

Revive Rotoiti

Rotoiti welcomes a fourth kiwi chick



Biodiversity ranger Kate Steffens holding Onahau during his annual health check.

Photo: Tim Cuff

A kiwi chick was discovered in the Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project (RNRP) this year during the annual June/July kiwi health checks. Though its sex is not yet known, Manawhenua Ki Mohua offered the name Marama.

The parents Onekaka (female) and Takaka (male) paired recently in the area as Takaka's true mate from the original transfers Rameka died in a flash flood back in 2006. The new pair were monitored closely from early on in the breeding season through to mid-March as neither kiwi had diagnostic type transmitters fitted. During Onekaka's annual health check and transmitter change in late March 2008, a brood patch was prominent; suggesting a nesting attempt had taken place. Huxley the kiwi dog didn't lose interest in Onekaka's burrow which raised suspicion that a chick remained deep inside the burrow out of sight.

It wasn't until Takaka's health check on 11 June that Marama was discovered to the delight of that days kiwi team. Onekaka's chick was approximately 115-150 days old upon discovery. When revisited three weeks later Marama had grown a whopping 200g which was significantly more than the RNRP's two other previous seasons' chicks; Ngahere and Rito at the same age. Marama is looking fit and healthy and will have an adult transmitter fitted in November. We welcome Marama our nineteenth bird to the project.

This years kiwi health checks began in May picking up momentum in June/July as certain birds had to be tracked 2-3 times before finally catching them. All the resident



kiwi are in good to excellent condition. Transmitters were changed on all but three birds that proved too difficult to catch before the onset of the breeding season. A kiwi dog will be necessary to find these birds again, once the battery life in their transmitters die.



Marama, the fourth chick to be discovered. *Photo: Paul Gasson, DOC*



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

2008 LEARNZ field trip

Photo right - RNRP coordinator Paul Gasson retrieves Pariwhakaoho from a burrow, (LEARNZ Peter Sommerville in back ground). Pariwhakaoho's health check was filmed by the LEARNZ team and uploaded to the LEARNZ web site as part of the field trip.

Photo: Heurisko Ltd

LEARNZ is an online education programme for students in New Zealand primary and secondary schools. The organisation offers virtual field trip experiences for students to 'visit' places they would never otherwise go to and interact with people they would never meet. Students' participation is supported by online background materials and activities, and is enabled using live audio conferencing, web board and diaries, images and videos uploaded daily.

The LEARNZ team - Mike Clemens - LEARNZ teacher and Pete Sommerville, camera man and managing director of LEARNZ visited the Rotoiti Nature



Recovery Project from the 4-6 June 2008 to carry out an RNRP virtual field trip that registered schools then followed. The three day field trip included topics such

as the history of the RNRP, biodiversity within the project which included a kiwi health check which the LEARNZ staff were able to film, and a day looking at restoration which included predator control and monitoring. Staff were also involved in live audio conferences with registered schools. The students put the

RNRP ranger Tamsin Bruce is attacked by a sock stoat! Right - The sock stoat gets whats coming to it! These props; a DOC200 trap, fake egg and a sock stoat are used as demonstration tools for school groups visiting the Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project.

Photo: Heurisko Ltd



staff through their paces, asking some really curly questions, both during the live audio conferences and on the 'ask an expert' web based question board.

Audrie McKenzie (LEARNZ teacher) also came on the trip to oversee two Thai teachers who were learning more about the LEARNZ concept before introducing the programme into schools in Thailand. The field trip was a great success with over 100 schools in New Zealand registering. Over 3000 students followed the RNRP virtual field trip over the three day period. The field trip will stay on the LEARNZ web site for other schools to utilise throughout the 2008 year and beyond.



Photo right - Community Relations ranger, Sally Leggett (left), LEARNZ teacher, Mike Clemens and RNRP coordinator, Paul Gasson (right) take part in a live audio conference with several schools on the LEARNZ RNRP field trip.

Photo: Heurisko Ltd

Rodent control

The RNRP is planning a rodent control trial this season to test the effectiveness of controlling rats using toxin in bait stations. The bait being trialled is Ratabait paste, (active ingredient, Diphacinone). This trial will require reasonably high rodent numbers to adequately test its suitability for controlling rodents over a large area. The high rodent numbers that follow after a heavy beech mast would be the ideal climate to test this type of operation.

We will be using our existing tracking tunnels to gauge the build up of rodent numbers as the summer progresses and if rat numbers do break through a 15% tracking threshold then the programme will commence.

What the weather brings

This will involve a lot of person power during the first few weeks of the operation as we have about 700+ bait stations out there to service and it is essential that the stations are refilled regularly until rodent take stops.

The daily weather forecast plays a central role in the day to day running of the Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project. Wild weather in August, however, has had impacts far beyond the day to day. In early August, St Arnaud was hit by severe winds, which brought down branches and flagging tape throughout the project area. The project team had just got its collective heads around the damage from the winds when the project was hit by a huge snowfall which caused much more extensive damage.

The snow started falling on Friday the 15 August and didn't let up for another two days. A depth of 60cm fell in St Arnaud over the 48 hour period. The DOC office closed down for



Safety first! - from left, RNRP rangers, Tamsin Bruce, Chris Doonan and Anne Brow prepare for a day accessing the snow damage along the rat control lines.

Photo: Chris Doonan, DOC



The remains of one of the rat control lines. If you look closely you may be able to see some pink flagging tape which marks where the track used to be.

Photo: Chris Doonan, DOC

three days as power lines broke across the region, and the roads became impassable. The snowy silence was punctuated by the eerie sound of trees crashing down under the weight of snow.

It was another week before the snow had melted enough for RNRP staff to be able to get back into the project area. Staff wore hard hats to protect themselves from falling tree limbs while they assessed the damage. One third of the approximately 89 kms of mustelid control lines and 825 hectares of rat control lines were heavily impacted by tree falls. It will take many weeks of staff time to chainsaw and clear lines – but the upside is that it made for some impressive photos!

Youngest staff member to date starts with RNRP

At two months old 'Fenn' is the youngest staff member yet to be employed by DOC. Dave Rees, Biodiversity - Programme Manager feels 'the younger you get them, the quicker they can be fully trained and ready to go!'

No, the RNRP have not resorted to child labour, Fenn is a young German shorthaired pointer. He is the first 'kiwi dog' to be bought and paid for by DOC rather than being owned by an individual DOC staff member. He will belong to the RNRP team and will be trained by Dave Rees and Sarah Forder who is carrying out the kiwi monitoring this summer.

Fenn will go through a rigorous training regime which will see him become a fully certified 'kiwi dog' and will then be used to help monitor the great spotted kiwi population in the project area. Fenn will take over from Huxley, Paul Gasson's 'kiwi dog' who has followed Paul and his family up to the North Island where Paul has started in a new position within DOC.



RNRP ranger Sarah Forder and Fenn.
Photo: Sally Leggett, DOC

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A new trapping line targets feral cats

Photo right - RNRP rangers Chris Doonan and Anne Brow, (in boat) prepare to deploy the new cat traps along the Lakehead Track.
Photo: Tamsin Bruce, DOC

Approximately 43 chimney style box traps housing two Belisle traps in each will be in operation along the Lakehead Track to Lakehead Hut by the end of the year. These traps will be set every 200 metres and will target feral cats.

Stoats are generally only a danger to juvenile kiwi below 1kg in weight, but cats could have a devastating effect on the whole kiwi population so even one cat wandering around the project area could cause a lot of damage.

Our main problem with these new cat traps is what to bait them with? Rabbit meat is the obvious answer but is also very attractive to wasps who will steal the bait from the traps over the summer months. We need to come up with a bait which is attractive to cats but less attractive to wasps during the height of the wasp season. If you have some good ideas for a suitable bait we would be keen to hear from you.



Friends of Rotoiti



The Friends of Rotoiti at their October meeting.
Photo: Bryce Buckland, FOR

The Friends have been busy over the winter converting old Fenn trap boxes to take DOC 200 traps. These new traps have been used to extend the Whisky Falls stoat line which now runs from the start of the Lakeside Track to Coldwater Hut. Some of the new traps will also be used to replace the remaining Fenn traps on the Mt Robert Road line.

The Friends will also be starting a bait trial on the Whisky Falls stoat line in November this year. The bait

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 honeydew 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.

to be trialled is a rabbit meat/ polymer based bait produced by Trapper Cyanide Ltd and will be set in all odd numbered traps with eggs in every even numbered trap. The study proposes to trial this bait versus fresh white hen's eggs to determine which bait type attracts a greater proportion of stoats to DOC 200 traps over a 12 month period.

Fresh white hen's eggs have historically been used as the preferred (and most effective) bait for attracting stoats to mustelid traps. However, this bait type has major logistical disadvantages, especially in large-scale projects. Hen's eggs are easily breakable in the field, take up a lot of room in packs and are heavy when carried in large quantities. The results of this research will be reported on in future issues of Revive Rotoiti.



Community Relations Programme Manager, John Wotherspoon (front) and Peter Hale, FOR set out new DOC200 traps along the Whisky stoat line.

Photo: Bryce Buckland, FOR

Revive Rotoiti on-line

If you would like to receive future copies of Revive Rotoiti by email (saving the project printing and mailing costs), please contact Sally Leggett by email at nelsonlakesao@doc.govt.nz.