

Jim & Barbara Battersby

Inaugural Life Members



As a successful organization matures, there increasingly arises the opportunity to confer honour on certain members who have contributed beyond the call of duty and assisted in the flourishing of that organization. In many organizations, granting an honorary membership to such individuals or groups is standard practice. Therefore last year the Supporters passed a resolution to amend the constitution to allow this additional membership category.

At the 2003 AGM, a member of the society (having just celebrated his 50th anniversary of ordination this year) but and this was to our founding chairperson, knew little about conservation when he Jim Battersby and his late wife, Barbara. and Barbara were invited by a friend to The members present unanimously accepted this and Jim gave an acceptance trip. speech to thank everyone for the award.

Jim is a long time minister of the Church

..... continued on page 5

In This Issue

Weed Report

Page 5



Building Update

Page 9



New Signage

Page 11



Research

Framework

Page 11



Close Encounters

Page 5



Your
Logo
Here?

See Page 7

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

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From the Chair

In the original 10 year working plan for Tiritiri Matangi, written in 1982, it was stated that "recreational development on the island was to be specifically designed to enhance the low key interpretation of the natural history of the island." Additionally timing was meant to be flexible, based on the experience gained as the operation proceeded.

In keeping with these management considerations, the Supporters have maintained this philosophy throughout the development of the project. Examples include subtle interpretation on the public tracks and keeping large structures such as the service centre unobtrusive. In the early stages of the development of the infrastructure, the time taken to prepare for building was unencumbered with the need to obtain resource consents, and projects often began as soon as funding was available. The Kawerau track is a perfect example of this type of planning (or lack of planning). Originally intended to be merely a bridge across a stream, it began to meander it's way through the bush due to the enthusiasm and experience of the volunteers building it, and as soon as funds became available, timber was ordered. Four years after it was constructed, it stood as a monument to those pioneering pre resource consent days. To create such a structure today would require detailed planning permission, resource and management consents and health and safety plans before any work could even think of being undertaken!

Although consents and planning policies under the Resource Management Act and the Conservation Act are carefully designed to ensure sound and safe practices are carried out with structures such as these in public places, they can at the same time impede progress and significantly postpone the commencement of volunteer projects. Such an example of this is the proposed and much desired visitors centre, a project first contemplated in 1990. Design disagreements, site selection differences and Government policies kept this project on hold for many years. The site was finally decided on four years ago and a great deal of work was undertaken by Ray Walter and Rennie Dowsett (architects) to come up with the design plan. After this came the long process of obtaining Historic Places Trust consent, resource consents, iwi permission and finally public notification.

Finally after all these processes were completed, the lease to construct the visitors centre was signed in the middle of March (refer article in this bulletin). Much credit for this final signing can also be given to DoC, particularly John Galilee, Rob McCallum and Sarah McCready who gave invaluable assistance to the Supporters over the last 12 months. However it has taken 13 protracted years of negotiations, delays, design disputes, policy changes etc to reach this stage. If only we could have celebrated the construction of a building worthy of this project much earlier. The long utilised potting shed has seen better days. But to quote a famous NZ TV advertisement, "Good things take time, you know". So they do.

Carl Hayson

Page 3 Bird

“Busy doing nothing efficiently” sums up the NZ Pigeon which is often seen doing just this for hours on end. However, attention is drawn to a bird when he does move due to the pronounced noisy swish of wing beats. The call is a soft penetrating “kuu”.

NZ Pigeon were once very common and it is recorded that in 1882 at Opawa, Rawiri Kahia and his people snared 8000 birds in a single strip of miro bush about 3 kilometres long and about 1 kilometre wide. However by the early 1900's numbers were in

serious decline from over hunting, forest clearance and predation. Hunting has been banned since 1921 and although still widespread and locally common, NZ Pigeon are now threatened because in many places adult mortality (from illegal hunting, predation, starvation and road deaths) exceeds breeding productivity, which is low because of loss of eggs and chicks to possums, rats and stoats. A study in the Nelson Marlborough area showed that birds only lived 5-6 years whereas on off shore islands birds are known to live over 10 years.

The breeding season is dependent on fruit availability and in poor fruit years there is no breeding and conversely in good fruit years, birds will nest 2-3 times. When breeding, the male does impressive aerial display dives by flapping upward from a perch, stalling, then diving on stiffly held wings and tail. In good bush there can be one

New Zealand Pigeon

Kereru / Kukupa / Parea
Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae

pair of birds per hectare.

NZ Pigeons would not get their Master Builders certificate for nest building as the nest is a flimsy affair, often a precariously balanced platform of sticks on a horizontal branch. The egg or chick can sometimes be seen from the ground through the nest.

Unusual for birds, NZ Pigeons produce food for their chick – crop milk, a protein-rich cottage cheese like secretion from the crop wall. As the chick grows, regurgitated fruits form an increasing large part of the diet.



Photo Simon Fordham

The NZ Pigeon is herbivorous, with fruits preferred to foliage. They play a key ecological role in the regeneration of native forests by dispersing the seeds of large-fruited trees and shrubs (eg. miro, tawa, taraire, puriri and karaka) which are too large to be dispersed by other birds.

Tiri and other off shore islands are important to the long term survival of the NZ Pigeon due to the lack of introduced predators and poachers. Cities could also be important due to the reduced number of predators and poachers compared to rural areas.

Morag Fordham

Working Bees Thank You!

- Auckland Tramping Club
- Barbara & Ivan Reilly Weekend Group
- OSNZ Bird Count
- SoTM Easter Weekend
- Gael Arnold's Weekend Group

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

Deadline for Autumn Newsletter

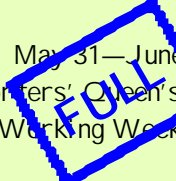
July 30 2003



Calendar of Events

2003

May 31—June 2
Supporters' Queen's Birthday Working Weekend



Sunday 1 June
Supporters' Planting Day & Bellbird Trip
-Planting in Sheep Paddocks-



July 5—6
Supporters' Families Weekend



Sunday September 7
Supporters' Kowhai Trip

Monday September 15
Social Evening
(Date & Speaker to be confirmed)

October 4—5
Supporters' Families Weekend

October 18-19
Supporters Non-Working Weekend

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

10 Years Ago

Excerpt from Bulletin 13, May 1993

Intense But Rewarding Weekend

Barbara and Ray recently received some letters expressing the pleasure, enthusiasm and excitement that the writers felt about their recent visit to the island. Not altogether unusual as these are emotions felt by most island visitors. What made these letters special was the effort that went into writing them and providing the writers with the opportunity to experience the island.

The writers were members of a group of nine young people who visited the island in early March. They were participants in the Disabled Sailing Trusts programme and all were confined to wheelchairs - many had limited communication ability. Their visit to the island was not without difficulty. The night they arrived the weather was terrible and as if getting off the boat wasn't hard enough it then took three hours to get everyone ferried up to the bunkhouse. But, with the help of Ray, Barbara and fourteen accompanying assistants, the next two days saw them in Bush One and visiting other areas of the island. (An advantage of the boardwalk that many of us may never had foreseen.) The weekend was described as a marathon effort and very intense, but like many challenges was worth the effort to see and read the responses of all concerned. It ended when everyone 'sailed' back to Gulf Harbour.

Once again Tiritiri, along with the dedication of the Disabled Sailing Trust's members, had provided a group of people with the opportunity to experience a part of our heritage otherwise beyond the reach of these members of our community.



School Visits

Rosehill Intermediate (4 Trips), Trident High School (Whakatane), Whakatane High, Auckland Boys Grammar, Sunnynook (3 Trips), St. Dominic's High, Whakawatea School, St. Cuthbert's Biology, Montessori School (Glendowie), Kohia Terrace School, Rotorua Girls High, St. Peter's College, Victoria Avenue School, Brookby Primary, Kristin School, Mairangi Bay (2 Trips), Long Bay Primary (2 Trips), Berkley Intermediate (Hamilton), Waimauku (2 Trips), Matamata College, St. Mary's Primary (North Shore)



Last year, NZ Sugar became one of the latest sponsors for Tiritiri Matangi by donating raw sugar for the Hihi (Stitchbird) project on the island. Considering the efforts being undertaken to study and save this species, this assistance was much appreciated. Now NZ Sugar has enhanced this sponsorship by now donating the sugar sachets for the Tea and Coffee in the visitors centre. We thank NZ Sugar for their ongoing support and making a valuable contribution to the work on Tiritiri and for NZ conservation in general.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT!

Whole island was systematically searched for weeds in one season for the first time ever

The weed programme on Tiritiri Matangi this year has been very successful. The whole island was systematically grid searched, including the cliffs, and all weeds found were removed. We were fortunate to have a experienced team of four with a wide variety of relevant skills, and a commitment to conservation. All team members but one were already members of the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi. A significant number of seeding weeds were located including the real nasties such as Japanese Honeysuckle, Mothplant and Mexican Devil. These are major threats, and of concern to have them in such numbers and so widespread. It is going to be vital in coming years to ensure these weeds don't get the chance to seed, as it is the belief of the team that the major seed source for the spread of weeds comes from plants on the island rather than offshore. The success in any programme is based upon consistency, and I believe if what has been achieved this year is maintained, significant progress will be made in weed control.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Weed Team – Angus Bevan, Peter Craw, Sharen Graham, and Helen Lindsay.
Special mention must be given to Peter Craw for his many unpaid hours work on the computer.
Tiritiri Supporters and the Department for their funding.
Ray and Barbara for their support.

All the herbicide used in this years programme was acquired through sponsorship. This was a substantial contribution towards funding the programme. Our thanks to Yates NZ Ltd, Nufarm NZ Ltd, DuPont NZ Ltd, Dow Agrisciences NZ Ltd.

And finally, all those supporters and volunteers who helped in the grid searching, cotton winding, and belying while I hung off the cliffs attacking boxthorn.

Thankyou, Ian Price

Life Membership for Jim & Barbara Battersby (from page 1)

They were both so taken by the work on Tiri that they quickly volunteered for other work. However he received news from Ray Walter that the island's budget was to be severely cut in 1988 and the lack of funds would threaten the viability of the planting program. Jim confided that he had seen a vision of other people's visions for Tiri, particularly the working plan of John Craig and Neil Mitchell, and decided that it was too great a project to let die. He talked over the idea of establishing a group to raise funds for the island with his wife, who gave much support, and with Ray and Barbara. A meeting of interested individuals was then called that finally established the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi Inc on October 24th 1988. As chairperson for the first three years, Jim presided over meetings in his home with an enthusiastic group of people, seeking funds through sponsorship, grants and increased membership for the island. Quickly the planting program got back on track and new equipment was bought and ambitious projects were undertaken. The Supporters had begun and without the initial catalyst that sprang from Jims desire for the island project, Tiri would not be the same place today.

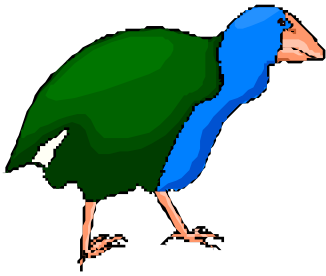
Despite his retirement from the committee and the loss of his wife Barbara, Jim has retained his connection to the island and has been actively engaged in Supporters' working weekends, belying his advanced years and sharing his enthusiasm and experience with other members.

Jim describes his inspiration for the Supporters as divine intervention, as he states he is not an academic naturalist and would never ordinarily thought of the idea on his own. But looking back on the achievements of the Supporters since 1988, it is not hard to believe that Jim and Barbara Battersby deserve the life membership that has been bestowed upon them.

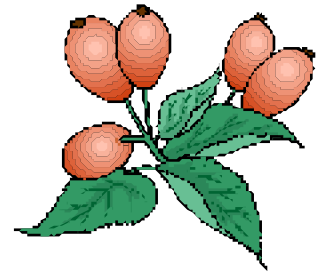


SoTM Chairman, Carl Hayson, presents Jim with his certificate

Carl Hayson



Flora and Fauna Notes



Compiled by Barbara Walter &
Morag Fordham

Flora

We have lots of small trees ready for this year's planting day – Queen's Birthday weekend, Sunday 1 June. Nearly 600 trees were planted by the SoTM volunteers on the Easter working weekend. Lots of fruit has been picked and processed ready for next year's planting.

There has been a lot of *Melicytus rhamiflorus* (Mahoe) fruit around and at Easter weekend there were a few trees still in flower.

Masses of *Myoporum laetum* (Ngaio), *Coprosma robusta* (Karamu) and *Pseudopanax arboreus* (Puhou/ Five-finger) fruits have been popular with the birds but most of this is now finished.

Hebe stricta (Koromiko), *Hoheria populnea* (Hoheria / Lacebark) and *Parsonsia heterophylla* (Maori jasmine) are all flowering well. *Leptospermum scoparium* (Manuka) is also flowering.

There is *Pittosporum crassifolium* (Karo) fruit around but only the Saddlebacks and Whiteheads eat this. The *Pseudopanax lessonii* (Houpara) fruit is ripening now. The wattle is starting to flower.

Fauna

Takahe

All the birds are looking great sporting their new plumage. The 3 chicks are about 6 months old and Aroha and Glencoe's chick has now been banded (GM-W) and a feather taken for DNA testing. Sapphire has been a tremendous help to Ahikaea in helping raise her chicks now that Kristin is presumed dead.

@Dot left Greg for one night and returned to the lighthouse gang but one look was enough and by the next morning she was back on the beach with Greg. These two are often seen down at the Wharf and occasionally up on the Wattle Valley platform where Greg tries to persuade visitors to share their food with him.

Now that the breeding season is over Whetu and Bossy Rossie are better tolerated by the lighthouse gang – JJ, Kaitiaki and Blakie but every so often friction erupts between them.

Blackwatch has been "walkabout" – one morning he was seen near the far end of Tiri then later that day he was on the Wharf Rd near the implement shed and by the end of the day he was back up on the Ridge track.

Stitchbird / Hihi

Lots of the juveniles are changing colour so the males are more easily distinguished. Now that a lot of the fruits and flowers are finished they are back using the feeders.

Kokako

No more nesting attempts. Te Koha Waiata and Cloudsley Shovell are no longer feeding Ruby. The two chicks, Oscar (bloke) and Ruby (girl) were recently seen together early one morning doing a little dance on the road near Wattle Valley. Oscar has visited the nursery area on his own several times.

N I Robin

Two robins are frequenting the shop area and are often in the tea and coffee area – wonder if they prefer Earl Grey or ordinary tea!

Whitehead

Performed beautifully and the team from ARC lead by Tim Lovegrove had got their 40 birds in 24 hours. An even number of males and females were safely transferred from Tiri to the Kokako block in the Hunua Ranges and released on Saturday 12 April. An estimated population of approximately 1000 birds on Tiri makes the Whitehead our commonest bird. A flock of 45 has been seen on Hobbs track.

Saddleback

No more evidence of late breeding attempts so it has been a poor season. More unusual behaviour was observed and photographed at the end of January when a Saddleback was seen touching beaks with a robin. It is unclear if the robin was a juvenile or an adult and it wasn't apparent if any food was exchanged.

Red – Crowned Parakeet

Lots being seen feeding on fleabane on the sides of the roads. They appear to have had another good season with many juveniles seen in Wattle Valley. 2 were recently seen on Whangaparaoa Peninsula.

Brown Teal

Part 2 of "Soap on the Water"

Rose, the mother of the two ducklings has not been seen for a couple of months and might be dead as she was quite old (approximately 10 years). One of her offspring is occasionally seen on Lighthouse Valley Dam but immediately swims away and hides.

Danny had another "one night stand" with Jemima and then returned to the



A Summary of the Hihi/Stitchbird and Kokako Season

by DOC Contractor Sandra Jack

HIHI

We had another successful season, despite a late start, with 101 fledglings from 35 first clutch nests and 13 second clutches. Last season 108 fledglings were produced with 100 extra eggs and up to four clutches. So with a lot less effort this season I'm hoping the winter survival rate will be good again for both adults and fledglings. Our survival rate over last winter was the highest yet – 54%. Our mortality rate over the breeding season was also low at just 28% (vs. 47% last season).

We also had our first recorded natural nest this season, with BR/BM fledging at least one unbanded chick from a cavity in the large pohutukawa tree next to the bridge at Pohutukawa Cove. Keep your eyes peeled as this fledgling remains unbanded and was seen in the February/March survey (where a total of 120 birds were recorded).

Matt Low and I put in an extra 10 territories (sets of 2 nest boxes) this year to help with the expanding population (thanks to Ian's Price & Higgins for making 20 extra nest boxes at the beginning of the season!). We are starting to run out of space for any further boxes though. Maybe next season a pair of nest boxes might go up on the track to the dam behind the bunkhouse as we do get hihi around this area particularly post-breeding.

A new feeder was put up at the lower entrance to Bush 2 to take some pressure off the ridiculously busy Bush 1 feeder. In the height of feeder consumption last November/December we were going through 10 feeder bottles at the Bush 1 feeder in 2 days – that's 15 litres of sugar water!

The mite situation continues and Troy Makan (the other DOC contractor) and I were busy replacing nests with artificial ones and spraying the chicks with Frontline to help combat any mite related deaths in the nest. This seems to work well and we'll continue using this method practically as soon as more than 5 mites are detected in the nest. Vic Hunter (a SOTM) has made a beautiful cedar nest box which we'll trial next season to see if the scent of the cedar repels mites.

Daisy our one-eyed hihi is still about and although she didn't breed this year she seems in good condition. Pete the one-legged bird was around most of the season doing fairly well but wasn't seen in the Feb/Mar survey. Matt treated him for burrowing mites (which cause feather loss around his eyes) as he finds it difficult to preen with just one leg!

We also had a strange phenomenon where four females managed to "miss" their nests when laying eggs... we'd find eggs in hallways, between the nest and the nest box wall and one female even started to lay her second clutch in her first clutch nest (which had been changed 10 days prior) 2 days before her first clutch fledged! Those hihi just love to keep you on your toes!

Matt and I recently attended the annual Hihi Recovery Group Meeting where I presented my report on the season (soon to be published and available from Ray & Barbara for those who want all the details). The meeting was held at Stony Bay, at the very top of the Coromandel Peninsula – an area where DOC is eradicating predators for kiwi, and other species yet to be introduced. The habitat (once predators are at low levels) is similar to that on Little Barrier and at some time in the future could be a potential release site for hihi.

One of the Hihi Recovery Group's objectives is to increase the number of populations outside of Little Barrier. Unfortunately we now have only 2 of these populations, Tiri and Kapiti Island (under 50 birds) as all the Mokoia Island birds were translocated to Kapiti this season. The Tiri population has been so successful that we're reaching a capacity level (which will increase over time as suitable habitat regenerates). At this point in time we continue to produce more fledglings than can be sustained by the island. These fledglings could enjoy a better chance of survival in a new habitat while helping start a new population. It's an exciting prospect for hihi recovery and Tiri's role would have surpassed its original expectations! We'll keep you posted...



KOKAKO

Another eventful season for our treasured kokako... the season began with three pairs and three single males:

Cloudsley Shovell & Te Koha Waiata (Wattle Valley)

Kahurangi & Belcanto (Bush 3, 4, 5)

Shazbot & Te Hari (Bush 2 and 1)

plus Te Karanga (Bush 6), Kaha (Bush 1 and 22) and Kanuka (the fledgling from last season, seen around the Lighthouse area).

Thanks to the new video recording equipment donated by SoTM, we were able to monitor the nests closely and luckily we had no recorded predation although one chick did magically disappear between frames but it was unlikely to have been due to a speedy harrier.

Cloudsley and TKW were our super-breeders this year producing Oscar (male) in the first clutch and Ruby (female) from the second nest, which was the most public yet, being right next to the Wattle Valley boardwalk within hands reach! The other two pairs tried their best and for the first time in Tiri's history all three females laid 3 eggs (usually just 2) at some stage during the breeding season.

Kahurangi and Belcanto had two nests but were unable to hatch any chicks – there were fertile eggs so perhaps it was Kahurangi's incubation methods that still need perfecting (remember she is still a young mother).

Shazbot and Te Hari were somewhat more successful hatching chicks from both clutches. Shazbot however was less than impressed with the camera monitoring and her first clutch may have been abandoned due to this but she may have also abandoned dead chicks... hard to know. Still we won't risk using the camera on her nests next season. Her second clutch was also abandoned and again it's hard to know why although the use of machinery on a nearby track may have been a factor.

So all in all the season was twice as successful as the last with two fledglings and one a female to boot! Here's hoping the 2003/04 season is twice as good again with 4 fledglings... fingers crossed.

Building Update

John McLeod

Wharf Shelter

Now that we have a lease agreement with DOC we can proceed with the building of the wharf shelter. Ian Higgins has been contracted to do the work. The work will start at the beginning of June and will be completed at the end of that month. This facility will provide much needed weather protection for people waiting to board the ferry.

Visitors Centre

With the lease agreement from DOC and a resource consent from Rodney District Council we can proceed with the planning of the Visitors Centre. We have contracted Mike Saunders an Architectural Draftsman to draw up the plans. The concept plans have been done and we are now getting the final working drawings drawn up so that we can sent them out to builders for quotes and also get building consent. While these processes are taking place the committee will seek funding so that the building can be completed. When the contract is let to build the new visitors centre, we will relocate the shop etc into the old garage which will be set up as a temporary centre until the new building is completed.



The signing of the lease agreement— from left John Galilee (DoC), Warwick Murray (DoC), Rob McCallum (DoC), Carl Hayson (SoTM), John McLeod (SoTM)

Flying Flax, Sinking Sails and other Highlights from Gael Arnold's Working Bee Weekend

Text and Photos by Fay Sara

The Summer 2003 edition of *Dawn Chorus* documented the building of the new bridge at Northeast Bay by the Supporters Anniversary Weekend Working Group. A couple of weeks later further new track work was undertaken here by Gael Arnold's group. But before the bridge approach was tackled another event diverted our attention.

Saturday, 15 February was the first race day of the America's Cup Defence and we found the chosen start site option was the channel between Tiritiri Matangi and Rangitoto islands. By mid-day a vast flotilla of small and large craft could be seen from the bunkhouse windows. We received word that we would not be required until 3pm, so after a quick lunch we were off across the south east paddocks to a grandstand view of proceedings. Sea and sky were a glorious blue, but with strong winds chopping up the waters it soon became apparent something was amiss. Within a few minutes only one large, grey sail could be seen, where was the other - submerged under one of the floating palaces? Shortly after the spectator boats began to scatter. Only on getting back at the bunkhouse did we find out about the tale of disaster that had struck Team New Zealand.

There were other things to get on with though and we were soon heading off in the truck down to Northeast Bay. A new track needed to be cut through the 20 metres between the old and new bridges. The ten in our group plus Ray then faced several hours hard work of clearing a path through the flax bushes. As on the Supporters Anniversary Weekend there was much 'hacking and slashing through the flax and gorse jungle'.

All this disturbance did not go unnoticed by the birdlife. A

saddleback repeatedly sent off shrill alarm calls from the gully, while a robin from a tree near the old bridge darted about as the discarded flax was thrown past the old bridge and tossed down the bank. Despite the late start work was completed before evening fell and there was even time for a welcome cooling off swim at Northeast Bay before heading back for dinner.

The day's happenings were reviewed over a delicious BBQ meal. There was jocularly too. One of our group, a young relative of Gael's, was on holiday from Switzerland so she found herself coming in for some good natured ribbing about Swiss sailing supremacy.

Sunday was free time for our group. Some headed for favourite island spots and those of us remaining near the bunkhouse were entertained by pukeko and takahe feeding nearby. On this day, as on Saturday, the ferry was leaving at 2.30pm due to America's Cup early lunch and luggage loading, we reluctantly made our various ways down to the wharf.

This is the fourteenth year that Gael has organised weekend working groups for Tiritiri Matangi. Each time we go, unexpected special highlights occur. What will 2004 bring?



SoTM wishes to acknowledge the estate of the late Terry Laver for a recent bequest made to the Tiritiri project. Terry shared his passion for the Tiritiri in many ways, both on and off island and few could fail to miss his infectious enthusiasm. This bequest from Terry will ensure that his association will continue.

Tree signs for the Kawerau track

Last year, the committee commissioned the drawing of three significant trees on this track together with the kokopu pool, with the intention of having them made into interpretation signs.

The trees of interest are the big pohutuakawa, a puriri (known as the 'hide tree' by the research students who observe the bellbirds) and a tawaroa. The drawing of the pool depicts the kokopu and the eel that cohabit there. The signs are now completed, so look out for them on your next trip to Tiritiri.



Research Support Frameworks Formalized

Graham Ussher, Coordinator Biodiversity Sub-committee

Over the past year your committee has been working to improve the way in which members' money is distributed and accounted for. Research funding and support is one area where attention has been focussed.

Results from wildlife research on Tiritiri were one of the drivers for the original restoration plan for the island in 1982. The role of research in the ongoing development of the island continues to be recognised through support from SoTM. Research projects over the years have measured progress with replanting and species reintroductions, added to basic understanding of wildlife biology and ecology and helped management actions be more efficient and effective. Projects as diverse as weed control and species reintroductions now require the sorts of information that only well-structured research and monitoring programmes can deliver. DoC regards research and monitoring as a key component of their wildlife planning process.

Recently, SoTM has reviewed the way in which it supports and manages research and monitoring on the island. DoC funds a range of monitoring programmes (e.g. for hihi), but there are many other unfunded projects for which SoTM is perfectly placed to provide direction and funding support. In the past SoTM has helped fund mostly student research projects, with many benefiting from grants of up to \$500. As SoTM has grown, so has our ability to provide a greater level of assistance for research and to have a much more directed approach for the types of research needs that will benefit the island the most.

The new Research Policy and Funding Framework for SoTM gives a simple, transparent and accountable process for supporting research projects. After discussion with researchers and conservation managers, it was decided to structure the new grant system for both emerging student researchers and established researchers (e.g. Landcare, DoC, Universities). Committee members will be assisted by independent advisors – professional researchers who have given their time and expertise freely – to help assess project proposals and projects will be funded from an annual research budget. Where SoTM identifies an issue of importance to the island, then the committee is able to commission research on a competitive basis.

The overall goal is to support projects that further the restoration of Tiritiri's wildlife and history. We hope to actively encourage an even better level of research that currently exists and to ensure that members see the benefits of that research through newsletter articles, talks at meetings and through improvements to the island.

Current or recent research projects funded by SoTM include:

- David Clarke – dynamics of beetle communities in replanted areas on Tiritiri.
- Melinda Habgood – competition amongst skinks on Tiritiri and implications for future lizard reintroductions.
- Josh Guilbert – bat translocation research to assist reintroductions to places such as Tiritiri.
- Karen Lindsay – people effects on wildlife and visitor experiences on Tiritiri.
- Asa Berggren – long-term population dynamics of NI robins on Tiritiri.
- Matt Low – reproductive behaviours of hihi and their implications for adult survival.
- Rose Thorogood – importance of food quality on the breeding success of hihi.

The full research policy and funding structure is available on the Tiritiri website, www.tiritirimatangi.org.nz as is information for prospective applicants to the research fund.



Close Encounters of the Bird Kind

Anne Rimmer



It's a major part of Tiri's charm that people can get so close to the birds. The takahe are almost too approachable. Up at the lighthouse, young Blakie is totally fearless and anyone lurching on the grass has to keep a close eye on their bags. During the America's Cup when windless days stopped play, Greg was in his element on Hobbs Beach as hundreds of boaties arrived. With his new mate, @ dot, learning fast, any attempt at Greg watch is hopeless. While I was at one end of the beach, arm-wrestling Greg for a piece of plastic wrap, @ dot was running off with a banana skin at the other!

At the wharf dam, the spotless crake, a supposedly shy, retiring species, patrols endlessly back and forth at water level, in full view. Sit on the rock to watch, and you'll be joined by Jemima the friendly brown teal, who arrives, quacking busily, her wire radio antenna trailing along her back, as she clambers up the bank.

Some of the smaller birds are getting in on the act. Pause at the stitchbird feeder and you are likely to be buzzed by squabbling bellbirds, their synchronised calls so loud they are deafening. One young man arrived at the shop claiming to have had a young stitchbird on his finger. When we were dubious, he triumphantly produced proof in his digital camera.

Our star kokako couple, Te Koha Waiata and Cloudsley Shovell, along with this season's off-spring, Oscar and Ruby, continue to be highly visible, singing and dancing (see the last Dawn Chorus) on the Wattle Track. But few visitors realize just how closely these special birds have allowed us into their private lives. When young Oscar left home in December, the parent birds immediately built another nest in the crown of a ponga on the Wattle Track. "On" is the correct word here, because the ponga's trunk is in the cement, and its fronds overhang the track. Not only that, but from nearby steps, anyone in the know could eyeball a nesting kokako at close range.

The nest was constructed in high season while hundreds of people

passed underneath each day, so the birds must have known what they were in for. The nest's location was kept secret as much as possible to protect its precious contents, although this was difficult when a parent bird arrived with food just as a guided group walked past. Sandra Jack kept a close eye on things, and DoC briefly considered closing the track, but young Ruby fledged successfully in February.

Sandra named her Ruby because she is banded R M / R. The name also honours Ruby Jones, a long time supporter who was a research student on Tiri during the first kokako release in 1997. Ruby Jones and Graham Ussher (committee member and long time supporter) were married on Tiri last December.

My personal theory on this very public nesting, is that the kokako, who have lost so many of their chicks to hawks, decided that people gave them some protection from predation. Maybe, instead of considering dosing the track, we should have erected cardboard cut-outs of Ray and Barbara to watch over the nest at night.

Back at the lighthouse, Aroha and Glencoe with their chick, have been gradually moving in to the shop area. Barbara has to keep a close eye on them after last year's territory battles resulted in the death of a chick. But she became so frustrated at their insistent calling, and peering in the shop door for her, that she flapped a tablecloth at them as if they were chooks.

The baby takahe, now 6 months old, is taller than its parents. No one has told this youngster that takahe can't fly, and I watched in delight as the fluffy creature stretched up tall, and flapped its stubby wings furiously while jumping up and down in an attempt to get airborne.

Sylvia Durrant of Bird Rescue in Rothesay Bay has had her usual quota of young little blue penguins needing extra TLC. When a group were ready for release, I drove them up to the ferry at Gulf Harbour. It was a school day and the boat was full. The birds cannot touch land at Tiri, and must be released at sea. As we drew near the wharf, Jamie, the Fullers captain, slowed the boat down and announced to the school children on board what was to happen.

The gangplank was lowered to almost sea level (which was rising and falling alarmingly as the boat pitched) and two of us took the box of penguins down the gangplank. Each time the sea came up to meet us we threw one in. The birds were surprisingly calm - calmer than me! - and I had time to hold some of them up for crowd to see them.

The school kids were very excited to get a close look at the fat little fellows, which felt about the size and weight of a young puppy, though somewhat cooler and damper. Last seen, the five young penguins were paddling out to sea in a group, heads held high, for their first day of freedom.