

chicks hatched in March and April – the first known to hatch on the island and the first to hatch without supplementary feeding since the recovery programme began.

Codfish is also occupied, however, by the kiore, or introduced Polynesian rat. Within a few days two kakapo chicks and two eggs were taken by kiore. The three remaining chicks were undernourished due to the failure of podocarp fruiting on the island and competition from kiore for food. The two weaker chicks have been taken for hand rearing to Auckland Zoo, and DoC is now reassessing its hands-off management practice on Codfish and the long-term problem of kiore.

On Little Barrier, at least ten of the 13 males and four

they were the first young known to survive anywhere since 1981 (see cover of *Forest & Bird* May 1991). Thus, supplementing the diets of free-ranging kakapo on Little Barrier has not only been effective in inducing breeding, but also in enhancing the frequency of breeding – a crucial factor in a species that might otherwise breed only at intervals of 4–5 years or more.

On Maud Island in Pelorus Sound where all five kakapo are being given supplementary food, the males boomed intensively for four months. However, although they interacted with the two females, no breeding took place.

Unfortunately stoats, a serious predator of kakapo eggs and young, have again reached Maud – having



JOHN HAWKINS/SOUTHLAND TIMES

Fourteen-day-old kakapo chick on Codfish Island awaiting airlift with Don Merton to Auckland Zoo. The chick was seriously undernourished but is progressing well at the zoo. Both chicks in Auckland will eventually be placed in the captive breeding programme on Maud Island.

of the nine females placed there in 1982 survive. Since no breeding was apparent by 1989 the supplementary-feeding of some females began. The technique brought immediate results – at least two females attempted to breed in early 1990 although no young survived. The following season (1991) four females nested, eight eggs were laid and two young survived. Not only were these the first to have been raised on Little Barrier, but

swum from the mainland some 900 m away – and are proving difficult to eradicate. Although they are not considered a major threat to adult kakapo, DoC proposes relocating at least some of the Maud Island birds on Mana Island off the Wellington coast. One male is to be placed on Mana this month to test the island's suitability.

Mana has recently been declared rodent-free after a successful mice-eradication campaign (see last issue of

Move for saddlebacks



STEVE BRONI

A saddleback is examined before being tagged and weighed during the recent transfer.

SOUTH ISLAND saddlebacks have been reintroduced to Fiordland after an absence of nearly one hundred years.

In March Department of Conservation teams stationed on the Big and Kundy Islands off southern Stewart Island caught 60 saddlebacks in mist nets. The birds were transferred by helicopter to Breaksea Island at the entrance to Fiordland's Breaksea Sound.

South Island saddlebacks came perilously close to extinction in 1964 when their last sanctuary, Big South Cape Island, off Stewart Island was invaded by ship rats. They were transferred to several small nearby muttonbirding islands, where an estimated 300 to 400 birds now live.

The introduction of the

saddlebacks to Breaksea Island is an important stage in the department's recovery plan which aims to build the population to 4,000 birds, distributed and breeding on widely located offshore islands.

Norway rats were successfully eradicated from 170-hectare Breaksea Island in 1988 to provide a sanctuary for saddlebacks and other endangered wildlife (see *Forest & Bird* February 1988).

The South Island saddleback is an endemic wattlebird related to the rare North Island saddleback, endangered kokako and extinct huia. It was once common throughout the South and Stewart Islands but declined rapidly from predation by introduced rodents, cats and mustelids.

Tim Higham

Forest & Bird). If Mana proves suitable for kakapo then other birds from Maud may be relocated there later this winter, but Maud will remain the centre for captive management of the species.

Don Merton, co-ordinator of DoC's kakapo recovery programme and long-time champion of the species is happy with recent progress. He believes that recent advances in our knowledge and understanding of the kakapo, as well as in our ability to

manage it amount to a major breakthrough. He is confident that averting extinction and bringing about recovery of this remarkable bird are now realistic and attainable goals.

A happy footnote: Don Merton was granted an honorary Doctor of Science degree by Massey University earlier this month in recognition of his contribution to endangered species management both within New Zealand and internationally.