

Revive Rotoiti

Ratabate™ to the robins' rescue

For some of the 17 strong group, it meant a seven hour day, with up to 15kg of toxic bait in their backpack, traversing up to 1100m elevation.

The nesting results for South Island robins in the RNRP will be used for outcome monitoring for the toxin operation.



Rat numbers have been high in the Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project (RNRP) area for some time, posing a major threat to small forest birds.

The RNRP team use tracking tunnels containing baits and inked cards on which footprints are tracked to monitor the density of rodents and mustelids. The number of tunnels showing tracked footprints is then expressed as a percentage. In August this year, the rat-tracking rates were 50% for both the RNRP 'core' area (the original 825-hectare pest control area) and non-treatment sites. Such high rat numbers, especially during the nesting season, would have had a highly damaging effect on populations of small forest birds, such as robins. The high rodent numbers, however, provided the ideal testing ground for the much-anticipated trial of Ratabate™ toxin (active ingredient - Diphacinone) which was put out on 1 September.



To enable bait to be laid in all 600 Philproof bait stations (spaced over 600 hectares in the core area) in one day, additional Nelson Lakes staff and Nelson/Marlborough Conservancy Technical Support Officers (TSOs) were called in to help.

All toxin remaining in bait stations was retrieved on 12 October, and the all-important tracking cards were again set out, both within the core area and, for comparison, the non-treatment sites at Lakehead and within Big Bush. By the following afternoon the results were in with the non-treatment areas still tracking rats at 30% while the Ratabate-treated core area tracked at a much reduced 3.75%.

The success of this toxin trial in reducing rats at the optimum time should be reflected in increased nesting success for South Island robins this season and by inference other small forest birds. The annual robin survey was conducted in August, with three pairs recorded and banded in the core area. As at mid-November two chicks had successfully fledged and two more nests have chicks. With the rat numbers low it is hoped more will successfully fledge over the summer.



Spot the kiwi capers



One of our special visitors this winter was Al Morrison, Director-General of Conservation (far right). Setting out with Al to find a wild kiwi chick were (at rear, from left to right), Alison Rothschild, Nelson Lakes Area Manager, RNRP team leader Grant Harper, RNRP ranger Sarah Forder, and in front, Neil Clifton, Nelson/ Marlborough Conservator, RNRP ranger Nik Joice and Fen the kiwi dog.

A surprise find of a great spotted kiwi chick during a winter health check trip has brought the total of wild-born chicks in the RNRP to five. Our kiwi dog, Fen, tracked the scent to where the seven-month-old bird was burrowed with its parents. On the same day Fen also located two adults which had dropped their transmitters, showing great aptitude for such a young and newly-trained kiwi dog.

Since their release in March, the first two ONE chicks have gained weight and are now over the 1.2kg weight whereby they are considered relatively safe from stoat attack. One of them is quite adventurous, being caught close to the campground at Kerr Bay, but generally they are spending their time further back within the RNRP core area.

On a sad note, Takaka, one of the adult male kiwi, was found dead on 7 September. Pathology results showed the cause to be predation, however, the predator species could not be determined. Grant Harper, RNRP team leader, said, "Takaka was a particularly strong and feisty bird, weighing around 2.5 kilograms when he died, so it would have taken a fairly large animal to kill him." Of real concern is the finding of dog prints around the same time in the RNRP. It's a timely reminder for dog owners that dogs are not permitted in the national park and we ask that they are kept under strict control in adjacent areas.

This kiwi nesting season was expected to be quite busy for our RNRP team working on the BNZ Operation Nest Egg™ (ONE) programme. BNZ Operation Nest Egg™



High Five! RNRP ranger Sarah Forder, introduces the latest chick to the camera.

increases the RNRP kiwi population through taking eggs from wild nests and hatching the young in a wildlife centre, then releasing the chicks at a few months of age into the project area.

The RNRP team visited the Goulund Downs area of Kahurangi National Park in mid-November, planning to collect up to 10 eggs for transport to Willowbank Wildlife Reserve in Christchurch. It turned out however that there was very little breeding activity and only two eggs were located. Grant Harper said, "It is becoming obvious that great spotted kiwi do not breed every year, which is a useful result in itself and has implications for DOC's management of the species."

This year is the final year of three years funding by the BNZ which has helped cover a range of essential kiwi-related costs such as vet bills and transmitters.



New faces

This past year has seen some big staff changes in the RNRP team, with two new arrivals who bring with them a wealth of experience and knowledge - and more children for the local school!

Nik Joice arrived just over a year ago in October 2009, fresh from managing the Murchison Mountains takahe programme, where he was based at Te Anau (Southland Conservancy). Prior to this Nik was a field researcher based in New Plymouth, looking at the role of tui & kereru in seed dispersal and pollination in a landscape of fragmented forest remnants. Nik has also been one of the fortunate few to work on the kakapo programme, being based mostly on Maud Island in the Marlborough Sounds but also working on Codfish Island off Stewart Island.

Nik's experience working in bird recovery programmes in a challenging field environment has proven to be an ideal background for the work here. His local

role includes being the coordinator of the ONE great spotted kiwi chick programme, rodent and mustelid monitoring (using tracking tunnels) and the monitoring of the nationally endangered plant *Pittosporum patulum*. Recently, Nik's specialist skills have been further recognised and he has trained to become a 'key contact' for animal pest control methods for the department. Being able to live closer to family in Nelson has been great for the family and Nik says, "It's nice to be able to enjoy the warmer weather at the top of the South Island, while still living close to mountains and lakes."



Nik Joice (left) and John Henderson (right), show off the new RNRP fundraising shirts and hooded sweat shirts with their sons (left to right) Sheppard Joice, Keanu Joice and Piri Henderson. Profits from the sale of these will assist the project and are available in limited sizes - order yours by calling the Nelson Lakes Visitor Centre on 03 5211 806 or email nelsonlakesvc@doc.govt.nz.

John Henderson migrated back from the North Island in March, from Pureora (Maniapoto Area Office in Waikato Conservancy) where he had been working on kaka nesting and fledgling success related to the large rat control programme there. This kaka project is very similar to the work previously done in the RNRP. Before moving up to the North Island, John was a TSO for Southland Conservancy, and also worked on the same tui and kereru project as Nik (although at different ends of the country). John was also part of the Science and Research Division (S&R), as it was then called, based in Te Anau Area Office. In addition, he has worked on tracks, mustelid trapping and various kiwi, takahē, robin and bat monitoring.

John's roles within the RNRP include being the coordinator of mustelid trap checks and five minute bird counts along with cat trapping, lizard monitoring and assisting with the kiwi programme as part of Goulard Downs' team. John says, "It's great to be back in the South Island, particularly working back in the beech forest environment, and to be part of such a high calibre area."

Friends of Rotoiti

The Friends of Rotoiti (FOR) would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all their supporters who have contributed a total of \$3300 for 2010. The group has been stunned by your generosity and it has benefitted many areas of their work, and that of the RNRP team. The following list shows what these donations purchased:

- 40 DOC200 stoat traps (and materials for the trap boxes). A 'sponsored line' has been set out along the Speargrass Track, and the additional stoat traps will be used as spares, to replace those stolen or damaged over the summer months.
- 40 Sentinel possum traps which have replaced the old warrior possum traps.
- 1 burrow scope for the RNRP team to help locate kiwi in long and/or deep burrow systems.
- 6 live capture cages for feral cats which will be available for the community to borrow.
- 1 kiwi transmitter (@\$430) for the new kiwi chick found in July 2010.



Success! Warwick Ward checks a new sentinel trap, purchased through generous supporter funds.

Each year there will be new opportunities for support depending on the focus and priorities of the FOR work and the RNRP project.

To find out the most current options for supporting FOR, please download the form from their website: www.friendsofrotoiti.org.nz.

The Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project is one of DOC's six 'mainland island' ecological restoration projects where science research and learning is the main focus. The Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project covers 5000 hectares of boneydew beech forest on the shores of Lake Rotoiti in the Nelson Lakes National Park.

- The project's goals are to:*
- restore native biodiversity at Rotoiti.
 - increase our knowledge of how to restore biodiversity nationally.
 - increase public support for ecological restoration.

The project is assisted by Friends of Rotoiti volunteers who carry out pest control adjoining the project area.



Diana Reeves 'on the beat' for Friends of Rotoiti.

Sadly, one of the founding members of Friends of Rotoiti passed away on 28 September, after a long illness. Diana Reeves is remembered for her dedication and determination in the early days of the group, particularly for her recruitment skills.

Diana featured in one of the department's 'Meet the Locals' mini-documentaries, saying: "I've been coming to the lake since I was about seven. It's a special place for me, I'm very fond of the birds, and I feel I should be putting something back. It's very rewarding."

This wonderful lady leaves a perpetual legacy, not just through her work with the Friends of Rotoiti but also her support to the Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project in a number of other ways.

FRIENDS OF ROTOITI CAPTURES - DEC 2001 TO NOV 2010 - 14,978 PESTS REMOVED

RAT	MOUSE	H/HOG	STOAT	FERRET	WEASEL	CAT	RABBIT	POSSUM	BIRD
2,363	10,052	983	705	62	37	15	139	622	19

Revive Rotoiti on-line

If you received this Revive Rotoiti in the post but would prefer to have future editions emailed to you (saving the project printing and mailing costs) please contact Petr Carter at pccarter@doc.govt.nz.