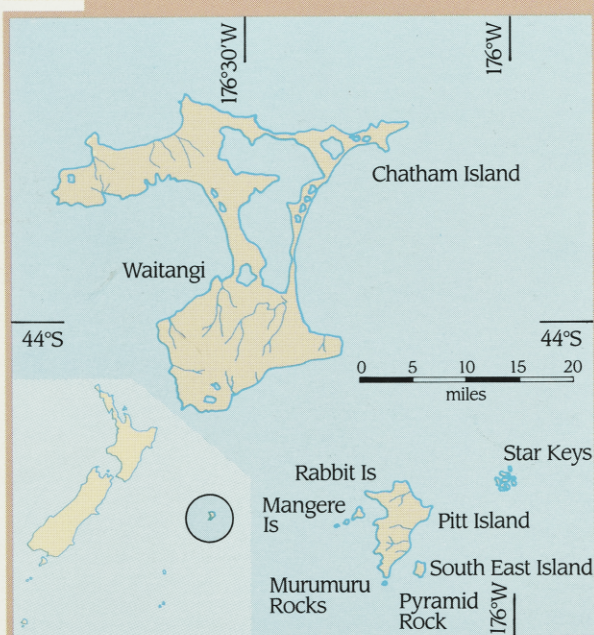




Before the last seven black robins were transferred from Little Mangere Island to adjoining Mangere Island in 1976, Mangere Island was replanted with help from Forest and Bird. The photo on the left shows the relatively barren island in 1980; by 1989 a healthy coastal forest was regenerating. In the background looms the tiny rock stack of Little Mangere Island – only home to the black robins for a century. Photos: Don Merton



late 1983 or early 1984 – and unquestionably saved their species from extinction. All surviving black robins are descended from this pair. The black robin is the only avian species living in the wild in which the identity and lineage of every individual is known and can be traced to a common ancestor.

The Future

Following the 1988/89 breeding season, 99 robins existed and since the population was believed to be sufficiently strong to continue its recovery unaided, we ceased manipulative management. Nevertheless, during the 1989/90 breeding season the population increased to around 116 birds, an increase of approximately 17 percent over the previous year! This was the proof everyone had been waiting for – that the robins could continue their historic recovery without our help.

Although manipulative management has ceased, it is desirable to re-establish the species on a major island in the Chathams group. However, because the robin is incapable of co-existing with cats or rats, the species can never be reinstated on the main Chatham Island where feral cats and two species of rats are established and eradication is not feasible. On the other hand, Pitt Island (6,270 ha), the second largest island in the group, is

rat-free, and plans are already in train to eradicate its feral cat population. In a cooperative programme with Pitt Island residents the Department of Conservation intends to start this ambitious project as soon as possible for such is probably the only means by which the long term survival of the black robin and many other Chatham Island species might be assured.

The black robin's rescue has demonstrated that manipulative management of an endangered species living in the wild is practicable, and that even in the most extreme case (one remaining viable pair) recovery is possible.

Acknowledgements

The black robin could not have been saved without the extraordinary dedication and commitment of Wildlife Service – and more recently DoC – teams, which often included volunteers. Over the nine years of the intense management programme many departmental staff and volunteers have been involved. In particular I'd like to acknowledge the major contribution made by my colleagues Brian Bell, David Crouchley, Rod Morris, Allan Munn, Geordie Murman and Rick Thorpe, and of my wife Margaret for her crucial support throughout. Furthermore, success could not have been achieved without the support

and cooperation of the Chatham Islands community – in particular the Pitt Islanders who provided vital transport between the islands. John and Bridget Preece and Ken and Eva Lanauze of Pitt Island deserve special mention in this context, for their outstanding support and hospitality throughout the programme. The black robin rescue has been a classic team effort. 🦅

Postscript: A comprehensive account of the black robin history and rescue from imminent extinction is currently being written by Dave Butler (author of *Quest for the Kakapo*) and Don Merton. It is to be published as a book later this year.