

## HOME GROWN

Timing is everything and by timing the visits of our first kokako pair, Maurice and Kowhai, to their nest and observing when the frequency of visits increased we knew an egg had hatched and a chick was being fed. Rostered observers kept their vigils, timing the feeding visits and checking the array of traps placed in a protective circle 25 m from the nest site. December 15 came and, having allowed the usual number of days for a chick to grow and be ready to fledge, several of the team dragged an aluminium ladder to the site. Plump, healthy, and remarkably unconcerned, the single chick was carefully taken to ground level, weighed, identifying leg bands applied, and a small feather taken for the later DNA determination of its sex. Anxiously awaiting events after the bird was returned to its nest, those watching were greatly relieved as the parent birds resumed feeding their chick.



Miro

[photo courtesy of J. Stewart]



Climbing to the nest

[photo courtesy of A. Warneford]

Kokako can have clutches of up to three chicks, but having one obviously healthy chick brought through to this stage was very satisfying to all. Now named Miro, the chick was seen subsequently on several occasions moving with its parents in their territory.

Meanwhile, the kokako pair Moby and Punga, which had been translocated from Tiritiri matangi, had maintained their relationship and seemed to prefer being well away from all the other kokako. Moby and Punga, from their radio-transmitter signals, seemed to be often just north of the ARK boundary in our Buffer Zone where we have supported neighbouring property owners with traps and (or) bait stations. A call from the caretaker at Karanga Camp across the road from the ARK let us know that probably our birds were there. Would we like to see them? In no time at all, Andy Warneford and other volunteers were on site. Before Andy could ask, the birds appeared by the house! Showing

... continued on Page 2

— The Ark in the Park —

ARK IN THE PARK is a project of the  
Waitakere Branch,  
Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society



## HOME GROWN

. . . continued from Page 1

disdain for human presence, lawnmowers, the house cat, and later the occasional explosion from the neighbouring rock quarry, perhaps because of their island upbringing, they proceeded in subsequent days to nest. Again, precise timing of when the nest was established and when egg laying occurred allowed the chick to be brought from its nest, processed, and returned to its parent's care. **Brittany**, the caretaker's 10-year-old daughter, had been the first to spot the parent birds originally and kept a keen interest in all phases of the observations, so quite reasonably the chick was named after her.

Kokako are sexually *monomorphic*, which means that to mere human eyes no apparent external difference is noted between the male and female members of a species. Of course, the members of these species are far more discerning, although for many years the remnant kokako population in the Hunua Ranges continued making nests and attempting copulation, although all the members of that group were male. The translocation of some females not surprisingly led to better breeding success.

It was with some relief then that DNA analyses from tail feathers from our two gender-unknown chicks were returned showing that indeed Miro was male and Brittany female. Both chicks have been seen moving around with their respective parents after fledging.

Close to where Maurice and Kowhai successfully reared Miro, frequent calls from other kokako were followed, culminating in **Totara** and **Puke** being seen consorting together and obviously a pair. From early in January, when suspicions were raised that they might have a territory here, efforts were made to protect that territory rather than hunting for a possible nest. Rapidly, the team well experienced in reacting to kokako wandering beyond existing boundaries, navigated bait lines through another 130 hectares. With a succession of volunteers, bait stations were placed along the lines and traps around the perimeter. One volunteer placing rabbit meat lures along this perimeter was surprised to find a stoat caught in one trap as he made his return journey, a mere 20 minutes after. Being a previously uncontrolled area, the traps caught several rats and stoats in the initial weeks. Hearing at times a possible juvenile's

song has convinced the kokako team that the decision to install protection rather than spend the time in nest searching was the correct choice.

Feeding at ground level on non-indigenous grasses, as they have been seen to do on Tiritiri matangi Island, indicates that kokako are not restricted in their diet.



*Banding Brittany*

[photo courtesy of A. Warneford]

Yet there are large areas of our protected forest that have rarely had our translocated birds visiting, although they have a far superior variety of flora to that on Tiri. What is it then that has drawn 12 of our kokako—Maurice and Kowhai; Totara and Puke; **Pierre** and **Rhonda**; **Sophie**, **Grace**, **Sylvain**, **Maire**, and **Kiekie**—around our southern boundary? This higher-elevation forest, while having occasional kauri, is ruled by podocarps. Rimu, as in most hill country in New Zealand, is the dominant emergent

podocarp species, with miro a close second. A few totara are present and lower down by the stream are small clumps of kahikatea. Apart from podocarps, other trees such as tawherowhero [*Quintinia*] and tawari are restricted to their preferred high ridges, whereas a special smaller tree near the stream is raukawa [*Raukawa edgerlyi*], often starting its life on tree fern trunks, and with brilliantly glistening and aromatic leaves. This forest then is more diverse and more open than the nearby, almost equally elevated blocks surrounding the reservoir. Speculatively from stumps observed, there may have been more of a kauri/rata mix here. The kauri was taken out for milling, whereas the rata, being valueless as timber, was left only to suffer later from possum browsing. This browsing ultimately led to tree death and collapse of the rata forest and taking place in more recent times regeneration of this area may be some decades behind. Vast numbers of light-loving kie kie vines are a consequence, leading to much frustration for our volunteers who have to get through the stuff.

Anticipating dispersal events, our management plan allows for the temporary protection of important areas just beyond our nominal boundaries if significant fauna should go there, but with the large number of kokako frequenting this obviously desirable habitat, we will be making application to routinely include this within our management zone.

## JOINING THE DOTS

**F**rom the Ridges to the Sea—this slogan from our Vision Statement in 2000 expressed our desire to expand protected areas and to link sites of biodiversity via corridors of protected habitat. The *ARK IN THE PARK* at the Cascades Kauri Park now links with the privately owned properties of our Buffer Zone down the Waitakere Valley, and in turn connects to the Forest & Bird Reserve Matuku, which is only a short distance from the beach at Te henga. Important biodiversity at Te henga includes New Zealand dotterel, which are breeding again thanks to predator control and a small protected headland, where more species of petrel and shearwater nest than at any other mainland site in New Zealand. The Matuku reserve is named after a bittern, which now is a threatened species, while also here is the spotless crane, a small endemic rail. Fernbirds, also endemic, are common around the swamp edge that is part of the southern border of this reserve. Matuku reserve has both swamp and forest habitat and although both are accessible from its main access off the ridge, for many people the full walk is rather demanding. Having spent many days last year clearing a track at the reserve along the swamp edge and in the process uncovering the old 1920 tramway used for kauri log extraction, ARK volunteers France



*Stoat trap fascinates children*  
[photo courtesy of J. Staniland]

Baptiste Cluny, Antonin de Diego, and myself knew we had a flat scenic track that showcased swamp, riverine, and forest habitats.

With the kind permission of a local landowner, we were able this year, as part of the *World Wetland Day* 40th anniversary, to access the cleared tramway track directly from his riverside property. Displays from the National Wetland Trust, Forest & Bird, Auckland Council Biosecurity, Ducks Unlimited, and the Waitakere Rivercare group were appreciated by up to 300 people who enjoyed the fine summer's Waitangi Day. Many informative labels and signs told the visitors of the flora, history, and some of the weed and animal pest threats to the swamp.

The cleared track will possibly be used in the future for other organised walks but can now perform its main function of allowing good access to bait lines and trap lines in the reserve. With tomtit presumably having made their way along the bush corridor from the Cascades and now established in the reserve, robins sighted in several places nearby, and kokako having been radio-tracked at the reserve, it is evident how effective the corridor is already. Further predator control measures at the reserve, and if possible along the Buffer Zone, will only enhance this and may one day lead to species such as pateke, brown teal, being translocated.



*World Wetland day visitors*  
[photo courtesy of J. Staniland]

## HELPING HAND

A three-day practical visit to the ARK by 30 students and their five tutors from Culver University, Indiana, USA, was very successful. The students were told of threats to the indigenous biodiversity in our area and how we try to minimise them, then were taken to our western boundary along with some ARK volunteers to remove woolly nightshade [*Solanum mauritanum*]. Chain saws, used by our certificated volunteers, brought down many of these weeds and the students applied Vigilant gel to stop regrowth. The following day they and our volunteers went across to the Karanga Camp to remove ginger. Andy estimates that 2000 woolly nightshade plants were dealt with and 8000 ginger stems! The final day, which again was a wonderful clear autumn day, saw them splitting onto six groups to each accompany one of our radio-tracking team to locate our kokako.

### Los Voluntarios Mexicanos

Threats to native biodiversity are not unique to New Zealand and many of our threats are the same elsewhere, as a large audience was told at an enjoyable evening talk recently. Luciana Sánchez and Federico Mendéz, both studying at Auckland University and who have volunteered at the ARK, were persuaded to tell about their work with Conservación de Islas on some of Mexico's islands. Over 1000 islands fringe the Mexican mainland and most have introduced species that have affected the indigenous biodiversity. Off the Mexican northwest coast, for example, the island of Guadalupe has lost all of its upland forest and the majority of its scrublands to goats, whereas cats have caused extinctions and decimated seabirds and land birds alike. Isabel, an island off the southwest coast of Mexico, was plagued with rats that, because of good food supplies, were able to flourish and breed year round. Adding ultraviolet-reflecting dye to baits



Culver Group  
[photo courtesy of K. Colgan]

in early trials enabled the scientific team with UV lamps to see if non-target species ingested the bait and later, using techniques developed and employed on New Zealand's offshore islands, GPS-guided helicopters baited the whole island with brodifacoum. Precipitous cliff edges around the shore and the rocky shelves and sea caves below were finished off with hand-thrown baits in wax. Two years on, monitoring shows a successful eradication. As in New Zealand, increasingly large islands are being tackled, although many of these have indigenous mammals that could possibly preclude the use of toxins such as brodifacoum. To date, over 30 successful eradications of one or more pest species have occurred.

### Bird Song on Popular Walk

Being almost flat, the Auckland City walk is the most accessible walk in our part of the Waitakere Ranges and, with its original kauri forest, the exposed volcanic origin breccia cliffs, the cascade, and its forest-edged river, is visually very scenic. And now it is also very pleasing to the ear, with four robin territories along this circular route. Volunteer Heidrun Schinke has studied these birds throughout the season and has come to know the pairs intimately. Her birds have had lots to sing about as 14 chicks were produced this season and interestingly, even now quite some time after the breeding season, males are giving sustained song usually raising a response from one or more males. Robins generally had a good season with some 14 territories being observed.

Until next time . . .

*John Sumich*

#### ARK IN THE PARK CONTACTS

— PHIL —

Email: [P.Lodge@forestandbird.org.nz](mailto:P.Lodge@forestandbird.org.nz)

— MAJ —

Phone: 302 3902

Email: [m.depoorter@forestandbird.org.nz](mailto:m.depoorter@forestandbird.org.nz)

— JOHN —

Phone: 818 5267

Email: [cjnk@xtra.co.nz](mailto:cjnk@xtra.co.nz)