

A history of kākāpō



Pre-human settlement

Kākāpō are abundant throughout New Zealand.

1800s

Kākāpō are confined to the central North Island and forested areas of the South Island.

European settlers bring rats, stoats, cats and extensive habitat loss begins. Kākāpō began to decline rapidly.

Lithograph: J G Keulemans, 1872, London.



Pre-human settlement

Māori settlement

Māori settlers bring kiore (Polynesian rat) and kurī (Polynesian dog). Māori also hunt kākāpō.

1894

Government's first attempt to save the species. Conservation ranger Richard Henry moved several hundred kākāpō to predator-free Resolution Island in Fiordland.

Richard Henry, 1900. Source: Hocken Library, Dunedin



1900

Stoats reach Resolution Island and begin the eventual destruction of the entire kākāpō population there.



1900

1949–1967

More than 60 expeditions to find kākāpō, focusing on Fiordland, with only 6 males caught. Species seems doomed to extinction.



1974–1975

Three Fiordland male kākāpō, including Richard Henry, are transferred to offshore island sanctuary Maud Island (Te Pāteka).

1970

1973–1977

No females and 18 males are found in Fiordland. Only one, Richard Henry, lives to pass on his genes to the current population.

1980

Cats are eradicated from Te Hauturu-o-Toi/Little Barrier island in the Hauraki Gulf/Tīkapa Moana. First female kākāpō is found on Stewart Island/Rakiura.

Use of tracker dogs begins as cage trapping is found to be too slow. 16 birds are caught including 3 females. First 2 Stewart Island/Rakiura birds transferred to Maud Island (Te Pāteka).

Mandy, the first female found on Stewart Island/Rakiura. Photo: Errol Samuelson



1980

1977

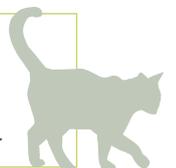
Estimate of 200 kākāpō found living on Stewart Island/Rakiura.

1979

First male kākāpō, named Mawson, is captured on Stewart Island/Rakiura.

1981–1982

Of the 13 radio tagged kākāpō on Stewart Island/Rakiura, 7 are killed by feral cats. Feral cat control begins.



1987

Decision is made to transfer the remaining kākāpō from Stewart Island/Rakiura to Whenua Hou/Codfish Island. Most birds are removed by 1989.

1990

1982

18 kākāpō are moved from Rakiura to offshore island sanctuary Te Hauturu-o-Toi/Little Barrier Island because of cat predation.

1991

On Hauturu, mothers fed supplementary food raise 2 chicks.

1995

There are 51 known kākāpō, with just 20 females. National Kākāpō Team is established by DOC to actively manage the species.



1992

Hoki, hatched in the first breeding year on Whenua Hou, is the first kākāpō chick to be hand-reared.

Hoki at 5 weeks old, being flown up to Auckland Zoo. Photo: Don Merton



1998
Richard Henry breeds with Flossie on Maud Island, producing 3 chicks.
Kiore are eradicated from Whenua Hou/Codfish Island.

2000
There are now 62 known kākāpō.

2002
The programme's first significant breeding season, with 24 chicks produced on Whenua Hou. The population reaches 86.

2009
A significant breeding season, with 33 chicks produced on Whenua Hou, taking the number of kākāpō to above 100! Also, the first successful artificial insemination with 3 chicks produced.



Sirocco, a hand-reared kākāpō, becomes an online sensation following the screening of BBC's *Last Chance to See*, helping bring the plight of the kākāpō to international attention.

2010
Richard Henry, the last kākāpō from Fiordland, dies.

Don Merton holding Richard Henry. *Photo: Errol Nye*



2016
Kākāpō breed on Anchor Island in Fiordland for the first time in living memory. A significant breeding season with 32 chicks successfully fledged between Anchor and Whenua Hou. One of Richard Henry's offspring, Kuia, breeds for the first time - ensuring valuable Fiordland genes are passed on.

2017
153 known kākāpō of which 47% are female. The team is working towards re-establishing kākāpō on Resolution Island, 123 years after pioneering conservationist Richard Henry began transferring kākāpō there.

1997
The last known kākāpō, a female, is found on Stewart Island/Rakiura and is transferred to Whenua Hou. Since 1980, 62 birds have been transferred to four islands; with 39% of these being females.

1999
Kākāpō are removed from Hauturu-o-Toi/Little Barrier Island and recovery efforts concentrate in the south.



2001
Stoats are eradicated from Anchor Island.

2004
Kiore are eradicated from Hauturu-o-Toi/Little Barrier Island.



2005
Kākāpō are established on Anchor Island.
Photo: Em Oyston

2012
Kākāpō re-established on Hauturu-o-Toi/Little Barrier Island as a trial to see if female kākāpō can raise chicks there without supplementary food.



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For more information: kakaporecovery.org.nz

@takapodigs

KakapoRecovery