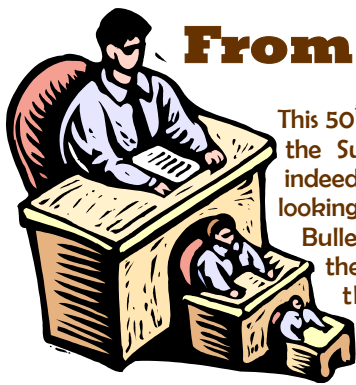
I also wonder about the fact that New Zealand has 30% less sheep than the 70 million it boasted 20 years ago. This must also have freed up many hectares of suitable land for revegetation

Mind you, until we learn to effectively control, and hopefully eradicate, possums on the mainland, such replanting may be a futile exercise.

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

**Deadline for Spring Newsletter**

**October 31 2002**



## From the Chair

This 50<sup>th</sup> edition of the newsletter from the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi is indeed cause for celebration. By looking at the past editions of the Bulletin (now the Dawn Chorus), they show a remarkable record of the achievements by the supporters / volunteers over the past 14 years.

Look at what has been achieved on the island since those early bulletins went to print. For example, I was recently reading the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the newsletter produced in July 1989, a one page typed A4 bulletin, sent out to a small group of 84 members. Mentioned in this edition produced by founding chairperson, Jim Battersby and his late wife Barbara, the Supporters had made the first successful application to the lotteries board for a 4WD bike; the first public release of the whitehead coincided with the September planting trip; Ian Hogarth, Conservator of the newly formed Department of Conservation had given greetings to the organisation at the first AGM in April, which was followed by a talk from Dr John Craig on the possible future developments for Tiritiri and Motuora Islands.

Now in the year 2002 one can look inside the implement shed and spy not one, but two 4WD bikes, a ride-on mower and a utility, all purchased by the Supporters. A further eight bird translocations have been made since 1989, still mostly with public involvement. The planting has virtually long finished on the island, apart from recent planting in the former sheep paddocks, and we currently have over 1300 members. We have an excellent partnership with the Department of Conservation and much of the proposed developments presented by Dr Craig back in 1989 have come to fruition.

The bulletin has also faithfully reflected the changing role of the supporters / volunteers and committee since those first editions. The organisation is more professional, reflected in both the roles of volunteers and the influence the group has within conservation circles. For example, volunteers initially were involved with the revegetation work and track building, but once this work was completed the volunteers became information providers to the public that flock to the island. Volunteers have swapped spades for notebooks; educating the public on the way the island has developed as one of the foremost conservation projects in New Zealand.

The newsletter itself has evolved into a 12-page document together with pictures and occasional colour articles. I doubt the founding committee would have ever imagined the newsletter would have developed to this level of sophistication in such a relatively short period of time.

But as we now proceed towards future developments on the island, recently signalled by the introduction of the five year plan (a guide for the future development of the island), no doubt prospective chronological voyeurs will be able to marvel at the work yet to be done on the island as the metamorphosis of this magical island continues to be recorded in the pages of the Dawn Chorus.

Carl Hayson



## Page 3 Bird



Photo Simon Fordham

### Brown Quail

*Synoicus ypsilophorus*

One could be forgiven for calling this bird Tiri's "daytime Kiwi" as so many visitors to the Island excitedly report how wonderful it is to see a Kiwi in broad daylight. On closer questioning, it inevitably turns out to be a Brown Quail.

These delightful "dumpy" little birds with their overall brown lacy patterned feathers, above mottled black and chestnut were introduced to Tiri during farming days as a game bird. Interestingly, at a later date, Chukor were also released but they did not survive.

It has been suggested that the Brown Quail and the "extinct" New Zealand Quail were very closely related, if not the same species. The current thinking is that maybe they bred and thus it is unlikely that no pure examples of either exist in New Zealand. Perhaps with current DNA Techniques this can now be determined.

From September to January the females breed in nests lined with grass and leaves, sited on the ground and hidden under thick vegetation such as bracken. The eggs are white with brown specks. It is always amusing to see the tiny chicks which look just like little bumble bees scurrying along beside their parents.

A few summers ago, one used to see a dozen or more chicks with their parents. In recent times, the clutch sizes are much smaller so presumably the birds have reached their carrying capacity on Tiri.

When not breeding Brown Quail form small coveys of 3 – 10 birds and can often be seen at the edges of the tracks as well as in Wattle Valley. If approached too closely they wait until the last possible moment before taking off almost vertically with rapid flight and a noisy long whistle, with rising inflection.

Morag Fordham



# Bringing the Bats back to Tiri



by Carl Hayson



In the years before Tiritiri Matangi became an open sanctuary, there existed on the island a colony of bats, which roosted in the abandoned Defence Department buildings that once stood behind the lighthouse station. In the 1950's however, the Defence Department demolished the buildings and unfortunately most of the bats were destroyed. There were still some reported sightings of bats up to 1974, but recent subsequent searches using bat frequency detectors have failed to find any more and it is assumed they are now locally extinct on Tiritiri.

New Zealand has only two existing native land mammals, the long-tailed bat (*Chalinolobus tuberculatus*) and the lesser short-tailed bat (*Mystacina tuberculata*). They are very small, with the body the size of a thumb and a wingspan of about 300mm. Both bat species have restricted ranges on the mainland, particularly the short-tailed bat.

The short-tailed bat is a zoological oddity, being the only one of the known species of bats to forage on the ground and are known to have a special relationship with an unusual plant called wood rose (*Dactylanthus taylorii*), which the short-tailed bats are known to fertilise. This ground dwelling habit has caused it to be the target of ground predators so hence it's rarity.

The long-tailed bat is a more recent arrival in New Zealand, possibly arriving from Australia more than 1 million years ago. It is more widespread than the short-tailed, feeding around forest margins and chasing insects at dusk in a fantail like fashion.

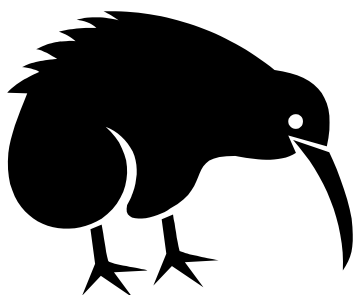
It appears though that the species of bat originally on Tiritiri was the long-tailed bat. Of the two species, only the long-tailed bats will roost in buildings, and the small forest remnants before replanting began on Tiritiri would have well suited this species. There has always been talk of reintroducing the bats back to Tiritiri at some stage but bat translocations are virtually unknown in New Zealand, so it was not considered a realistic possibility for the near future.

Then in February this year, Dr Stuart Parsons and student, Joshua Guilbert, from the Auckland University who have special interests in New Zealand bats, put forward a detailed proposal to the Supporters to begin the process of reintroducing bats back to Tiritiri. The proposal begins with a 2-year study into the long tailed species in the central North Island to research and understand the homing behaviour of these bats. This work needs to be undertaken before a translocation takes place as the bats may simply head home after release.

The next stage after the study would be to breed long-tailed bats in a special roost on Tiritiri and to conduct a soft release of the offspring onto the island. The whole process could take up to 5 years, but the end result would be a return of this species to one of its former ranges and a welcome addition to the ecology of Tiritiri. This bat is also more likely to be seen by visitors and it opens up new possibilities for advocacy and research.

After receiving an endorsement in principle for a translocation from the Bat Recovery Group, the Committee decided to partially fund the purchase of specialised equipment for the study. This is now well underway and the study should commence in November in the King Country while a study of the insects on the island will also begin soon.

There is a risk that the translocation may not succeed, but without our support, a translocation of bats to the island would not have been considered in the overall recovery plan and may never have happened. The results from this study will have national and international significance and the Supporters will be recognized for their support. More pertinent, however, will be the sight of bats dancing in the twilight on Tiritiri once again.

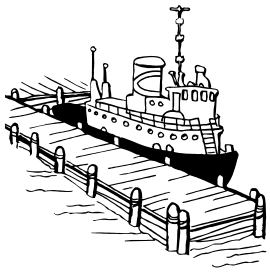


## Kiwi Census Results

From the 7-12th of July Hugh Robertson, Rogan Colbourne and volunteers were out on Tiritiri Matangi Island intensively surveying the little spotted kiwi population. They

have reported the great news that the population is thriving. Sixteen birds were released in 1993 and 1995. It is estimated that there is a minimum of 15 pairs on the island now and there will also be juvenile birds present. The birds caught were VERY healthy with world record weights of a 2040g female and a 1540g male suggesting that there is plenty of kiwi food available.

Rosalie Stamp  
Threatened Species Officer - Fauna  
Department of Conservation



# Drama at the Wharf

by Ray Walter



Have you noticed sometimes, after the Fullers ferry has dropped off it's passengers at the wharf, they steam out into the bay and anchor? The crew often take this time to go through and practice their safety procedures like fire drill, man over board and emergency anchoring. On Monday of Queens Birthday Weekend, the crew of Fullers QuickCat 2 was put to the test.

When approaching the wharf in the morning, the Quick Cat 2 lost control to one of it's gear boxes causing it to veer off the wharf with its bow facing Hobbs Beach and the stern pointing at the wharf. There was a southwest wind blowing at the time and the ferry quickly began to drift towards the beach in front of the toilets. The anchor was dropped immediately but as the drift of the bow was halted the stern began to swing around towards the beach and was in danger of going aground. By this time the ferry was about five or six metres past the wharf and beam onto the sea and wind.

Dave, the skipper of the ferry, threw a line from the stern of the ferry towards the steps on the wharf but it landed just short of them. I had to think quickly and ran down the steps into the water and just managed to reach the line and with the help of Trevor Buckley, one of our guides, we managed to secure the line to the wharf.

The ferry was now secure but was rolling in the beam sea with about 50



passengers on board. There was now the problem of getting the ferry back along side the wharf. After talking to the skipper it was obvious that we needed to get a line from the bow of the ferry to the wharf so she could be hauled back to and alongside the wharf.

With the help of some of our guides the DoC dinghy was put into the water. Sarah Gibbs and I rowed out to the ferry and took a line from the bow of the ferry to the head of the wharf. The crew on the ferry, with the help of two or three burly male passengers, managed to pull the bow around into the wind. It was not long until the ferry was alongside and our visitors ashore, be it an hour late!.



## Thank You!!!

To all who have contributed to make this edition something special and, indeed, to all who have contributed to the first 50 newsletters.

Thank you also to Garth Holmes of Gama Print for additional assistance and generosity in the production of Bulletin 50.

# A Brief History of the SoTM Newsletter

As this is the 50th newsletter, it is appropriate to be reminded of the history of the newsletter. Here is the very first bulletin, edited by Barbara Battersby, a double sided A4 edition. The information within serves as a timely reminder of how far SoTM have come since those early days.

The second edition appeared 5 months later and had grown to 4 pages (reduced to A5). It is perhaps fortunate that this exponential growth did not continue or we would be looking at a 50th edition with 112 trillion pages.

## SUPPORTERS OF TIRITIRI MATANGI

Bulletin No 1

February 1989

Greetings to you all for 1989.

Our membership is now approximately 55, including couples, families, and groups, and about \$1400 has been received. Your contributions are already being used to

1. Provide spray to combat the honeysuckle problem— although the rain and wind of recent weeks has delayed the start of the actual spraying.
2. Supply timber to continue improvements to Wattle Track. Volunteers have been at work, and another bridge is almost completed.
3. Provide materials to make a number of new information signs to be erected at landing points around the island's coast explaining the nature of Tiritiri Matangi to the casual visitor and warning against lighting fires allowing pets ashore, etc.

The committee has met several times, dealing at this stage mainly with organisational details. Arrangements to make the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi an Incorporated Society are proceeding, but legal details are taking longer than expected. We have been informed that the Rules passed at the Inaugural Meeting need altering slightly. Accordingly we are submitting the amended Rules to the Registrar for approval, and when this has been done we will bring them to a General Meeting for final endorsement. For this reason, and other considerations we have decided that it would be better to have a General Meeting in Auckland rather than on the Island. We will let you know when this can be arranged,

BUT

In place of the Meeting, a PICNIC is arranged on the Island.

SEE BELOW

The committee thanks those of you who have made various offers of service. These have been noted – they can't all be used at present – but please don't stop offering! We hope our membership can be increased this year. Please do your part by encouraging others to join. Enrolments should be sent to the Secretary, Mel Galbraith, 62 Holyoake Rd, Birkenhead, Auckland 10.

Some of you have made donations but have not sent in an enrolment form. It would be of great clerical help if you could send in a form to the secretary right away.

Others of you have indicated your real interest in Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi but have neither enrolled nor made your donation. If you would like to join with us, please send these in without delay. Further news and bulletins will be sent out to financial members only.

SEE PAGE TWO FOR PICNIC DETAILS & MORE NEWS



Whilst the number of pages remained at 4 for some time, Bulletin 9 was the first to be produced in A4 format. Bulletin 10, was the first to include photographs.

In the early stages, , the bulletin was being produced 3 times a year. However, in 1994, a February edition was realized and, since then, the magazine has been produced quarterly. In December 1994, Bulletin 19 became the first 8 page edition.

Perhaps the first "Special Edition" was number 28. This bulletin featured a 4 page colour spread to celebrate the "Life and Times of Mr. Blue".

The first 12 page bulletin was number 39 in the Spring of 1999. This is now the standard size for the newsletter.

The last "milestone", perhaps, was in the Summer of 2001 when Bulletin 44 boasted the new name for the magazine, "Dawn Chorus".

## Past Editors

There have been countless contributors to the bulletin over the years and 7 editors.

1-7*	Barbara Battersby
8*-12	Graham Jones
13-24	Zane Burdett
25-36	Peter Lee
37-41	Sarah Lowe
42-43	Philip Smith
44- Current	Simon Fordham

\* It is uncertain exactly when Graham took over from Barbara.

### NEWS FROM RAY & BARBARA ON TIRITIRI MATANGI.

Not much excitement since that fishing boat ran aground and the rat baits set caught no ship rats, only a few Kiore, hopefully proving that no rats came ashore. The saddleback hatching programme has been a little disappointing due to attacks by mynahs, but Ray is waging war against the Mynahs, with some success. Barbara and Ray have begun collecting seed for the new planting season.

### SUPPORTERS PICNIC DAY

#### SUNDAY 19<sup>th</sup> MARCH

Another great opportunity to visit Tiritiri Matangi. Put a circle round MARCH 19<sup>th</sup> on your calendar.

Explore Tiri's Pa sites, do some bird watching, learn more about the planting programme or just relax on the beach and get to know other Supporters.

#### Departs

Ferry steps 8-30 a.m.  
Devonport 8-50 a.m.

Tiritiri Matangi  
3-30 p.m.

#### Arrives

10 a.m. approx.

Devonport 5 p.m.  
Ferry steps 5-30 p.m.

Return Trip \$15 Adults \$12 Children

Please make cheque payable to Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi.  
Fares will be collected on the boat.  
Bring swimming gear – lunch etc.

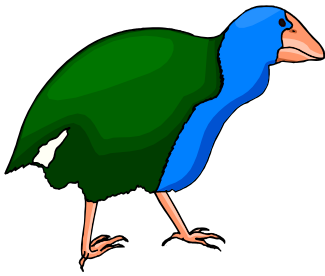
Booking is essential as numbers are limited – so please phone

Tim Ellison 810 – 9877 evenings AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

If weather is doubtful, please listen to 1ZB's cancellation notices at 7 a.m. on the morning of the picnic.

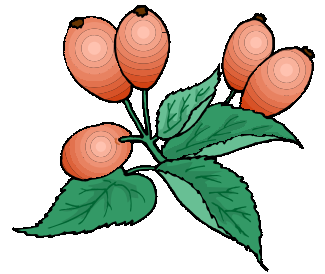
In the event of cancellation, the alternative date is April 2

N.B. Should this happen, new bookings MUST be made with Tim.



# Flora and Fauna Notes

Compiled by Barbara Walter



## Flora

Wattle, kohekohe and mahoe were battered by the recent storms. What looked like a good Kohekohe fruiting year will not be as good as expected.

Kakabeak are flowering and some kowhai trees already have blossom on them which the kereru have found. Kowhai have flowered 2 weeks earlier than last year and last year's were very early! The karo is also flowering early.

Several flax plants have flower stems at North East Bay – exceptionally early. Last year was also early – the third week in August.

## Fauna

### **Saddleback**

As 39 birds have been transferred to Karori Sanctuary it will be interesting to see how long it takes those bush patches to once again achieve their carrying capacity? When Saddleback were transferred to Mokoia Island several birds were taken from Bush 22. It then took 4 years for this area to repopulate.

When Phil Cassey did his Masters Thesis in 1997, the population on Tiri was at its best – a lot of birds. There were 137 birds in Wattle Valley alone and another 72 in the Kawerau Bush area. In 1999 Rosalie Stamp started her Masters Thesis and noticed fewer birds in Wattle Valley. As there is good habitat now in the planted areas a lot of birds have now moved into them. Estimated population is now approx 400. There is also now competition from other species and also predation by Harriers and Morepork. The 3 x 3-egg clutches of last season shows the birds themselves know that the population has slowed down.

#### Update on Karori released birds:

Some are courtship feeding. The juveniles are hanging out together and some birds are feeding on the jam/honey mix provided for the Bellbirds.

Most of the translocated birds are still in the valley but 3 have popped over the fence to have a look but luckily have come back.

### **Hihi (Stitchbird)**

Mid July count is 50 adults and 63 juveniles. With the extreme weather conditions, most of the kohekohe blossom and some wattle flowers were devastated so the stitchbird feeders have been very busy, especially the one at the top of the Kawerau Track where 50 different birds were monitored during a survey of one hour.

The survival rate of the juveniles is very good so far.

### **Takahe**

All are in excellent condition but one of the juveniles, BJ is now dead. The Lighthouse Gang of JJ, Kaitiaki, Adot, Rossie and Blakie were in a territorial fight with Aroha & Glencoe. JJ attacked BJ, their juvenile, and bowled him over several times. The next day he was found in a hunched position, ate very little for 2 days and so Richard Jacob-Hoff and Maria, the Auckland Zoo Veterinary team were helicoptered in. Blood tests and poo samples were taken and an antibiotic injection given but the next morning he was found dead. Post mortem results found that BJ died of an impacted stomach.

### **Brown Teal**

7 Brown Teal were released on various dams on 22 June, bred by Ducks Unlimited. It is great news to have our population boosted. A further 4 were released on July 25th.

3 of these birds have already been predated by harrier hawks, 2 from the first release and one from the second.

Originally 3 pair were released in 1987 and 3 pair in 1990, but some of the original birds died of old age leaving probably 8 individuals, only 1 adult male and a juvenile male, the others being

female. It is thought that the young males leave the island – also some ducks may have been taken by Harriers. A further 4 are to be introduced soon.

For further detail, see page 13

### **Little Spotted Kiwi**

DOC Scientists Hugh Robertson, Rogan Colburn and Natasha Coad with their dogs Ollie, Oscar and Fern and volunteers Wendy, Nigel Ian, Peter, Rose and Samantha carried out the 5 year Kiwi Census from 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> July. 14 kiwi were caught including the heaviest female and heaviest male ever recorded. The estimated population on Tiri is now 50.

For further detail, see cover story

### **Kokako**

Are seen regularly in Wattle Valley and on the Kawerau Track.

### **Fernbird**

Two banded birds have been seen with unbanded mates which proves last years birds have bred. 6 more were released in May. Finally, after many weeks of very unsettled, wet, windy weather, a further 6 were captured and released from 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> July when we experienced some lovely calm sunny days.

For further detail, see opposite page.

### **Whiteheads**

There have been 2 sightings of juveniles being fed recently!

### **Kereru**

Sightings are now more frequent, especially on the Kawerau track.

### **Kaka**

One bird seen on the morning of 19<sup>th</sup> July in the Pine trees in the sheep paddock.



## Fernbird Update by Kevin Parker

After days of wind and rain a band of eager volunteers and myself managed to get in two days catching in the mud up at Orewa. The weather was perfect, the birds on territory and calling, and the catching teams focussed. We did not catch a single thing. Richard Griffiths (DOC, Warkworth) and myself had a couple of close encounters but the little brown birds eluded all attempts to catch them. The wet and windy weather returned and a retreat was called.

On reflection I suspected that the birds had become habituated to the calls that we have been using to lure them into the nets so I recorded fresh calls on the territories from which I hoped to catch birds. Playing their own calls back at them really winds the birds up and gets a good defensive reaction.

The weather eased again and I quietly snuck back in with a couple of people on Tuesday evening, 15 of July. I managed to catch a single bird that evening which flew (in a transfer box) out to Tiri on Wednesday. All day Wednesday at Orewa produced no more birds. Thursday morning, in bright and early, and a pair of birds quickly captured within seconds of each other-into their respective transfer boxes they went, on to the ferry and released on the island before lunch. Friday morning I got another pair of birds (including a banded bird that escaped at Orewa last year) and Sandra Anderson caught a single bird bringing the weeks total to six birds.

All up, 25 birds have been transferred over the last year. There have been many sightings from all over the island in the last six months including banded birds in quite discreet locations, so hopefully they are all settling in well. Dean Williams from National Radio has recorded a story on the transfer that will be on Environment Matters sometime in the next month or so. In the meantime keep an eye out for little brown birds on the island and forward any sightings to me at [k.parker@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:k.parker@auckland.ac.nz). A big thank you to all those that helped out, or offered to help out over the last year and a big thank you to all the supporters whose efforts over the years have made this transfer possible.



## SCICON Conference Field Trip to Tiritiri Matangi

Raewyn McAlonan

The NZ Science teachers conference was held in Auckland during the first week of the July School holidays. One of the highlights of the conference was a field trip to Tiritiri Matangi which was attended by 60 teachers from all parts of New Zealand.

We were all very pleased on that squally morning when we rang the 0800 FANTAIL number to hear Barbara's cheerful voice advising us that the 'Trip' was on!! The trip from Auckland wasn't too bad and we tied safely up to the wharf to be greeted by Ray and Barbara, who gave their usual interesting and enlightening talk!

The teachers had been well primed to bring money for maps and souvenirs and we were delighted when all available maps on the boat were sold out as well as the shop doing a good trade.

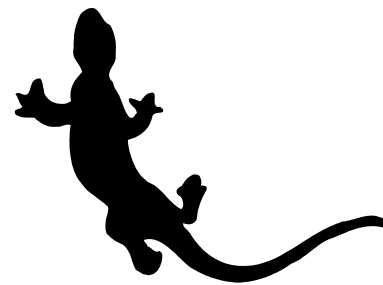
Tiritiri lived up to its name of "blowing in the wind," but in spite of this, most people saw a good selection of birds and were well guided and informed by the group of Supporters who looked after them. As usual the Light House Gang enchanted and delighted the visitors.

After lunch, Mel gave a most interesting talk on the history of the Island, its revegetation and the involvement of the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi. This was much appreciated by our guests as it gave them an insight and understanding of the Island's development. Special interest tours were held in the afternoon and once again our thanks must go to Mel, Graham, Barbara and Neil for their participation and enthusiastic imparting of their love and knowledge of Tiritiri.

The Field trip was deemed to be a great success, with many of the teachers fulfilling a long time goal to visit our very special Island.



# The Skinks of Tiritiri Matangi



by Melinda Habgood



Little is known about the behaviour and ecology of New Zealand's native skinks which is one reason why I chose to study them. Aside from increasing our general knowledge, my research, conducted as part of my Master of Science in Environmental and Marine Science, aims to improve the effectiveness of native lizard translocations by investigating behavioural interactions between copper (*Cyclodina aenea*) and moko skinks (*Oligosoma moco*) on Tiritiri Matangi Island. I am investigating whether either species express an incumbent advantage (where a resident species has a competitive advantage over a newly introduced species), and if competition can be inferred by measuring population densities, daily activity patterns, microhabitat use and reproductive ecology.

My project commenced in March 2002 and will be completed on the island by the end of the year, with the help of much appreciated funding from the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi. In spring I will be conducting field experiments inside a 14-15m enclosure on the grassland at the highest point of the island. In my initial survey of different habitats, this grassland proved to be the most abundant site for both species.

The survey also showed that, amongst young mixed plantings, skinks are numerous, whereas only 2 individuals were ever discovered at mature kanuka forest sites. The amount of grass in an area could be an important factor in the density of skink populations on Tiritiri, which highlights the importance of preserving some grassland areas, especially as planted

trees mature and inhibit the growth of grass.

Identifying the existence of an incumbent advantage between the resident species would help determine how the transfer of a new lizard species to Tiritiri Matangi should be carried out.

Copper and moko skinks are the only two lizard species on Tiritiri so there is huge potential to introduce more lizards in an attempt to restore the island to the 13 reptilian species that fossil evidence shows inhabited the island.

All too often translocations (movement of organisms from one area to another) take place with no or very minimal preliminary research in behavioural interactions between the affected species. Studies like mine, investigating competition

between species before translocations, allows for careful planning and management. For example, if it is shown that one species has an advantage over the other (but only when it is already resident in an area), the management plan can compensate for this by temporarily removing the majority of the resident population from this area. This would allow the new species a 'head start' at establishing themselves before allowing the original resident species to recolonise.

Furthermore, introductions to an area being restored often begin with native bird species, which may make it more difficult to introduce animals that are further down the food chain. Thus, increased success in skink translocations will enhance efforts to restore entire ecosystems.

If you would like further information about my thesis studies please do not hesitate to contact me:

Melinda Habgood  
email: mhab009@ec.auckland.ac.nz  
Ph: (09) 3737599 Ext. 6602

## Guiding Moments

Guiding children on the Island often provides me with delightful stories such as this one. One young boy was very interested in the lighthouse and wanted to know who turned the light on. I explained that Ray was the last lighthouse keeper on the Island but now it is automated and turned on by a sensor. He look puzzled and didn't seem to understand, so I said a sensor similar to the one outside your garage. "I know now" he replies "when the boats go passed, it turns the light on". I omitted to say it was a light level sensor not movement.

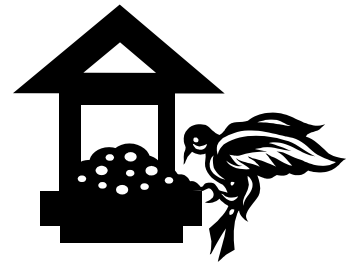
Cathy Catto





# Sweet Success

by Olga Brochner



Recent visitors to Tiritiri Matangi will have noticed all the activity around the supplementary feeding stations. It looks a little like a busy airport but with bellbird and stitchbird landing for top-ups instead of 747s!

These feeders are for the stitchbird, helping them through the autumn and winter months, when there is an increased competition for a decreased supply of nectar. Previously the stitchbird would miss out due to the more aggressive Tui and Bellbirds. On Tiritiri, stitchbird always bred well but their numbers would drop quite drastically after winter with competition for food seen as a major cause for this drop. Supplementary feeding was introduced and it has proved to be very successful. We now have 120 birds so all the extra work and cost involved is worth while.

Yet, nature again has the upper hand by sending us all sorts of unusual weather conditions. Tiri's trees have taken a bit of a beating and all the Mahoe was devastated by the recent "weather bomb". Plus, increasing numbers of stitchbird, while fantastic, also means the feeding stations are constantly used. Although the entrances to these stations are too small to allow

Tui in, Bellbirds (being the same size as stitchbird) are able to enter. Bellbirds are not silly, and realise the stations are an easy food stop, and their large numbers are another demand factor.


Richard Griffiths (Warkworth DoC officer) and Rose (the Brown Teal student) are currently attempting to design a new tunnel-type entrance to the feeders. The idea being that stitchbird nest in a hollow and so are not afraid of wee tunnel-type entrances, whereas, bellbirds are. However, this is a "work in progress", and the demand for supplementary feeds is increasing to almost critical levels.

I decided to seek outside assistance for one part of the supplementary feeding programme: sugar. When the feeds were first commenced, a "nectar solution" from Australia was used. But it did not really suit our conditions and tended to go off! The next feeding solutions were made with white sugar. It was more successful, but then investigations

showed raw sugar would be better. It seems that, although our stitchbird are refined little nectar consuming bird, their tastes are not. Raw sugar is far more suitable as it is natural sugar and has not been refined at all (unlike white sugar) and therefore contains enough goodies to keep the stitchbird going though leaner times.

Armed with this knowledge, I contacted the New Zealand Sugar Company at the Chelsea refinery on Auckland's North Shore (see picture on left). The Company is one of New Zealand's top 100 companies and the "Chelsea" brand is certainly an icon in New Zealand. The sugar is great, and so are people I contacted there, in particular Vicki Lenihan who was most helpful. As a result I am delighted to report that the New Zealand Sugar Company have agreed to donate raw sugar to the Stitchbird supplementary feeding programme. In June I collected 10 kilos from Chelsea, and Vicki has promised us more as required.

### School Visits



Manurewa High  
Hamilton High  
Maungawhau (3 Classes)  
Gulf Harbour (2 Classes)  
St. Thomas (2 Classes)  
Greehithe (4 Classes)  
Takapuna Intermediate  
Northcross Intermediate  
Kristin (5 Classes)  
Manau Primary  
(Northland)

Gladstone Conservation  
Unit also stayed for their  
annual 2 night visit.

### A Price put on Tiri!!!

The staff vacancy left on the island with the resignation of Ian McLeod has been filled by Ian Price.

Ian has had a long association with conservation work. He has worked on Raoul Island and has been involved with both the Motutapu and Motuora Restoration programs. Welcome on board Ian.

### Working Bees—Thank You!

- SoTM Queens Birthday Weekend
- Gloria Lander's Weekend
- Outdoors Activities Weekend
- Ivan Reilly's Weekend
- Eve's Weekend
- David Gauld's Weekend
- WOPS Weekend

and all involved with trackwork, beach cleanups, planting, nurserywork etc.

### One for the Kids

Tiri is well known as being host to schoolchildren so I guess it is no surprise that a letter from the IRD addressed to the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi contained forms to claim Child Support!

Julie Cotterill







# Queens Birthday Weekend Working Bee

by Peter Lee

## Heavy Metal makes a comeback

No, not the music - but the gravel.

As those of you who have visited the island in the past few months will know, the Wattle Valley track has begun to show its age. The gravelled areas were becoming worn and eroded (I know just how they felt...) It was time to bring them into the 21st century.

Bring on the Queen's Birthday Working party. With a mix of "old hands" and some new faces, we assembled at the implement shed at 1pm to get our instructions from Ray. The task: reconstruct part of the lower track with a gravel and cement mix. With a trailer full of gravel, cement and shovels, and the concrete mixer behind the other farm bike, off we set to Build the Motorway.

Up the top, on the road, was an ever-changing team under the expert supervision of one Jim Battersby. Their job was to prepare the mix in the concrete mixer. Us serfs then took it in turns to barrow our loads down the steps - nimbly straddling the ramps, and wondering how soon it would be before we lost a load! At the bottom, we piled it on the track, whence Simon Fordham showed what a loss to Kiwi road building he has been by his expert skills in operating a compactor. Then, it was back up to the top for another barrow load.

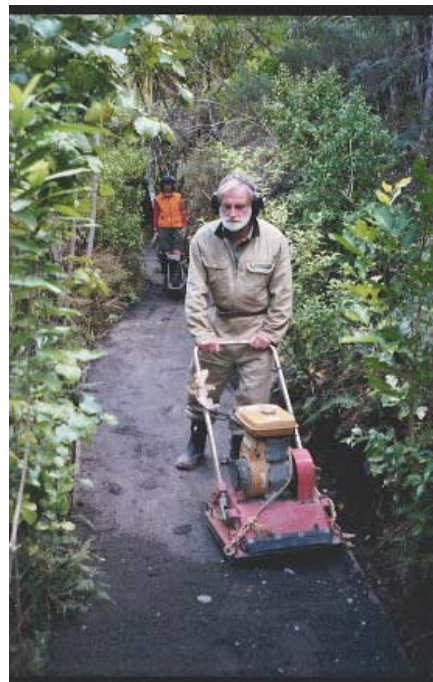
Needless to say, by 4pm each day., we were all rather tired. Back to the bunkhouse for a sit down, or maybe around the island for a pre-dinner perambulation, then time for a well-earned dinner!

The end result seemed to please Ray. There was

Sound easy? Well, have you ever tried barrowing a full wheelbarrow down a flight of steps? Fortunately, Ray had anticipated the problem and had got a coupled of volunteers the previous weekend (thanks, Mike!) to construct and install "mini ramps." Then it was down to work.

only one thing missing: the new track was so flat and well-constructed, it almost needed a white centre line down the middle. It would have got one, too, had there been any white spray-paint on the island.

Not all working weekends are so physical - but we all enjoyed it!



## More Guiding Moments

A boy on one of my guides was fascinated by the Rangiora tree and was heard to tell his younger brother that he could use the leaves for toilet paper and write a letter at the same time!

Julie Cotterill



## Calendar of Events

**Sunday September 8th**  
Kowhai Trip

**Monday September 30th**  
**Special General Meeting**  
**Social Evening**  
Speaker—Kevin Parker  
Fernbird Studies

**October 5th—6th**  
**Supporters Families Weekend**

**October 26th—28th**  
**Labour Weekend Working Bee**

**November 2nd—3rd**  
**Supporters' Non-working Weekend**

For all of the above (except September social) bookings must be made with Barbara, not Fullers — 476 0010

## Congratulations .....

To Shaun Dunning, Tiri's original Assistant Ranger. Shaun has recently been promoted to Program Manager in the Warkworth Area office of DOC and is now in charge of "Historic and Structures".

## Membership Database Updated

We have recently completed transferring our 1300 members to a wholly new membership database which is going to bring many benefits and simplify much of the running of our organisation. The process, work and checks have taken some time. The Committee thanks you for your patience as we have gone through this major exercise.

Val Smytheman  
Membership Secretary

## Brown Teal Release



Brown teal, endemic to New Zealand and one of the rarest waterfowl in the world, have been in residence on Tiritiri Matangi Island since their release in 1989, but have survived only in very small numbers. Being secretive during the day and feeding at night, they have not often been seen by the public. Despite the fact that the Tiritiri Island population is the longest surviving captive bred population in New Zealand, no study has ever been made on how the brown teal survive in this habitat in the absence of the introduced predators that have ravaged them on the mainland. Alarm bells rang two years ago when a survey conducted by Dave Barker and his trained dog found only 4 females on the island. Despite the subsequent appearance of 2 males the population is still in dire straits. An urgent requirement was needed to not only bolster the existing population, but to provide some means of finally monitoring and tracking the brown teal on the island.

Although there are more important sites located in New Zealand for the brown teal, 11 brown teal became available recently that had not been allocated to a specific release and these were made available to Tiritiri Island, thanks mainly to the efforts of Kevin Evans, a designated brown teal breeder. The Supporters took the opportunity to fund the release of these waterfowl, along with the installation of small transmitters strapped to each bird to enable radio telemetry tracking after release. So on June 22<sup>nd</sup> after under going routine disease quarantine procedures 7 brown teal comprising of 5 males and 2 females were released on various ponds throughout the island. A further 4 birds were released on Thursday July 23<sup>rd</sup>. Due to timing and inclement weather conditions, a public release for these events was not possible.

The results to date have been mixed. There were problems with the telemetry process and many of the brown teal could not be reliably tracked. Two brown teal have been predated, possibly by Harrier Hawks but the rest seem to be in good condition. It remains to be seen how well the new arrivals adapt to their new habitat and whether the incumbent brown teal accept them onto 'their island'.

Importantly, the brown teal on Tiritiri is the only bird species on the island not to have been studied and this will finally be rectified.

For assistance with the release, thanks go to Kevin Evans from the Brown Teal Breeders; Shaun O'Connor and Nigel Miller from the Brown Teal Recovery Group; and Ossie Latham from Ducks Unlimited.

Carl Hayson

## The "Spot on the Spot" Challenge

How many species of birds can you spot while standing in one spot?

Say, within five minutes and a radius of five metres.

Anne Rimmer starts the challenge with six species.

Date and Time: 28 July, 1:30pm.

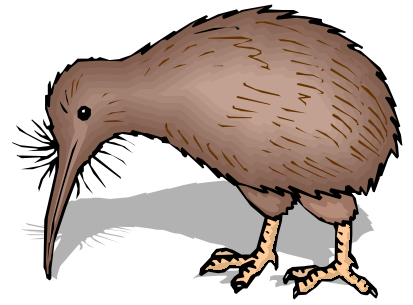
Place: Near the generator shed.

Species: Saddleback, Bellbird, Fantail, Whitehead, Kakariki and Takahe



# 2002 Kiwi Census

by Peter Craw



From Sunday 7th to Friday 12th July, Hugh Robertson and Rogan Colbourne visited Tiri for the express purpose of conducting the 5 yearly survey of Little Spotted Kiwi. Here is an account of the final evening before departing by chopper (2 trips for just 3 people and 3 dogs – DoC travel light !!!).

The team included Hugh & Rogan (DoC Wellington), Natasha (DoC Trounson Park ?) and Wendy and Nigel (from Coromandel). They were ably assisted by the island's new resident DJ, Ian Price who was made responsible for playing recordings of male and female kiwis on Hugh's portable CD player with megaphone to attract birds into an ambush. Some evenings Rose (Auckland University), Samantha (DoC volunteer) and I (DoC volunteer) went out with the team and helped form the perimeter of a kiwi-ambush with instructions to grab a leg if a kiwi came in our direction. Wendy and Nigel spent an extra night on the island to search for more stitchbirds after the DoC team had left – in total they accounted for over 90 different birds and recorded the bands. Extremely devoted birders. Wendy has spent the past couple of summers monitoring the NZ dotterels at Opoutere (Coromandel), and her partner Nigel is off to Antarctica as a bird-watching guide on a cruise ship.

From about 6.15-8.15 pm each evening the team went out listening and using compass bearings to locate kiwi calling on the island. Then around 8.30pm the team reassembled and went to likely sites to try and catch birds for banding and attachment of radio-transmitters (Sunday-Tuesday as all transmitters had to be removed again before the team left the island). On one marathon night the team stayed out to nearly 3 am. The radio-transmitters were used during daylight hours with the aid of the 3 dogs to locate the kiwi caught the previous night, get some idea of their territories, and also see if the bird that was given a radio-transmitter lay up during the day with a mate.

It was wonderful to sit absolutely quiet in the Kawerau with the rain dripping down on a cold evening, listening intermittently to recorded calls from the DJ, and morepork calls from Hugh (meaning play the recording again) as

we waited for kiwi. It was all action when the keenly eared Hugh & Co heard a bird approaching – lights on and crashing through the bush to catch the kiwi. Once caught and brought in hanging upside down by the legs to the DJ's office under an umbrella, the kiwi was carefully upended to lie like a wriggling babe in arms (see photo of Hugh holding the nursery-caught kiwi) and reduce the pressure of blood flowing to the kiwi's head when it's upended. Next Hugh measured the length of the beak (accurate to 0.1 mm !!!) and leg diameter, then he taped up the legs and the kiwi was weighed while hanging from the tape around its legs. Any dislodged feathers were gathered and placed in a sealed bag for later DNA identification. The kiwi was then returned to the babe-in-arms position, band attached if it was an unbanded bird (island bred), and a radio-transmitter attached.

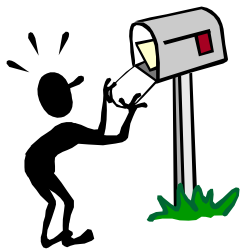
On the last night the team set up an ambush in the nursery area and we didn't have to wait long for a kiwi. Natasha was in the tea and coffee room and heard the footsteps of the bird walking by, and a single low whistle from Natasha indicated to the rest of the team that a kiwi was coming. Hugh came charging past and the kiwi headed under the large fig tree. The plastic chairs came in handy and were quickly fashioned into a barricade between the banana plant and the shade-house then Hugh scampered around the back under the fig to cut off the kiwi's escape. The male kiwi called several times and made a dash for it along the edge of

the chair barricade and as it did Rogan grabbed one leg then secured the bird. He took the bird to the comfort and chairs in the tea room, turned on a light (this was luxury compared to other evenings out in the rain and wind), then while Hugh took his measurements Natasha went to get Ray and Barbara. They assembled with the bird in front of the kiwi sign for some quick photos, then the bird was placed on the grass with all cameras ready for a photo of it dashing away when the tape was removed from its legs. It got the last laugh on us, and shot off the other way so all we saw was its fluffy backside running off in the direction of the lighthouse. Needless to say I felt very privileged to be working as a volunteer on Tiritiri at the same time as the 5 yearly kiwi survey. They are truly adorable birds, and doing extremely well on the island.

See the "official" results on page 4







# Letters to the Editor



Dear Editor

The article outlining the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi 5 year plan published in issue 49, made no mention that the plan is in draft and that members have an opportunity to comment and make submissions to the plan. I support the concept of having a vision for the island and a plan formulated so that we may accomplish our vision but consider that members should have an opportunity to contribute and discuss the plan at a special meeting.

Firstly the plan makes no mention of the volunteer input to the island and does not outline what future projects that they can be involved in. The success of this society has been due to the strong support of the volunteers and any future projects need to include their contribution.

Secondly, the Supporters have not initiated research projects in the past. I consider we need to have more input into the research topics and that topics relevant to the island should be promoted, e.g. Why do the takahe fight for territory, has the Island reached it limit? Do the number of pukekos effect the behaviour of the takahe? What impact will the dying wattle trees have on the food source of our birds? Will the stitchbird always need intervention on Tiritiri?

Finally, referring to infrastructure, do we really need a seminar facility, when we have a perfectly good existing structure under the big pohutukawa on the Kawerau track.

Cathy Catto

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*Comment from Peter Lee, former Chairperson and architect of the plan:*

*The Strategic Plan is just that: an overall strategy. The intention was that it set out the overall direction for the Supporters for the next few years. All successful organisations have an overall strategy - it's the core document that gives guidance when making decisions. It is actually not a draft document in that it was approved by the outgoing Committee as the basis for future decision-making. Feedback from supporters, the University of Auckland*

*and DoC has been extremely positive.*

*However, this does not mean each item is set in concrete. The intention is that each year the Committee will prepare an annual plan, in conjunction with DoC's own one, and this will be up for discussion, input and change. I'm sure each committee will seek and welcome input from all stakeholders, including individual Supporters, DoC, iwi and universities. Finally, each proposed action has to be separately approved, taking into account our finances and the need to balance the priorities at the time. We are required to do this under our constitution.*

*It's true volunteers have been at the very heart of our organisation, and to some extent it would have been "stating the obvious" to mention you all. Each project will demand a greater or lesser involvement - and it's also true that some will require none at all. This merely reflects the Supporters' increasing size, opportunities and needs. Some projects may be unsuitable for volunteers because of safety reasons - the wharf shelter being one.*

*Research is clearly at an initial stage, and it's one where we will initially be feeling our way. Carl Hayson has already set up a research subcommittee under Graham Ussher, and they have only just commenced the task of identifying research requirements. Cathy is quite right - suggestions welcome!*

*Finally, the seminar facility is actually one required by one of the iwi. They have asked us for a facility for them to hold occasional meetings, and because all existing and proposed structures permit the consumption of food, this needs to be separate to the main public structure. As iwi are a key stakeholder, we take their suggestions very seriously. Having one potential user meant it seemed logical that we be able to use the structure ourselves. An obvious use would be for educational or other seminars where closing off part of the main visitor centre would be detrimental to the public.*



Dear Editor

I strongly support having some sort of seminar facility on the island. If Tiri wants to effectively build on its image and meet its long-term goals of becoming a centre for education, then having a dedicated indoor facility to host small numbers of people for presentations and teaching events is essential. I agree that the pohutukawa has more atmosphere, but it presents difficulties in inclement weather (!) and for audio-visual or more formal presentations.

Graham Ussher



Dear Editor,

There are some issues I would like to raise about the translocation of bird species to mainland islands where the birds are able to fly.

First we had Robins moved to Waiwera and I believe that a significant number took themselves off across the road to another spot that they decided was more desirable than the mainland island situation.

The most recent translocation has been of Saddlebacks to Karori Sanctuary where there is an expectation that the birds will remain inside a perimeter fence on the basis that it is safer inside than out. I believe that at least one bird has tested the habitat outside the fence within a very short time of release.

Is Tiritiri Matangi going to be the incubator or nursery for mainland island populations so that when the birds decide the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, then another flock of birds will be uplifted, on an ongoing basis. I am not clear that there is even a proper census of bird numbers on Tiri prior to the translocation off of a species.

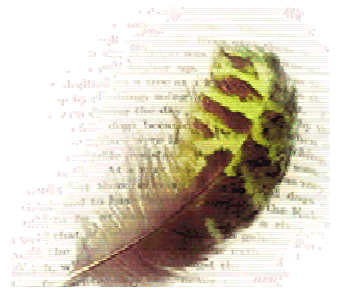
Could the Editor please get some clarification from the Director General of DOC on their view of the purpose of Tiritiri Matangi species management.

Yours sincerely,  
Claire Stevens



# A Fortnight on Codfish Island

by Val Smytheman



As Supporters, we all know what a very special conservation asset Tiritiri Matangi is; but recently I discovered another such island asset when I was privileged to become one of a small number of SoTM members to visit Codfish Island this year. Others went as nest minders, while I have just returned from 2 weeks as a "feedout" volunteer.

Codfish (Whenua Hou) is a Nature Reserve 3km off the northwest coast of Stewart Island. It is 1396 ha, a little over 6 times the size of Tiritiri, and it is very much more rugged, being 348m high (cf Tiritiri's 90m). It is relatively unmodified, with mixed rimu, totara, miro, rata forest, and pakihi shrubland on the upper plateau.

Codfish is, of course, home to one of our most endangered birds, the kakapo, with a total known population of just 86 birds. The good news is, though, that there was an exciting 39% population growth this year with 20 of the 21 breeding age females laying eggs and the 24 chicks being more than the combined total of the last 20 years.

Supplementary food is supplied, in particular for the females and their chicks. There were 2 of us doing the feedout, and our programme went something like this, in a 3 day cycle:

- (1) A long day which started with our last minute preparations (cutting up pieces of apple and kumara, filling water bottles, etc), and then involved anything up to about 8 or 9 hours tramping the tracks with relatively heavy packs, cleaning up the food hopper sites and replenishing them, before returning to weigh in and record the food we brought back.
- (2) A similar day, but generally involving only about 4 or 5 hours out in the bush (this day included a hopper for the famous Hoki, the

first hand-reared kakapo to breed).

- (3) A hut-based day on which we "napisanned" all our dirty food hoppers, etc, weighed out all the pellets and nuts for the following day and then helped with a variety of tasks around the hut.

The birds were magical. The beautiful dawn chorus was reminiscent of Tiritiri, while at the other end of the day, moreporks and noisy little blue penguins could be heard around the hut. There were many rifleman, tomtits, bellbirds, tui, red and yellow crowned parakeets, kaka, fantails, pigeons. I also saw brown creeper, the Codfish Island fernbird, Campbell Island teal, yellow-eyed penguins. And then, the KAKAPO!

My expectations of seeing one weren't high, as we'd been warned not to expect to see them, but I saw them about 8 times! I can't begin to tell you how

endearing they are --- seeing them, holding them, having them play with you is just indescribable.

One of my encounters was when I was out in the field and I met up with Paul Jansen (Head of the programme) who was finding the chicks by transmitter, weighing them, checking them, etc. I was lucky enough to hold Maggie's 90 day old chick for him. All of the other times were with the hand reared chicks, Ariki, Konini, Marama and Al. They were still being kept in an enclosure near the hut and we were able to visit them sometimes when they were being fed.

They started to experience 'tough love' during our 2nd week as they were prepared for their eventual release, but during our first week, if we knelt or sat down in their enclosure, they'd soon be climbing all over us, tugging at anything they could find to tug, trying to eat our fingers, chewing camera straps, playfully flapping their wings at us .... many such special, unreal, unbelievable moments. They're lovely and soft to touch, and, I decided, are a mixture of piglet (their funny little grunts), owl (their beautiful facial expressions) and playful little puppies or kittens! They're certainly very special birds on another very special island which I feel privileged to have been able to share with them for a short time.

I'm sure we all wish them, and the whole Kakapo Recovery Programme (sponsored by Comalco New Zealand Ltd), a bright and successful future.