

# Kokako and Kiwi Restored to Mount Bruce

**M**ount Bruce/Pukaha Forest is the last remaining pocket of a formerly massive belt of bush in the lower North Island, alive then with innumerable birds. The forest was one of the last strongholds of the huia; but other birds were also lost as it was felled, and kokako and kiwi became locally extinct.

Over the past two years, however, the Mount Bruce National Wildlife Centre, in conjunction with other conservation organisations — including Forest and Bird — and the local community, has carried out a major pest-control operation in the 942-hectare forest. Many kilometres of track have been cut, and poisoning and trapping have been used to remove over 1500 possums, almost 4000 rats and over 150 stoats, weasels and ferrets, along

with numerous hedgehogs and mice. The project's goal is 'to restore the forest so that our native birds can be set free to breed in the wild . . . back where they belong'. That goal is now beginning to be realised.

Six kokako, taken from the Pureora Forest Park, were released into the Mount Bruce Forest in July and August 2003. Four more were released this year. Returning kokako to the lower North Island was a great achievement in itself, but in January 2004, whilst tracking birds fitted with transmitters, a nest with two kokako chicks was discovered.

Breeding success so early has exceeded all expectations. The chicks have now been successfully fledged and plans for the future involve the eventual release of five pairs of kokako into the forest.

Another sign of the success of the pest-control programme was the release of six North Island brown kiwi in December 2003. The kiwi were 'captive-bred' at the Willowbank Wildlife Reserve in Christchurch. One of the birds drowned when 118 millimetres of rain fell in one day in February, but the remaining birds are doing well. The plan is eventually to release 10 pairs of birds into the forest.

As well as the recent release of

kokako and kiwi, other birds found in the forest include tui, bellbird, rifleman, grey warbler, whitehead and fantail. Kaka have also been breeding in the forest for a number of years.

Fund-raising for the restoration project has been aided by individuals and organisations each sponsoring a hectare of the forest for \$25 a year, and all hectares are now subscribed.

— JASON ELSWORTH



Kokako aviary, Mount Bruce National Wildlife Centre. Birds from this aviary were released into the forest in May.



Kaka nest box erected in Pukaha/Mount Bruce Forest, by the National Wildlife Centre.



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