

WASP STUDY

From journalist in Mumbai to being a volunteer in the Waitakere ranges could be argued a significant change, but the absence of the odd 20 million people hasn't fazed new volunteer **Natasha Sahgal** who has taken to her new environment with gusto and who writes:

I have never been stung by a wasp or bees, so in my head there was nothing wrong with those hardworking insects. This is the reason that I found it hard to understand why there was much excitement on the new study being introduced at ARK IN THE PARK—trapping wasps. After meeting Robert Brown, my doubts vanished as he explained the urgent need to rid the park of them. Brown, currently based in Christchurch, is doing a study on wasps which is funded by the University of Auckland. It involves using a sweet smelling lure that he created to attract wasps to a sticky trap where they will get stuck.

So far, he has only experimented over the South Island, where the problem is intense and this lure has worked extremely well. ARK IN THE PARK is the first place on the North Island where he has tried this technique. The success of the experiment in the South Island can be seen by the fact that at most times it took less than 2 hours for the trap to

be completely filled with the insects. While some other small insects do manage to get stuck, he seems to be doing well in attracting a majority of only wasps. A bird has never been caught and we can only hope that it stays this way.



Natasha and the new wasp lures.
[photo courtesy of R. Woolf]

The wasps begin to get visible during the summer, stinging volunteers and trampers. So the reason we begin so early is in the hope to attract the queen wasp, thus hopefully eliminating the large families that she is capable of bringing up.

While the stinging can get annoying for us, it is not the main concern about these introduced pests. Wasps eat tiny invertebrates and ingest honeydew, both of which are sources of food for many native birds or reptiles.

Three blocks in ARK IN THE PARK have been set up with these bright red traps and a total of around 200 traps have been set. The monitoring and re-baiting will be done after a month of the set up.

As my first project as a volunteer with the ARK, it was quite a time-consuming task and I can only imagine the manpower that it will need to set up traps in the whole park and regularly monitor them. But I do know that we need to begin the eradication process, because you don't need to get stung by one to understand the seriousness of the problem.

— The Ark in the Park —

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

LIZARD MONITORING

Spring certainly has been busy; a novel reptile monitoring technique developed by Trent Bell has been installed at the ARK as well as in three other sites in the Auckland region. Closed cell foam covers are placed on tree trunks at spacings through the forest and at intervals they will be inspected to see if any lizard species are utilising the warm, dry refuge. The foam applied to the tree trunk replicates how bark naturally acts as a refuge, shielding anything hiding there from prying eyes of the aerial predators that previously were all that geckos and skinks had to be concerned about. Mammalian predators, rats, and stoats commonly use scent to guide their hunt so reptile numbers are low in mainland sites. We hope though to observe increases with predator management. Below, Katherine Da Silva shares her experience with this monitoring.

Being involved with the novel project to set up 200 foam covers around the ARK IN THE PARK was a fun and educational experience. For an individual such as myself whose main ambition in the future is to become a dedicated herpetologist, being able to participate in the set up of a large monitoring project for our native geckos provided a valuable insight to complications of designing and organizing such a project. I had the pleasure of sitting in on planning discussions and working closely with the great duo (Trent and Sarah) and observed an immense amount of effort, time, and patience in solving any interfering obstacle or

hitch that arose while they were in Auckland. The underlying goal was to provide a long-term and experimentally robust set up, with the outcomes to be compared to several other monitoring projects similar in design, which are being set up across the country. Trent and Sarah are extraordinary scientists who are specialists in their fields; I soaked up as much information as I could and enjoyed every moment of conversation and advice they had to give. There were several volunteers who donated their time and worked hard in placing the covers onto designated trees along transects that at times consisted of dense vegetation that required significant jostling. I found fellow volunteers fun and enthusiastic about being outdoors and thoroughly enjoying the labour. Appreciatively, Mother Nature provided us with beautiful weather to work in on both days of cover placement. I am very much looking forward to the start of the actual monitoring, and hope we discover a nice population of dazzling green and forest geckos within ARK IN THE PARK (and possibly arboreal skink species). I feel this addition of a long-term gecko monitoring programme within the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park will provide further public awareness of our cryptic lizard species and enhancement to the numerous conservation projects already underway in the ecological and species rich environment of the Waitakeres.

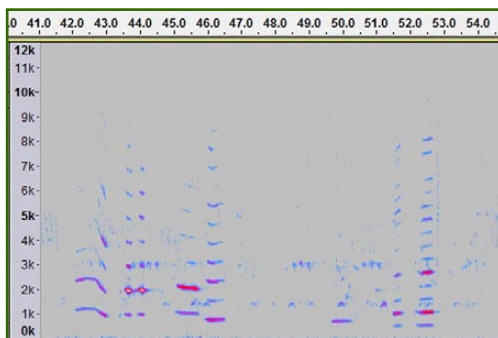
TEAM ROBIN

Robins are melodious, friendly, visible, and obliging. Actually, their visibility and friendliness is cupboard love, they'll come nearby if there's a possibility we humans will stir up an invertebrate or two for their consumption, but obligingly their tendency to draw near and gratefully accept the meal worms we strew enables us to follow them and find their nesting sites. Since our first release in 2004, we as other restoration project workers, use this technique to assess how these translocated birds are doing in their new habitat: how many eggs are laid, how many successfully hatch, and how many chicks successfully fledge, but there is yet another reason to monitor these songsters. Robin breeding success can be a surrogate for the breeding success of other species, many of which are harder to monitor as we cannot lure them to lead us to their nests. Along with regular bird counts through the year, we can use the robin data as rough indicators—good breeding success for robins will, as long as weather and food sources remain stable, usually mean good breeding for tui, tomtit, fantail, etc. We have been able to deploy visiting foreign volunteers and several of our own volunteers over the

years to monitor through the season; however, this year we are trying to cover a bigger area and more completely observe territories, numbers of nesting attempts, clutch size and fledgling success with an aim of banding a greater number of these new additions to the population. Co-ordinated by committee member Laurence Bechet, teams of volunteers 3–4 to a group have put themselves on a roster to observe specific pairs of birds. Previously known sites have already been checked and 13 territories have been determined with nesting already at six of these. With the more frequent observation that a team can achieve, we hope to be ready at the optimum time to band young chicks that makes future analyses easier. Having seen many robins at various places distant from the ARK, we can gain a better idea of dispersal if the robins are banded which is another reason to band as many as possible. Most of these early pairings might go on to have a further two clutches as in no way have the forests reached robin saturation point. Territories additional to these already observed will be searched for also and if enough volunteers can be enlisted, the in-depth monitoring will continue at such new sites.

KOKAKO OLD AND NEW

Emerging from a bush bait line one day about 4 years ago, I surprised a visitor to the Cascades Park; we chatted and I explained to this Forest and Bird member what was happening and some of our goals. She expressed hope she would live long enough to see kokako in the forest here. I didn't go so far as to state that she need not live very long, but I was confident kokako would be in our forest sooner rather than later. If she is reading this, perhaps she would like to join our various volunteers who now actively monitor kokako in several different ways. Although kokako is a large, colourful songbird of magnificent voice, in our dense forest of tall trees it can be unhelpfully silent and hard to see; however, in spite of these difficulties some birds have been heard or seen. We are nearly certain which birds from the six released last year are pairing, and the pair released this year from Tiri have kept together in their own territory well away from the others. Aiding the search are the recorders devised by volunteer Eric Wilson, with a few strategically placed to record the appropriate call frequencies. Over 4–5 hours each morning, the recorders store data on an SD memory card. The recorders are then shifted to new localities every 3–7 days and the SD card swapped with a new one and batteries changed if necessary. The sound files are transferred to the computer and using a sound editing program (Audacity®) the file can be shown as a spectrogram.



Portion of kokako's call
[photo courtesy of E. Wilson]

With a bit of experience one can scan through a file around 10 times faster than just listening. Consistent calls from a recorder from one site helps establish that the kokako is utilising this part of the forest, possibly indicating a territory so ground crews can go and check the area.

Sound file listening is a passive activity in which volunteers are involved but not so for the ground search volunteers. Particularly in the newly opened up area south of the Waitakere reservoir where all of last year's birds moved to, this is demanding work in tough territory where with MP3 players kokako calls are played and then these volunteers listen for any responses. With this technique the first of last year's birds that seem to be



Kokako . . . from here . . .
[photo courtesy of G. Capill]



To here . . .
[photo courtesy of A. Warneford]

a pair have been seen. A slightly easier monitoring is where, after training in the use of transceivers, yet other volunteers are regularly walking certain tracks very early in the morning to check on the whereabouts of those birds with functioning radio transmitters—and there are more and more of these!

Improving weather has meant that the catching teams lead by Department of Conservation expert Paul Jansen have already caught 14 new kokako from Tunawhae in the Pureora forest, South Waikato, and these have been released in five separate releases. That brings the current total to 22; however, to attain our allowed total of 30 next season, we need more funds for their capture and the current monitoring.

Grant Capill, a member of the catching team, sent us his photo of one of the clearings at Tunawhae made to erect the mist nets.

STARBUCKS, BOEINGS . . . AND NATASHA

Involvement in our trapping programs and explanations of the need for it were part of the experience that recent visitor **Natasha Lozanoff** had during her week at the ARK, including a visit to **Massey University's Ecology and Conservation Group**.

Coming from the busy city life of Seattle where everyone fends for himself or herself, I was unaccustomed to the incredibly friendly natured people of New Zealand, specifically at the ARK IN THE PARK. I received the Matt Jarvis Travel Grant through the University of Washington Photography department. I am studying both Photography and Biology with a focus in conservation at the University of Washington. My goal was to travel to New Zealand to discover the successful conservation efforts across the board and document it through photography. I was interested specifically in the pest trapping programme, the process it entails, and its results.

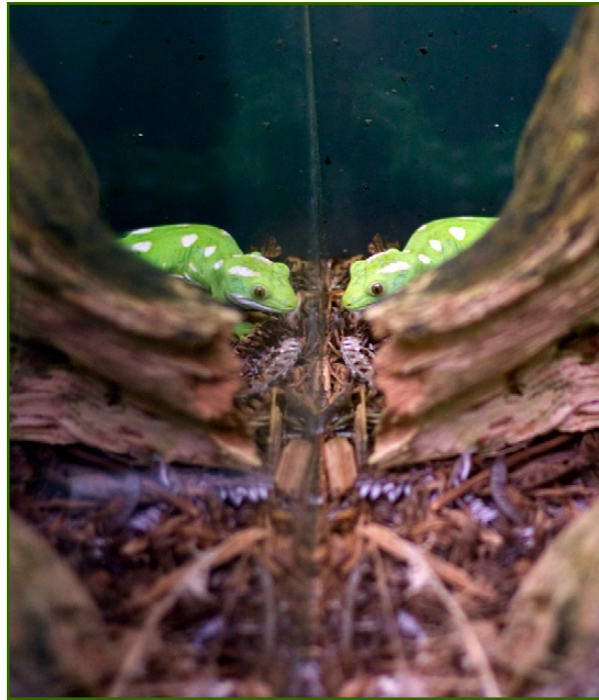
On first arriving to the park, I was immediately deep in conversation with conservationists. It was

wonderful to talk and learn about a region that is struck with so many hardships and the ways people are trying to preserve the natural biodiversity of the area. On the second day of my stay, I was able

to go into the park's well maintained and diverse walking and tramping system and was lucky enough to be inspected by curious robins. I did not expect to be so captivated and warmed by these creatures. It was important for me to see first hand how the pest control programmes are directly allowing for these native species to prosper as they once did before the introduction of mammalian pests.

Overall, it was an extremely informative and enriching experience. I did and saw many things at the ARK, which allowed for a successful learning experience and project. I encountered

first hand New Zealand's special biodiversity and the people that devote so much to preserve it.



Gecko population doubling technique?
[photo courtesy of N. Lozanoff]

Briefs

Maurice Colgan informed those on the stoat trap rosters: "Dear Stoaters, another year of your slithering, sloshing, and puffing your way around the Ark's mustelid defenses has netted the following:

- 78 stoats
- 15 weasels
- 5 ferrets
- 26 hedgehogs
- 2 possums
- 142 rats"

John Staniland meanwhile reports his spring bird survey showed twice as many birds at the ARK than at our comparison area.

Until next time . . .

John Sumich

ARK IN THE PARK CONTACTS

— KAREN —

Phone: 837 0443

Email: mcolgan@netaccess.co.nz

— MAJ —

Phone: 302 3902

Email: m.depoorter@forestandbird.org.nz

— JOHN —

Phone: 818 5267

Email: cjnk@xtra.co.nz