South Island Kākā Breed-for-Release

Programme Outline 2025-2030

April 2025

Version	Date	Comment	Lead
1.0	11 April 2025	Initial draft for review	9(2)(g)(ii)

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Introduction

In place of the 25/26 Flocking Plan for SI Kākā, this Programme Outline has been created for circulation and discussion on the objectives, goals, and needs of SI Kākā Breed-for-Release Programme over the next 5 years. Because of the complexity of the programme a longer-term planning horizon to give context for holders and recipients of breed for release chicks is required.

There is considerable interest and activity by community initiatives to restore kākā to sites in the South Island. The establishment of kākā at new these sites makes an important contribution to long-term kākā recovery on mainland New Zealand. Restoration projects currently receiving (or planning to receive) kākā are:

Brook Waimārama Sanctuary – Northern South Island kākā

Orokonui Ecosanctuary – Southern South Island kākā

It is expected that the captive kākā population will also be used for reintroductions to other restoration sites established during the term of this Programme Outline.

2024-25 summary

The South Island kākā at the Dunedin Botanic Garden Aviary have produced two chicks from one pair this season. There were early signs from several pairs that breeding was progressing, including observations of courtship behaviour and enlarged cloacas. However, a significant weather event in October, where Dunedin received four-times its average monthly rainfall, seems to have disrupted the breeding season for several pairs. The prolonged onsite disruption at the Aviary, involving multiple individuals over an extended period, also caused disturbances for both the staff and the birds. It is not known how this disturbance impacted the breeding season.

General information

Taxon (scientific name): Common name:	*Nestor meridionalis meridionalis* South Island Kākā
NZ Threatened Species status:	Threatened-Nationally Vulnerable
SI Captive management units	The SI kākā captive population is managed as two distinct management units, Northern South Island (NSI) and Southern South Island (SSI), due to regional phenotypic differences.
Scope of managed population:	The captive population is held by 5 private and local government facilities: • Natureland Wildlife Trust (Nelson) • Willowbank (Christchurch) • Kiwi Birdlife Park (Queenstown) • Dunedin Botanic Garden Aviary (Dunedin) • Invercargill Queen's Park Aviary (Invercargill)
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Summary of Threat Assessment for wild populations

The threat ranking for South Island kākā is currently ((Robertson et al., 2021; Rolfe et al., 2022)):

Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable (facing high risk of extinction in the medium term)

Qualifiers: CD – Conservation Dependent (likely to move to a higher threat category if current management ceases).

CR – Conservation Research Needed (causes of decline and/or solutions for recovery poorly understood and research is required).

PD – Partial Decline (declining over most of its range, but with one or more secure populations, such as on offshore islands).

RF – Recruitment Failure (age structure of population is such that catastrophic decline likely in future).

Aims of captive management

The primary purpose of the SI kākā Breed-for-Release programme is to breed birds so that captive-reared juveniles are available for release into the wild, to support community initiatives for ecosystem restoration.

Programme objectives

The following objectives for the SI Captive kākā population are aligned with the objectives of the current draft of the Kākā Captive Management Plan 2024-2034 (DOC-7734838)

Objective 1: Optimise productivity of the captive South Island kākā populations, to produce juveniles for release into the wild.

Objective 2: Manage the SI captive kākā population as separate NSI and SSI management units to maintain the regional variation of morphological traits, while maximising the genetic diversity available for each reintroduction site.

Objective 3: Support community conservation groups that want to diversify captive kākā by seeking approval to harvest eggs from wild kākā nests, to foster in captivity and increase diversity in the captive population, for each of the management units.

Objective 4: Support community conservation initiatives, by providing quality, regionally appropriate captive-reared kākā for release at suitable ecosystem restoration sites (that have a DOC-approved translocation proposal), to establish viable self-sustaining populations.

Objective 5: Review the captive programme once Objective 4 is achieved and there is no longer demand for captive-bred kākā for translocations.Programme Outline Goals 2025-2030

Northern South Island

With Project Janszoon releases into the Abel Tasman National Park having concluded, the focus of the NSI breeding programme will now be for the Brook Waimārama Sanctuary. There are currently 4 pairs in this population. Two pairs have bred successfully (with the help of foster birds); It is uncertain whether the other pairs will successfully breed.

Considerations:

- Continue breeding from 2 successful pairs for another season at Dunedin Botanic Gardens (DBG) then return to them to Natureland. Look at evaluating sperm morphometrics during the breeding season (25/26).
- Evaluate the value of continuing to hold Tawa (male in 3rd pair) that does not show interest in breeding.

- Rata (male in 4th pair) has shown positive breeding behaviours and bonding with new mate. Allow him another season. Look at evaluating sperm morphometrics during the breeding season (25/26).
- Need to assess the priority to increase this population to be able to retire some birds and meet the expected demands of our partner Brook Waimārama Sanctuary.

Southern South Island

Orokonui has indicated that they no longer require chicks bred in captivity for release into the Sanctuary.

Dunedin Botanic Gardens (DGB) currently has a translocation proposal lodged with DOC which would bring new SSI birds into the captive population. These birds would breed chicks for releases from The Botanic Gardens. This proposal has support from DOC, DDC and iwi. This programme outline will proceed with forward planning under the assumption that the proposal will be approved.

Considerations:

- The DBG proposal outlines plans to collect eggs or chicks from wild nests, which would result in a delay of several years before these birds reach sexual maturity and contribute to breeding efforts. To support this process, foster pairs will be the most effective option for rearing the collected eggs and chicks in captivity.
- Breeding activity for most SSI birds (those well represented at Orokonui) will be restricted over the medium term as there is not current release site for offspring. During this period, the focus of these birds will be to serve as foster parents for TOS and eventually DGB pairs.
- There are two SSI birds that have not previously bred. Obtaining offspring from these birds as future breeders for the DBG is a priority.

Other Programme Considerations

ZIMS

The SI kākā studbook has been migrated from Sparks to ZIMS. This process involved considerable effort to amalgamate existing institutional information across the whole programme. It is important that institutions using ZIMS confirm information with the captive coordinator before inputting information such as parentage and hatch date.

All holders should submit the Annual Reporting forms to the captive coordinator by April 15th annually to ensure that the information can be collated and disseminated to everyone in a timely fashion and the correct information put into ZIMS. A current SI kākā Annual Reporting form is attached at the end of this report.

Risks to the Programme

Obtaining new captive birds via rehab

A significant proportion of the SSI captive population consists of rescued or rehabilitated birds that were deemed unsuitable for release. As a result, some birds have been held for extended periods without successfully breeding. Over the past year, two instances have arisen where kākā potentially became available for retention in the captive population. To ensure that the captive breeding programme aligns with its objectives and long-term conservation goals, it is crucial to establish a well-defined approach for evaluating potential candidates.

Future new birds for the captive population need to be assessed against the following criteria:

- individuals need to display normal behaviours
- have the potential to breed successfully
- are physically healthy,
- are socially compatible with the group,
- display high levels of behavioural fitness,

Assessments should also be in the context of understanding the broader objectives for release sites.

Potential rehabilitation birds will require a period of evaluation before determining their suitability for the breeding program. During this time, there is a risk that facilities or caretakers may develop attachments to these birds, which can make it emotionally challenging when a decision is made not to retain them for breeding. It is important to recognize this challenge and ensure that decisions remain guided by conservation priorities rather than personal attachment. A structured framework will help navigate these complexities and optimize the program's contributions to species recovery.

Aging captive population

The captive population, particularly SSI pairs, includes many older birds., Consideration of the future of these birds beyond their active breeding age is required. Currently SSI female ages range from 14 yrs to 25 yrs. Four of these females (25y, 21y, 20y,17y,) are well represented at Oronoknui, while others (15y, 14y) are not. It has been observed that we are seeing a decrease in fertility of the SSI pairs. It is prudent to start developing a retirement plan for these females from the breeding programme, staggered over the next few years.

Retaining proven breeding pairs as foster parents for eggs and chicks brought in under the DBG translocation permit will benefit the programme by ensuring better long-term outcomes. These foster parents will not only help successfully raise the new generation but can also be utilized again when those young birds reach breeding age. This will help maintain a steady and efficient breeding program, preventing gaps or slow periods in productivity. Retirement ideally would be release to the wild, unless the bird is deemed to be not suitable for release. Retired birds not suitable for release would continue to be managed under the captive programme as advocacy birds.

Considerations:

- Retaining proven breeding pairs as foster parents for eggs and chicks brought in under the DBG translocation permit will lead to better long-term outcomes. Chicks raised by parents have higher success rates compared to those that are hand reared.
- Breeding will have to be controlled to limit or eliminate breeding by overrepresented birds.
- A staggered retirement plan should be developed that provides foster parents to be utilized for inexperienced new breeding pairs, and transitions non releasable birds into advocacy roles.

Managing birds with chronic health conditions

Over the past year, we have encountered two cases of captive birds with chronic health conditions that rendered them unsuitable for release. These conditions compromised our ability to maintain their welfare, required significant ongoing veterinary care, incurred substantial costs, potentially caused less effective use of available aviary spaces, and limited the birds' ability to contribute to the program's objectives and goals.

Navigating these situations is complex and challenging. Early consultation with the captive coordinator, veterinarians and the DOC Lead Technical Officer is expected to help institutions respond to the difficult decisions regarding the ongoing management of birds with chronic health conditions. Early diagnosis and proactive decision-making are essential to mitigating risks for the birds and minimizing the financial burden on holding facilities. Timely assessments and appropriate action will help ensure the best outcomes for both the birds and the program. By doing so, we can ensure bird welfare is prioritised, reduce care costs, and ensure that the birds in the Programme can display the full range of natural behaviours. This is a critical and ongoing aspect of our work.

In cases where euthanasia is considered, the Animal Welfare Act says a vet must euthanise if animal welfare is compromised, but they must make reasonable attempts to talk to the owner first - DOC on behalf of the Crown in this case. This allows DOC to consult with appropriate experts, if needed, and engage with iwi on the decision. A decision to euthanise a bird, unless critical for the humaneness of the individual bird, is to be made by the accountable T4 Manager in DOC. Equally a decision to retain a bird which might have ongoing chronic health issues needs to be justified to the accountable T4 Manager in DOC.

Structured transfer processes and protocols

We recognise that there is a need for more a more rigorous protocols around the transfer of birds between facilities. A standardised protocol will be developed to ensure that all necessary information is transferred, and that key roles and steps are identified prior to the transfer taking place. As per the Kākā Husbandry Manual, animal records should be maintained electronically to make it easier to maintain a backup copy of all records and to facilitate their transfer to other holders and the Captive Coordinator. When birds are transferred.

As per the Kākā Husbandry Manual, animal records should be maintained electronically to make it easier to maintain a backup copy of all records and to facilitate their transfer to other holders and the Captive Coordinator. When birds are transfer between facilities, copies of all records should be sent to the facility receiving the bird(s) prior to or on the day of transfer.

Independent Animal Welfare Assessment

Following concerns raised after the transfer of Charlie Girl from Te Anau Bird Sanctuary to Dunedin Botanic Garden Aviary, the Ministry for Primary Industries recommended DOC commission an independent welfare assessment, which DOC didin December 2024. In her report, Professor of Animal Welfare Science Ngaio Beausoleil, from Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa Massey University's Tāwharau Ora School of Veterinary Science made recommendations relevant to the kākā breed-for-release programme. Considering and addressing these recommendations will be an important part of strengthening the programme during the period of this Programme Outline. The report can be found at:

https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/about-doc/news/media-releases/charlie-girl-welfare-assesment-report.pdf

Current regional captive populations

As of April 2025, the table below outlines the current holdings and projected holdings for the next 3 to 5 years. Following approval of the DBG translocation proposal, annual flocking plans will account for incoming eggs and chicks, with bird movements conducted based on space requirements. Current holders should indicate any interest in housing additional pairs. Not set out in the table is whether the Programme will require expanded facilities to successfully meet the goals of the DBG translocation.

Northern South Island kākā (TOS)

Location	Male	Female	Future projected holdings
Natureland	1	1	2 or 3 TOS breeding pairs
Dunedin Botanic Garden Aviary	2	2	Nil
Invercargill Queen's Park Aviary	1	1	1 TOS breeding pair

Southern South Island kākā (SSI)

Location	Male	Female	Juvenile	Future projected holdings
Willowbank Wildlife Reserve			2	1 breeding pair
Kiwi Birdlife Park, Queenstown			2	1 breeding pair
Dunedin Botanic Garden Aviary	8	8	1	Breeding pairs and fosters
Invercargill Queen's Park Aviary				Proposed Advocacy Pair or Breeding pair

Bird Movements to take place for 25/26 breeding season

The priority for the season will be breeding from the TOS pairs. The 2 non represented SSI birds (SK1101, SK1008) will be allowed to breed to capture their genes. This may require AI and/or foster parent involvement.

StudBook ID	Name	Sex	Proposed move	Intention
SK2424	Nestor	M	Willowbank to DBG	Transfer to DBG for flocking and further assessment of his suitability for the breeding programme
	Obi	M	Willowbank to DBG	
SK0404	L34263	F	DBG to Willowbank	Hold pair as potential fosters
SK0501	L34253	M	DBG to Willowbank	

Work plan

To be developed	Responsibility		Due date	Date completed
	Name	Institution		
Relevant documentation required for programme.		Holders		
Addressing programme recommendations of independent welfare report		DOC		
Intake policy for Rehab birds		DOC		
Staggered Retirement plan of older birds		DOC		
Transfer protocol		DOC		

AR&R HOLDERS UPDATE FORM FOR SI KAKA – 2025

Please return by _____2025

Institution: (Name/location):	**The person completing this return**:
Email:	**Date return completed**:

CURRENT HOLDINGS

Stbk#	HOUSE NAME OR ID	L BAND	Age	Sex	Provenance	Additional Comments

STUDBOOK RECORDS:

List birds and information that should be recorded in the SI Kaka ZIMS studbook, if you do not use ZIMS at your facility

SB #	Local ID/Name	Sex	Age	Current Situation	Any Comments/preference
	EXAMPLES				
SK2020	Rata	M		On display/Breeding	Rata previously showed no interest in breeding, as very people focused. This season he exhibited bonding and breeding behaviors with his new female. This pair should be given another season together to see how things progress
SK1609	Betty	F	5	Breeding	Has a history if breaking eggs during incubation – may need to think about releasing her

HATCHES:

Record all Hatches that occurred during the 2024/2025 breeding season (July to February)

HOUSE NAME + studbook number	SEX (M/F/U)	*DATE OF HATCH**	Local ID # (or in-house #)	PROVENANCE (e.g. SSI, TOS)	SIRE STUDBOOK #	DAM STUDBOOK #	HAND OR PARENT RAIsed	DEATH DATE (if applicable)

TRANSFERS IN:

Record all transfers of kaka into your facility that occurred between _____

STUDBOOK #	HOUSE NAME (at your institution)	SEX (M/F/U)	Local ID # (or in-house # if not a Species360 member)	PROVENANCE (e.g. TAR, NLD, EAST)	RECEIVED FROM (Institution)	DATE RECEIVED	Local ID #.AT PREVIOUS INSTITUTION/ HOLDER

DEATHS: Please send pdfs of all **Necropsy Reports**

STUDBOOK #.	HOUSE NAME	SEX (M/F/U)	Local ID # (or in-house # if not a Species360 member)	PROVENANCE (e.g. SSI, TOS)	DEATH DATE	CAUSE OF DEATH (did you send a necropsy report?)

* Hatch date (day/month/year).

TRANSFERS OUT: **Include all birds transferred to new facilities and release sites;**

STUDBOOK #	HOUSE NAME	SEX (M/F/U)	Local ID # (or in-house #	PROVENANCE (e.g. SSI, TOS)	SENT TO (Institution name or release site)	DATE SENT	Local ID # & HOUSE NAME AT NEW INSTITUTION/ HOLDER (If known)

* Hatch date (day/month/year).

Comments:
Questions:

Please return to: 9(2)(g)(ii) Dept of Conservation, NZ **Email address:** 9(2)(g)(ii)

Walking on the wild(life) side

VCNZ's **Seton Butler** introduces a guide to dealing with injured wildlife.

IN CONSULTATION WITH Kate McInnes at the Department of Conservation (DOC), I've tried to simplify the complex decision-making process for veterinary teams when they're faced with injured wildlife in the clinic (see summarised chart below).

Importantly, all wildlife in New Zealand is considered protected unless specifically listed as not protected in the schedules of the Wildlife Act 1953 (it's not as simple as 'native animals are protected'). The schedules include species declared as pests, such as possums and stoats, species that are not protected, such as exotic passerines, and even native species that can be hunted at certain times of year. Endangered species should absolutely not be released without DOC involvement.

I encourage you to read the Wildlife Act at **www.legislation.govt.nz.** DOC has a 24/7 hotline if you need advice on managing wildlife cases. Note that marine mammals are managed under the Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978, and you should always contact DOC immediately for advice on treating them. VS

YOU ARE PRESENTED WITH AN INJURED ANIMAL BY A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC AND YOU HAVE WELFARE CONCERNS