



'Crunch' now 3 years old. Hatched by Chatham Island warblers and raised by robins.

Society members will have a special interest in this black robin update article, and the effort to save this little bird from extinction.

After all, the Society's assistance in the purchase of Mangere Island in 1966 and the later supply of 120,000 *Olearia traversii* seedlings which were planted on the island to make a new safe habitat for the birds, was support help gladly given. The Wildlife Service in this most important rescue work is congratulated on the success that seems to attend the efforts after all these years. *Editor.*

Black Robin Update

Allan Munn Wildlife Service

The black robin's 1983/84 breeding season marked the fourth year since the Wildlife Service's cross-fostering programme began and was critical — another bad year like the previous breeding season would have put the programme back to where it was when we started.

After the first two seasons which were largely experimental, and the disappointing 1982/83 season, it was with high hopes and an underlying optimism that we packed our supplies and headed for the Chathams in October.

We left Wellington knowing that down in the Chathams we had several things in our favour:

- The black robin/Chatham Island tit cross-fostering technique on South East Island had been perfected over the past three years.

- As a result of efforts in previous years we now had a much younger breeding stock.

- It was probable that the season would begin with three, possibly four, breeding pairs (in previous years there had been only one successful breeding pair and last year, although the season started with two pairs, one female died part-way through the period).

- The second black robin population on South East Island (c. 100 ha of habitat) had a far greater capacity for expansion than the remaining population on Mangere Island (4.2 ha of habitat) ...

With these thoughts in mind we arrived at Mangere and South East Islands eager to find out just how many black robins had survived the winter, which birds had paired and what stage they were at with breeding.

We found nine robins still alive. The pair that had been transferred to South East Island in January 1983, 'Crunch' and 'Ngaio', were active and before long 'Ngaio' was seen carrying a feather — a sure sign of nest building. We could find no sign, however, of the male of the second pair transferred to the island last June. 'Margaret', the female of the second pair was, therefore, without a mate and did not breed.

On Mangere Island two pairs were preparing to breed. One pair were young birds that had not bred before and the other were the established pair — the male 'Yellow' and 'Old Blue', the latter now being at least 13 years old. Two lone females on the island took the total number of birds to nine.

On the surface, it appeared we had not achieved much since 1980 when

Following the most successful breeding season ever recorded, the Wildlife Service believes the black robin 'crisis' has passed and the birds are well on the road to recovery. From a total population of five in 1980, including only one successful breeding pair, the population now stands at twenty.