

9 December 2022



Tēnā koe 

Thank you for your Official Information Act request to the Department of Conservation, received on 16 November 2022 in which you asked for the estimated number of saddlebacks in New Zealand, their distribution, and the number of breeding pairs on Ulva Island.

Your questions and our responses are listed below:

The estimated number of saddlebacks in New Zealand

The estimated number of saddlebacks (tīeke) in New Zealand were over 6000 individuals for North Island tīeke and 1265 birds for South Island tīeke in 2003 (Hooton and Jamieson, 2003). This paper is included in our response for your interest. Since 2003, numbers have increased steadily, although current accurate estimates are not available for the national population. It's likely that North Island tīeke substantially exceeds 7000 individuals (there is no formal counts available for the island populations), and South Island tīeke 2000 individuals.

Their distribution

Tīeke were once widespread across mainland New Zealand. However, they do not persist in the presence of introduced predators and are now only found on predator-free islands or fenced mainland sites. In the North Island, they are present on 19 islands and 6 fenced sanctuaries, such as Hauturu (Little Barrier Island), Tiritiri Matangi, Kapiti, Zealandia and Maungatautari. In the South Island they are on 11 smaller islands, mainly around Rakiura (Stewart Island), Fiordland, and in the Marlborough Sounds. For a list of specific islands, please see

The number of breeding pairs on Ulva Island

From the 30 individuals reintroduced from Big Island in 2000, the population was estimated to be around 250 individuals in 2010. More recent monitoring (2017-2020) estimate tīeke population on Ulva Island to oscillate between 600-900 individuals. Not all birds will be at breeding age and not all breeding birds will nest every year, so the number of breeding pairs likely varies between 100 and 300.



Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) and enclosed documents may be published on the Department's website.

Nāku noa, nā



Hilary Aikman
Director Terrestrial Biodiversity
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



Table 1 - Schedule of documents

Item	Date	Document description	Decision
<i>Item no.</i>	<i>Full date of document</i>	<i>Name of document. If a series of emails refer to it as emails on the topic</i>	<i>Released in full / Released in part -</i>
1	2003	Journal article: The distribution and current status of New Zealand Saddleback <i>Philesturnus carunculatus</i>	Released in full