



5 December 2024

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

### Response letter one

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation (DOC), received on 21 October 2024, in which you asked questions regarding Charlie the kākā and Tim Bamford's letter to you of 18 September 2024. You addressed your request to both DOC and the Dunedin City Council (DCC) and I understand that the council is also responding to you.

We have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA). While some of your questions do not strictly fall under the OIA, we are responding to them regardless, for the sake of transparency.

On 18 November we extended the timeframe to respond to your request to 5 December due to both the consultations necessary and the large quantity of information to search through.

I have made a decision on, and answered, most of your questions below. However, several questions (questions 1-5, and question 7) require more time before I can advise you of my final decision and answer these questions. For context, these require further internal and external consultation. These answers will follow by separate letter as soon as possible, but certainly no later than 20 December. I apologise for the delay.

Your questions and my responses are as follows:

1. *"We are, however, concerned about reports we have received that your presence at the DBGA is causing measurable, detrimental change in Charlie behaviour. Specifically, she is showing greater stereotypical behaviours in your presence. We suspect that Charlie remembers you and your training from when you were with her at the Te Anau Bird Sanctuary, and that this is leading to a change in behaviour in your presence. In your absence the stereotypical behaviour is reduced or absent. Further, we consider that your voice is influencing Charlie in her behaviours, and the close presence of your video camera (I have reports that you are standing with the lens against the aviary mesh) is unsettling Charlie and the other kākā present."*  
*1a) Please provide details of the cited reports, including data gathered*

1b) Which other kaka?

1c) What behaviours did they show?

1d) What baseline data for 'other kaka' do you have, when [REDACTED] was not present?

2. Tim stated [REDACTED] caused a 'measurable, detrimental change.' Please include all measurements and evidence relating to this, such as ethograms, video data, etc. Include all evidence of 'baseline' behaviour when [REDACTED] was not present and how it was obtained.
3. Tim stated Charlie 'is showing greater stereotypical behaviours in your presence.' Please include all evidence and measurements relating to this statement.
4. Tim stated 'We suspect that Charlie remembers you and our training... and that is leading to a change in behaviour in your presence.' Please provide all evidence supporting this hypothesis. Specify what changes were seen and the baseline behaviour. Was a certified parrot behaviour professional consulted? What are the qualifications of the person who made this hypothesis? Does DOC or DCC have supporting documentation, such as scientific papers, that positive reinforcement training leads to stereotypical behaviour? (see Charlie Girl Voluntary PT document, previously provided to DOC upon request, for a description of the positive reinforcement training Charlie received).
5. Tim stated 'Further, we consider that your voice is influencing Charlie in her behaviours, and the close presence of your video camera (I have reports that you are standing with the lens against the aviary mesh) is unsettling Charlie and the other kākā present.
  - 5a) Please explain what observable changes in Charlie, or other kaka, were seen in relation to this statement, and why 'video cameras' and 'lenses' are relevant. IE- how did Charlie and other birds respond to video cameras and lenses and what measurable observations were made
  - 5b) Does DOC and/or DCC have a policy on 'video camera' or 'lens' use around the aviaries? How has DOC or DCC addressed birds being 'unsettled' by 'lens' held by the public?

Decision pending – response to follow by separate letter.

6. Please state how many individuals were consulted and include all qualifications of the 'relevant experts' consulted before this letter was sent. What is their relation to DOC or DCC (ex- independent contractor). Were experts consulted for Charlie or 'other kaka' at the Dunedin Botanic Gardens? What evidence did the experts review?

DOC's South Island kākā breed-for-release programme team (two people), a husbandry expert from the Dunedin Botanic Gardens Aviary, and a wildlife veterinary expert from the Dunedin Wildlife Hospital were involved in discussions to understand Charlie's behaviour. These experts undertook direct observations and/or received reports of observations to base their understanding on.

Qualifications are declined by virtue of section 9(2)(g)(ii) of the OIA to protect staff from improper pressure or harassment.

7. *What evidence does DOC have in regards to Charlie weaving and obsessive toe grooming, etc that 'these are long term stereotypical behaviours'*
  - 7a) *Who provided this evidence and what was their working relationship with Charlie historically? What specific behaviours did they witness and with what frequency and duration? How often did they work with Charlie in Te Anau?*
  - 7b) *Has anyone who worked with Charlie regularly for over a year been consulted on her behaviour and asked to compare Charlie's behaviour in Te Anau to her behaviour in Dunedin?*
  - 7c) *Does DOC have evidence that Charlie would obsessively toe groom in Te Anau?*
  - 7d) *What other evidence does DOC have that 'these are long-term stereotypical behaviours'?*

Decision pending – response to follow by separate letter.

8. *Is DOC's and DCC's position that stereotypical behaviours should be 'maintained' or treated? How does DOC and DCC approach addressing stereotypical behaviours? How is DOC treating Charlie's arthritis and wing sag? Why is DOC keeping Charlie with an aggressive male and claiming it is 'courtship' behaviour? Does DOC have references stating chasing and fleeing are normal courtship behaviours in parrots? Is a male parrot striking a female parrot on the chest part of courtship?*

DOC's position is that stereotypical behaviours should be managed to reduce/eliminate the behaviours, with enrichment being the recommended approach to achieve this, as described in the Kākā Husbandry Manual:

[www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/conservation/native-animals/birds/kaka-husbandry-manual-2021.pdf](http://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/conservation/native-animals/birds/kaka-husbandry-manual-2021.pdf)

Please refer to DCC for the medical treatment plan for Charlie.

DOC refutes the statement that Charlie is being kept with an aggressive male. For references relating to kākā courtship and breeding behaviours, see the Kākā Husbandry Manual. DOC does not hold specific information relating to chasing, fleeing or striking by parrots during courtship.

9. *The letter sent on 18th of September was in response to an Open Letter signed by multiple professionals.*
  - 9a) *Did DOC and DCC discuss Charlie's wing sag and the aggression by the cohabitating male before sending the September 18th letter? Please provide documentation and any treatment plans.*

DOC and husbandry experts from the Dunedin Botanic Gardens Aviary were in regular contact to discuss Charlie's care, including her long-term wing injury and how she was interacting with the male kākā. Discussions were generally conducted via phone or video conferencing, and sometimes in-person. The plan for this is outlined in the Management Plan for Charlie Kākā held at Dunedin Botanic Gardens attached to this response as item 1.

- 9b) *Does DOC consider the wing sag and male aggression to be caused by [REDACTED] presence as well, and if so please provide measurable evidence.*

No.

*9c) How does DOC and DCC explain the other witness testimonies and video evidence documenting Charlie's welfare concerns, including members of the public documenting concerns in July when [REDACTED] was visiting family overseas?*

Charlie has long-term stereotypical behaviours, and it has been acknowledged that she displayed these at Dunedin Botanic Gardens Aviary soon after arrival.

*9d) In multiple emails and phone conversations with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], Tim stated he had no concerns for Charlie's welfare. Please explain the decision pathways relating to the lack of concern, and reason for the sudden change in concerns related to Charlie's weaving behaviour?*

DOC discussed Charlie's welfare with relevant husbandry experts from the Dunedin Botanic Gardens Aviary and a wildlife veterinary expert from the Dunedin Wildlife Hospital, to understand if there were any welfare concerns, and there were not found to be any. This was subsequently backed up by MPI and ZAA identifying no welfare concerns. There was no sudden change in concern.

*10. Please explain the decision pathways leading to this statement: "DOC's South Island Kākā Captive Coordinator is currently looking at alternative homes to move Charlie to in the South Island. It has been decided that Charlie will not be returning to Te Anau Bird Sanctuary, as there are no other kākā there for her to socialise with and no local wildlife vet expertise in Te Anau. As such, her welfare would be negatively impacted by a move to Te Anau Bird Sanctuary."*

*10a) Why is 'no local wildlife vet expertise in Te Anau' relevant? Are all kaka movements now subject to having a local wildlife vet in the same town?*

*10b) Why is this reasoning different from the requirements in the Kaka Husbandry Manual?*

Charlie has specialist health needs, including being on long-term medication. As such, being located distantly to wildlife veterinary expertise is not in her best interests. This is not a general approach for all kākā, just those with specialist health needs.

*10c) Since DOC determines where kaka are held, is DOC unwilling to provide a suitable kaka partner for Charlie in Te Anau? Please explain the rationale and decision pathways.*

At the time of the letter, Charlie had not settled with a mate, therefore there was no suitable partner to transfer with her to Te Anau.

*10d) DOC was planning to move senior and disabled kaka named Stumpy and Gimpy to Te Anau. How is Te Anau suitable for them, but not for Charlie to return to after a few months?*

If these kākā had been moved, they would have been a pair – not a single bird, as Charlie would have been. DOC has decided not to relocate these kākā to Te Anau. Sanctuary staff expressed concerns, and it was determined that the aviary in Te Anau was unsuitable for

flighted kākā, as well as not meeting minimum size requirements as per the Kākā Husbandry Manual for a pair of kākā.

*10e) Who was consulted and what decision pathways were used to determine a move to Te Anau would have a negative impact on Charlie?*

The South Island kākā breed-for-release programme team evaluated whether Charlie's welfare would be improved by moving her, and it was determined that it would not be. The absence of social interactions and companionship provided by a mate, as well as a lack of accessible veterinary treatment, were considered likely to negatively impact her overall wellbeing.

*10.1 Tim also stated: "Our priority remains ensuring that Charlie's welfare is maintained going forward. With this in mind, we don't consider that relocating Charlie so shortly after her recent shift will be in her best interests, but will ensure her welfare is maintained throughout the relocation process and beyond. We are also disappointed by the impact this shift will have on the breed-for-release programme. 10.1a) Please explain the decision pathway for these statements. How is Charlie's welfare 'maintained'?"*

A positive welfare state for Charlie is maintained by the husbandry and environment provided by the husbandry experts at Dunedin Botanic Gardens Aviary and supported by veterinary treatment as required by a wildlife veterinary expert from the Dunedin Wildlife Hospital.

*10.1b) Why is the impact to the breed-for-release programme relevant to Charlie's welfare*

It is not; welfare is the top priority for the South Island kākā breed-for-release programme.

*10.1c) Is DOC aware that Charlie had a positive impact for the Breed for release program over several seasons from Te Anau with her former partner 'Bling'?*

Yes.

*11 Tim also stated: "Following the concerns and information you have provided me over the previous weeks, the DOC team have been working with the Dunedin Botanical Garden Aviary (DBGA) staff to understand the plan for caring for Charlie, and her current condition. This has included DOC staff members visiting Charlie, and discussions with relevant experts."*

*11a) What was the plan for caring for Charlie? How was 'her current condition' described?*

The plan for caring for Charlie is outlined in the Management Plan for Charlie Kākā held at Dunedin Botanic Gardens. Her current condition was described in the 9 August 2024 Avian Behaviour and Welfare Assessment for Charlie Kākā held at Dunedin Botanic Gardens. This latter document is publicly available here:

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/about-doc/oia/2024/october/oia-4522-attachment-1.pdf>

11b) *What were the qualifications and experience of the visiting DOC staff members? How long did they visit Charlie and with what frequency? What were their observations?*

Visiting DOC staff had many years of experience working with native birds, including kākā, in both wild and captive settings. Specific qualifications of staff are declined by virtue of section 9(2)(g)(ii) of the OIA to protect staff from improper pressure or harassment. DOC staff visited Charlie for periods of 30 minutes to an hour, on different days, typically one or two times per week, but up to five some weeks. DOC staff observations were consistent with those reported by husbandry experts at the Dunedin Botanic Gardens Aviary, with normal behaviours observed the vast majority of the time, and some short bouts of stereotypical behaviour sometimes observed.

11c) *What were the qualifications of 'relevant experts.' Please provide documentation of the 'discussions.'*

The relevant experts included members of the South Island kākā breed-for-release programme team, as well as a wildlife veterinary expert from the Dunedin Wildlife Hospital. Qualifications are withheld under section 9(2)(g)(ii). Discussions were generally conducted via phone or video conferencing, and sometimes in-person. One email update is in scope of your request and is provided as item 2. Some information has been withheld from this document under section 9(2)(g)(ii) of the Official Information Act.

12 *In OIAD-4207 Item 4 Captive kaka programme emails - DOC-7733434.pdf, page 278, in an email dated June 19, 2024, it was stated: "Charlie appeared unphased, clam and interested in her surroundings and the other kaka on release today. Unfortunately, it was noted within the hour what appeared to me to be stereotypical swaying behaviour."*

I have chosen to re-release this full email chain to assist your understanding (see Item 3).

12a) *What treatment plan was implemented when this observation was made?*

The 'Management Plan for Charlie Kākā held at Dunedin Botanic Gardens' was developed and implemented.

12b) *Why does DOC state that [REDACTED] presence affects Charlie's behaviour when she was noted to be swaying within the hour of her arrival and release in Dunedin? Why was this information not disclosed to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] during conversations on Charlie's welfare?*

Please refer to question 2. DOC has been open about the fact that Charlie's swaying was pre-existing. During his phone conversations with you, Tim Bamford would not necessarily have had specific details to hand about exactly when and where in Dunedin this was first noted.

12c) *Please state what experts were consulted in June to address concerns with the stereotypical swaying behaviour?*

The relevant experts included members of the South Island kākā breed-for-release programme team, husbandry experts from the Dunedin Botanic Gardens Aviary, and a wildlife veterinary expert from the Dunedin Wildlife Hospital.

12d) *In an email in OIAD-4207 Item 4 dated June 9, 2024, page 314, it is stated “Yes, a follow-up in 3 weeks, is probably a good time frame. [Redacted] will be back and have some time to monitor Charlie.” What follow-up was done? How much time does DOC provide to address a stereotypical behaviour that arose within the first hour of arrival at a new facility?*

Please note that the “follow-up” referred to in this email chain was regarding a follow-up news story. However, in answer to the rest of your question, the ‘Management Plan for Charlie Kākā held at Dunedin Botanic Gardens’ outlines the agreed plan to monitor and evaluate Charlie’s behaviours, including a timeline. The follow-up on this plan consists of DOC staff (members of the South Island kākā breed-for-release programme team) holding regular check-in meetings with husbandry experts from Dunedin Botanic Gardens Aviary and a wildlife veterinary expert from the Dunedin Wildlife Hospital to understand how the plan is progressing and Charlie’s current behaviours.

12e) *In an email in OIAD-4207 Item 4 dated May 3, 2024, page 229, it is stated: “s9 is arguing that Charlie has been housed at Te Anau for 17 yrs and will not cope with a change of housing, or the over stimulating environment at DBG. There is some validity to that argument, but we don’t know unless we try. I feel that if we move her over the winter and she can be housed with or near Bling that will help her settle in.” Why are concerns about the DBG environment acknowledged in internal emails but repeatedly dismissed by DOC when concerns were raised? Does DOC consider Charlie to be coping with the change of housing and over stimulating environment at DBG? How does DOC define ‘settling in’ for a parrot? Why is this concern not being combined with the concerns in the Open Letter to better support Charlie, a 26 year old female parrot who lived in the same location for 24 years and has multiple Te Anau residents advocating for her return?*

DOC considers, based on reports by husbandry experts at the Dunedin Botanic Gardens Aviary and a wildlife veterinary expert from the Dunedin Wildlife Hospital, that Charlie was showing signs of settling in. The behaviours seen were considered to be typical for a kākā experiencing a change in environment, and we do not consider the environment at Dunedin Botanic Gardens Aviary to be over-stimulating.

I have decided to release the relevant parts of the documents in Table 1 appended, subject to information being withheld under one or more of the following sections of the Official Information Act, as applicable:

- section 9(2)(a) – to protect the privacy of natural persons, including deceased people, and
- section 9(2)(g)(ii) – to protect members of organisations, officers, and employees from improper pressure or harassment.

In making this decision, I have considered section 9(1) of the Official Information Act and determined there are no public interests that outweigh the grounds for withholding.

You are entitled to seek an investigation and review of my decision by writing to an Ombudsman as provided by section 28(3) of the Official Information Act.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) and attached 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**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Document description</b>	<b>Decision</b>
1	September 2024	Management Plan for Charlie Kākā held at Dunedin Botanic Gardens	Released in full
2	18 July 2024	REPORT_ Aviary visit Dunedin Botanic Gardens 18 July 2024	Released in part
3	20 June 2024	Email chain including DCC, DOC and the Dunedin Wildlife Hospital	Released in part