

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF B94055

In the distance, the “wup wup wup” of the helicopter faded away in the early morning, and we settled down into our thermals again quietly waiting for our quarry in the half-light and the cold damp of the Mangatutu Forest.

We’d not waited for the departure of the 18 robins that were making their 2-hour journey to the Puketi Forest in Northland or the five being taken to the ARK, although we did attend the dawn blessing of the birds by local kaumatua. With hopes of making up the numbers that both we from the ARK and the Puketi Trust group had permits for, we had set off along the rough, muddy 4WD track leading to our catch site.

Having undertaken a population density study and later a disease screening here, we knew there were lots of robins, but it seemed the warmer, clearer days of early autumn had made for easier sightings and capture.

Approvals to catch up to 30 robins [locally known as titipipi] for each group had finally come through—and so had the rain! Two cancelled

weekends initially, but now this extended weekend with promise of some fine intervals had drawn seven Puketi members and 13 ARK volunteers to Rangitoto Station by the Mangatutu forest. Rangitoto Station

was once a deer farm but since purchase by the Native Forest Restoration Trust had been allowed to revegetate and its farmhouse makes a cosy base for hiking or for expeditions such as ours. Poor weather in the first 3 days meant that only 23 birds had been caught and while male robins seemed eager to be captured, females were most disinclined so our patient vigils were necessary to try and balance the sex ratio.

Inactivity allows the cold to seep in but at long intervals the return of the female raises the tension, banishing discomfort.

Will she take the bait, approach closer? No, OK, an hour’s enough, that’s it, cut our losses, disassemble the trap, move to somewhere new. All done, ready to move but wait, she’s back! One of us quickly reassembles the trap; the other maintains an eye on the female, while casting worms each time closer to

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I shall be released
[photo courtesy of G. Capill]

— The Ark in the Park —

A Forest and Bird, Waitakere Branch “Auckland Naturally” project partnered by the Auckland Regional Council

CONCERT FOR THE BIRDS

The 2009 fundraising concert was held on Friday 12 June at the Glen Eden Playhouse Theatre and was enthusiastically received by an audience that had bought almost every available ticket. For a little while it looked as if some people might be turned away but just enough seats were available.

Karen Staniland, the Programme Organiser and Stage Manager, once again brought together an outstanding group of performers who all delighted the audience. Helen Medlyn was, of course, a particular attraction, but many other talented singers such as Yukio Takahashi, Warwick Gibbs, and The Three Mezzos were warmly applauded. Jubate, a group of young musicians, got a particularly enthusiastic reception with their brand of gypsy music and the Show West singers were very popular. John Staniland was once again the MC and skilfully promoted the *ARK IN THE PARK* project to the audience. The

feedback of many people who attended the concert has been very positive and they are all looking forward to another event in 2010.



Helen a hit with Habanera
[photo courtesy of J. Staniland]

Thanks to the generosity of our main sponsors—Pernod-Ricard Wines, Bush and Beach, Icon Events, and Morrison Funeral Directors—almost all of the over \$5000 raised from ticket sales and the sale of food and drinks will go directly to support the efforts of *ARK IN THE PARK* particularly for items needed for our kokako transfer. Other sponsors and volunteers gave raffle prizes, food, flowers, and their time to help on the night. Particular thanks must go to Karen Staniland, the Programme

director, without whom the concert would not have happened, and Icon Events for a great publicity campaign. Karen Colgan organized the volunteers as always, Rosemary Stagg co-ordinated sponsorship, and Maj De Poorter looked after administration.

— Rosemary Stagg

B94055 . . .

the bare earth trap site. Heart beating fast; licking of lips so they can puff on the tube that activates the trigger release, and then she's there, hopping into the zone for the mealworm bait, accepting at last the strange device looming above. Too late realising the danger she flies back, but the descending net arrests all escape. After that, it's almost too easy—a gentle covering hand, other hand slipped under net to grasp slender thighs, lifting of net, and without any entanglement of leg, head, or wing at all it's straight into the waiting black cloth bag.

The weather changes again, it's time to head back, and with the other caught birds all now in travel boxes it is a slow 4WD drive return to base. With fading light in the afternoon, the birds are processed: weight, wing length, tarsus of leg length, with metal band and colour bands placed for identification. Indeed, our bird seems to measure up as female by her smaller measurements, but now

she's not just "our bird." She is officially B94055. The next time B94055 sees the blue sky she's 250 km north and I get to open her travel box as eight other birds are also released to their freedom at the *ARK*. It's the least I can do for her.

Postscript: In the colder but clearer weekend following, a smaller team of *ARK* volunteers rapidly caught not only our remaining quota of 16 birds but substantially assisted Puketi members to reach their quota. Andy Warneford, who took over the measuring and banding on the first weekend and on the second, was able to report a high ratio of females caught. Monitoring of these 30 new birds will start immediately with several *ARK* volunteers observing the dispersal and interactions with any of the previous translocation or their Waitakere-born progeny. Topping up of numbers was one aim of the exercise but also this different genetic line introduced can only be beneficial.

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AFTERNOONS IN ARKADIA

Following the recent successful translocations from Tiritiri matangi to *ARK IN THE PARK*, the *ARK* committee decided it was time to think about another one—albeit a little different from the recent feathered variety! This time the species was *Homo sapiens* and the date was Saturday 21 February 2009. Habitat was prepared and adequate food supplies assured to guarantee a successful introduction and a convivial integration with the existing inhabitants, some of whom are already regular users of the Wildlink corridor between the two sanctuaries!

Tiri Supporters joined “arkivists” and Friends of Arataki for a sausage sizzle and a glass or two of Chateau Waitakere. John Staniland, Chair of Waitakere Forest & Bird and Peter Maddison, President of RNZFB introduced those who are not yet familiar with the *ARK* to the exciting things that are happening and are planned for the project and updated those Tiri supporters and Friends of Arataki who had previously “flown in” and were keen to learn more.

A fitting conclusion to a convivial “Afternoon in Arkadia” was a guided walk, led by Andy Warneford of the *ARK* Committee and stitchbird spotter extraordinaire. The visitors met hihi residents, formerly of Tiri in their new habitat and were able to say “hello” to offspring, at least one of which is breeding in the Waitakeres—the first time this has happened in over 125 years.



Tiri supporters, ‘Arkivists’, and Friends of Arataki
[photo courtesy of T. Erskine-Leggett]

All in all a successful and enjoyable afternoon that further strengthened the close ties between the two projects.

— T. Erskine-Leggett

Also among recent visitors was Francois Tron under the auspices of the Pacific Invasives Initiative. He was shown around by Maj De Poorter, Karen Colgan, and ARC staff being particularly interested in the strong volunteer management of the project as back in New Caledonia he is involved in a management programme tackling multiple invasive species around Mt Panie with local input.

Thirty students from the USA and their tutors attending the Centre for Rainforest Studies, Yungaburra, Queensland in their [Northern hemisphere] summer recess study period joined with *ARK* and Waitakere Stream Care volunteers adding a practical finish to their NZ journey when they planted over 1000 trees along the streamside at the *ARK* boundary.

Back at the Cascades after lunch prepared by the indomitable Val Lyon of Friends of Arataki, they were introduced to the principles and practice of ecorestoration at the *ARK* with a lively discussion after. They next move to Queensland where they will contrast conservation in warm temperate rain forests with that in the tropical rain forest of northern Queensland.



Group at Ranger Station
[photo courtesy of M. Colgan]

AUTC HELP EXPAND

Great progress has been made on the expansion into the water catchment of the Waitakere reservoir since approval and the support of Watercare was given. Navigating of lines through this southwest expansion by **Fiona Cameron** [who has a touch of the Mungo Park in her blood] assisted by **Sarah Johnson** had been done. Now only the attaching of bait stations and placing of bait remained. With three tramping club huts in this general area, it seemed logical to enlist club aid with the potential for longer-term care of a sector near each hut. The **University Tramping Club** hut, scene of many a raucous gathering, was now our base for the day. Supplies of bait, bait stations, a gas BBQ, and lunch supplies had all been brought up by quad bike and were awaiting us after the trek from the car park. Snatches of conversation overheard—for example, on useful compounds from marine sponges, or the social history of heritage areas, or pre-med studies—reflected the varying academic background of the students. Sixteen keen, but mainly inexperienced, students paired up with **ARK** volunteers. After hip chain counters to measure the bait station intervals were doled out, and equipment placed in packs, they were off in all directions. Extending some bait lines across the Ridge Road track so that the hut was within a control zone meant that the hut would be less likely to harbour rodents. Rats had previously gnawed into the hut locker, dining on various directories and other club papers so their control will be a big plus for the club. The marginal weather soon deteriorated to the forecast downpour just as all parties, but one, returned. Hot soup, sausages, and beverages in the shelter of the hut were greatly appreciated, although conversation was near impossible with the heavy rain on the corrugated iron roof. With the rain slightly easing, a brisk retreat was made, the clay-laden rivulets marking the tracks. The remaining group, thoroughly damp, soup-less but cheerful, was gathered up en route. **Jenny Waite**, leader of the students on the day, says the group had an awesome if somewhat wet day and they were all keen to get out again.



AUTC group before the rain
[photo courtesy of M. Mannington]

Just a Whisker Away

It seemed so easy back in October 2007. Assessing the need to find accommodation for the various overseas students who intern with us and also the needs of local post-grads pursuing their studies, it was obvious we needed a permanent base. Within the next 6 months one German, three French students, and two PhD students will need accommodating close to the **ARK**, which gives an indication of how useful such a base would be. Approaching Waitakere City's Deputy Mayor **Penny Hulse** brought an enthusiastic response. Over the next year and many meetings more, plans were drawn up to convert a house scheduled for removal from a flood plain into a 14-bed bunkhouse with an ablution block to be constructed alongside. And then came the recession! A downsizing of aspiration later, we had a leaner version more likely to find funding.

With the effort of Council staff **Danielle Hancox** and **Renee Davies**, our project manager **Dale Bainbridge**, and manager **Maj De Poorter**, we achieved consents and some funding from the ARC. We then applied for the remainder from the Waitakere Licensing Trusts, which have been so supportive in the past.

We've just received the Trusts' funding, putting us just a whisker away from something more liveable than a bare shell. So here we invite anyone interested in "growing our whiskers" to contact Maj, our manager. Donations of \$5000 or more will guarantee breakfast in bed in the bunkhouse when the donor stays over to hear the dawn chorus! [But all offers gratefully received.]

Until next time . . .

John Sumich

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