

A New Generation of Taiko Emerging

GRAEME TAYLOR



Taiko chick on Chatham Island — the world's rarest seabird.

A new generation of Chatham Island taiko is emerging among the 11 chicks that hatched this season — four more than last year's record crop of seven.

Once thought to be extinct, the taiko or magenta petrel was rediscovered on Chatham Island in 1978. The world population is now estimated at between 120 and 180.

The first nesting burrow was found in 1987 and DoC staff, volunteers and members of the

Taiko Trust have since been tracking the birds' progress and protecting them from predation.

Among this season's breeding pairs of the world's rarest seabird is a male that hatched in 1993. After spending around three years digging a burrow and finding a mate, he has produced the first of his offspring, heralding a bright future for this threatened species. It is only the second bird of known age to breed since the Department of Conservation began banding chicks in 1989. One of three banded chicks returning to breed has produced two chicks since 2001.

'It's encouraging to see a new generation coming along which will hopefully be breeding for the next 20 to 30 years,' says the Department of Conservation's senior species-protection officer, Graeme Taylor.

'We are starting to lose birds from our known breeding burrows through old age. That's why it's so important to get these young birds returning to breed.'

It is thought there are around 13 breeding pairs this season,

compared with just two in the 1998/99 season.

'We hope to get up to 25 breeding pairs within the next decade,' Graeme Taylor says.

This year's 11 new chicks have started to fledge, after

being banded and blood sampled to determine their sex. They have also been fitted with tiny transmitters to allow their initial flight out to sea to be monitored. — DoC

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Adam Bester who is the DoC programme manager for fauna biodiversity on the Chatham Islands, with one of the latest taiko chicks.