

## KOKAKO RELEASE

Clear ringing bell tones, octave jumping cadences, mews and soft burlblings all carried magically in the valley where invited guests walked in the early post-frost morning. Accompanying us to the release site where the first kokako to be seen in the Waitakere Ranges in over 50 years were waiting, these kokako calls although emanating from an “acoustic anchoring” speaker system erected high in the surrounding forest were still thrilling to us [see sidebar on page 2]. Hopefully they were fulfilling their real task of convincing the two boxed

kokako that had endured capture, then days in a temporary aviary, then an overnight 5-hour drive from the south Waikato, that they were in a good neighbourhood!

Some 150 guests and ARK volunteers had assembled first at the beginning of the Auckland City Walk where a welcome and karakia from Eru Thompson, a Te Kawerau a Maki tribal kaumatua,

was delivered. Councillor Mike Lee, chairman of the Auckland Regional Council (ARC) spoke next thanking the combined efforts of the ARC staff, the Department of Conservation (DOC), and particularly the ARK volunteers who have enabled

this historic event.

The dawn chorus of tui and other birds frequently punctuated the speeches while pairs of putangitangi [paradise duck] flew overhead and keruru performed their territorial stall-dive manoeuvre. Half a kilometre into the walk, often smelling the scent of *Alseuosmia*, we stopped and waited surrounded by tall kauri, which

for centuries previously would have hosted kokako in their branches. Hazel Speed of DOC, who had driven through the night with her precious cargo, extracted each bird holding it while Councillors Lee and Coney offered drink and food. Managing to disguise wincing as smiles



*Hazel releases bird*  
[photo courtesy of J. Davidson, ARC]

... continued on Page 2

### — The Ark in the Park —

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

**RELEASE . . .**

. . . continued from Page 1

as the birds each in turn pecked her with strong beaks, Hazel then placed the kokako onto the sloping trunk of a sapling where, sensing their freedom, they bounded rapidly toward the canopy. Joining in, two of the recently released robins flew around the spectators while, as Eru sang a small waiata to the kokako, a male hihi sounded his territorial call overhead.

Bush and Beach’s minibuses shuttled people back to the Golf Club House where Rosemary Stagg and Karen Colgan with an army of ARK volunteers had prepared breakfast. More speeches, including an address from Forest & Bird’s new President, Barry Wards, and then gifts to the Ngati rererahu and Pauakani iwi members who had come also from the Waikato to be involved in the release of the birds gathered from their tribal forests. Then suddenly the official ceremony was over and it was time to reflect. To reflect that a



*Telemetry 101*  
[photo courtesy of K. Colgan]



*Can you hear me?*  
[photo courtesy of P. Carter]

dream of 10 years that kokako be released into the Waitakeres had been realised. Is it their arresting song, their handsome colourings and burglar’s mask, their robust size, or all of these that made them so desirable right from the beginning as a prime goal for re-establishment?

The first pair was joined 2 days later by another three birds and through the next few weeks it is hoped that the full quota of 20 will be captured and transferred.

Capturing kokako and releasing them into the ARK is not the end of the story though and long-term monitoring is essential. Hazel Speed, a DOC research scientist who has been involved

. . . continued on Page 3

**Acoustic Anchoring**

The idea behind acoustic anchoring is that playing songs of kokako through loudspeakers will encourage them to set up territories, by making them believe it’s good habitat and that there’s food available. Original releases late last century failed because of the dispersal of the transferred birds, whereas when acoustic anchoring was used at the northeastern Bay of Plenty translocation in 2005, 12 birds remained in the sanctuary with pairs formed and a successful breeding. As the dialects of the two populations from which our ARK birds will come differ widely, we will not only be studying acoustic anchoring in general, but also the function of the

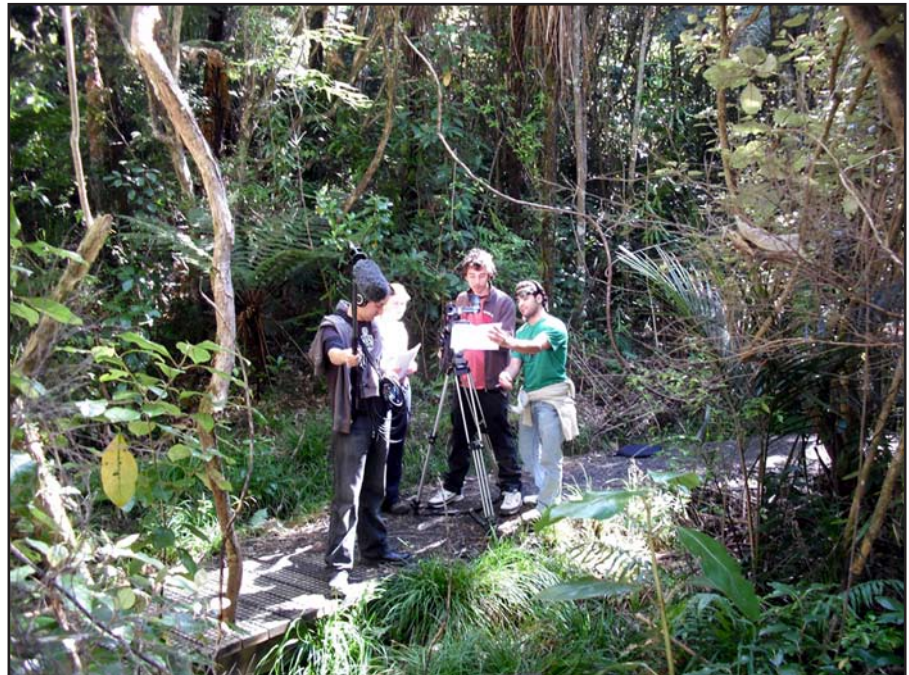
dialects, their influence on dispersal, and whether they are maintained in a mixed population. It will be seen whether the birds prefer to pair up within the same dialect group.

The two dialects will each be broadcast from a set of three speakers spaced out around the release site. They will play for 10–12 days after release, but as the birds will be coming in small numbers at intervals according to the catching success, the speakers may be in use for 2–3 months. Changing the dialects from speaker to speaker will ensure that any patterns of dispersal will not be biased because of the speaker site.

— David Bradley

## CLASS ACTION

Departments of Environmental Studies, or Ecology, Environmental Management, or even Forestry have usually been the source of the various students, both local and overseas, who have studied or interned at the ARK, but now a newcomer joins the list. Students from the South Seas Television and Film Production School have been involved in filming a documentary around the kokako re-introduction for their final semester project. Graduates from the film school have gone on to positions in local and overseas TV and film studios. Toni Dodds and her colleagues behind the lens and sound boom have been filming aspects at the ARK of our trapping and baiting regime, the success of which allows transfers to take place, and also filming the erection of the sound



Film crew

[photo courtesy of J. Sumich]

equipment used in the acoustic anchoring of the released kokako. Shortly, Toni and Dave Skinner will attend one of the catching weeks at the Mangatutu forest in an attempt to film an actual capture and then will return for footage of the post-release monitoring.

... continued from Page 2

## RELEASE . . .

in the Hunua Ranges with its remnant kokako population and its new transfers, is supervising the monitoring team and on a wonderfully warm spring day Hazel held her first class at the Ranger Station. Nearly 30 volunteers had come to learn basic kokako surveillance. The first requirement of 5:30-AM starts will be challenging to most, but there was no shortage of keen volunteers. In teams of four to five, they will be out early trying with the radio transceivers to detect each bird, and then by triangulation to narrow the search so that visual contacts are made. Also monitoring the acoustic anchoring and dispersal of the birds for his PhD will be David Bradley from University of Waikato assisted by Kate Richardson, who studied our hihi release for her MSc.

## Supporting Cast

Not forgotten by any means are our previously translocated robins and hihi. More volunteers have been steadily observing the robins released in May and the first two nests were found late in August. The mildest August since records began may have had an influence here. Several dedicated volunteers have patrolled their particular patch of the ARK seeing pairs form and territories establish. Meanwhile Andy Warneford, Grant Capill, and others have started the hihi hunt and already have found birds setting up in two of the previous nest sites with nest building behaviour being observed.

## SIGNS

Although the majority of people visiting the Cascades Kauri Park [the site of the *ARK IN THE PARK*] come by road and pass our colourful decorated shelter at the road junction, there are no other signs announcing our managed area at the many other hiking access points to the *ARK*. With funding obtained from the ASB trust, several signs have been erected informing the walking public that they are entering the special sanctuary of the *ARK IN THE PARK*. A robin features on some, a hihi on the remainder, and recently Rangers Riki and Jason with *ARK* volunteers transported these sturdy informative signposts to key track junctions.



*Erecting a sign*  
[photo courtesy of J. Sumich]

## Baiting

Many hands make light work they say and the presence of 94 hands on the first day of the baiting season at the

beginning of August [and 72 on the second] sped us on the way to our shortest-ever baiting. With good turnouts on volunteer days in the weekends and some contracted volunteers working weekdays, the first cycle was completed in just over 6 weeks. Even more remarkable was that this included baiting the additional 120 hectares of the W and D blocks where bait stations have been placed since last season.

### **ARK IN THE PARK CONTACTS**

— KAREN —

Phone: 837 0443

Email: [mcolgan@netaccess.co.nz](mailto:mcolgan@netaccess.co.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)

Until next time . . .

*John Sumich*