Kakapo Cure

THE KAKAPO RECOVERY PLAN, released by the Department of Conservation in July, is a welcome sign of the department's determination to rescue the world's largest parrot.

The document, compiled by kakapo scientist Ralph Powlesland, sets out in detail the steps which will have to be taken over the next five years to rescue the species. Estimated cost of the programme is $2.3 million, and DoC is hoping sponsors will pick up the tab for $1.5 million of that total.

A compelling sense of urgency pervades the plan. It points out that there are only 40 known kakapo, of which just 11 are female. Except for two young banded in 1981, the ages of the remaining kakapo are unknown (Since the report was written a further 3 females have been discovered on Stewart Island and relocated on to Codfish Island).

"Although kakapo are likely to be long-lived, this probably provides only a 10-year period in which we need to ensure that the newly established populations (on Codfish and Little Barrier Islands) start breeding. For instance, if no young are raised and the females have a 90 percent annual survival rate, only three or four of the 11 females known to survive today will be left after 10 years – thus the situation is urgent."

The plan of action to save the kakapo includes the following measures:

- Establishing a kakapo recovery group.
- Continuing to transfer kakapo from Stewart to Codfish Island.
- Hand raising kea and kaka chicks in order to develop captive rearing techniques.
- Monitoring booming and survival of the birds.
- Reducing the impact of the Polynesian rat kiore which exists on Little Barrier and Codfish Islands and is a threat to eggs and chicks.
- Preparing new islands for kakapo translocations.
- Increasing breeding frequency – this will be done by providing protein-rich foods such as kumara, carrots and apples for the kakapo. It is believed there is a correlation between diet and breeding.
- Prepare the way for possible captive breeding.

The report says that ideally in the long term there should be at least 500 kakapo on two predator-free islands. This should ensure the viability of the species.

Kakapo distribution