



Media release

25th November 2015

Challenging start to kiwi breeding season

The Whakatāne Kiwi Trust has been humbled by support from local businesses, project partners and the outstanding effort of its volunteers during a recent predator incursion response programme in Ōhope Scenic Reserve (OSR).

The predator response followed what was a very encouraging start to the breeding season; with six monitored kiwi chicks hatched and volunteers checking their transmitter signals daily.

However, health checks soon turned into rescue missions after four of those chicks were killed in nine days. The surviving chicks were relocated to pest-free Moutohorā (Whale Island) and any further chicks hatched in unprotected areas will also be placed there until they reach a 'safe' weight.

Post-mortem examinations confirmed that all four kiwi chicks had been killed by a stoat.

The trapping programme in the OSR had already been intensified following a higher number of predations during the 2014-2015 breeding season, with different traps, bait and other control method variations tried. Rats, stoats, weasels, ferrets, feral cats and other predators are always being caught and the reality is that it is impossible to keep all pests out of mainland reserves.

Whakatāne Kiwi Trust Executive Officer Lynda Walter said "It's disheartening to lose any chicks, however it highlights the damaging impact predators are having on our native wildlife. New-born chicks are especially vulnerable. Research has shown that more than 90 per cent of North Island brown kiwi chicks hatched in unprotected areas will be killed by introduced predators within their first year. By reducing predator numbers we are giving wildlife within the project area a better chance of survival."

To help in the fight against stoats, several local businesses joined forces with the Whakatāne Kiwi Trust. A predator detection dog and handler were flown in to Whakatāne courtesy of Air Chathams. Duane Emeny, Airline and Charter General Manager for Air Chathams, said "Air Chathams has enjoyed a long history helping various conservation groups on the remote Chatham Islands in their efforts to boost native bird populations, and as such were only too happy to assist the Whakatāne Kiwi Trust when they contacted us regarding a stoat issue that was causing serious concern."

White Island Tours (who already supports the Whakatāne Kiwi Project by monitoring kiwi during their guided walks on Moutohorā) provided accommodation for Woody the dog and his handler, as well as all transportation for volunteers and kiwi chicks to Moutohorā.

Ms Walter said “Without the help of these businesses, the Department of Conservation, Bay of Plenty Regional Council and the volunteer hours put in by so many dedicated people we would not be able to meet our goal of ensuring we provide a safe haven for our wildlife, in their own natural environment.”

Woody hit the ground running and had soon identified several “hot spots” for stoat activity in the OSR. With the new information Woody and his handler provided, the Whakatāne Kiwi Trust decided to move ahead with a special poison operation to target the trouble stoats. Ms Walter explained “PAPP (para-aminopropiophenone) is a poison that is used to specifically target stoats and recent changes in the regulations around its use have allowed us to trial it in the Ōhope Scenic Reserve. The results from the trial will at least give some indication of the efficacy of PAPP and guide us in its possible future use”. This will be the first large scale PAPP operation on the North Island, and other kiwi projects around the country are keenly watching to see how it goes.

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Contacts

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Background information

Whakatāne Kiwi Trust website: www.whakatanekiwi.org.nz

Photos attached:

Photo 1 – Woody the dog and DOC handler Miriam Ritchie arrive courtesy of Air Chathams to Whakatane Airport.

Photo 2 – Woody checks out the cockpit of Air Chathams plane at Whakatane Airport.

Photo 3 – Woody the dog outside White Island Tours, Whakatane.

Photo 4 – White Island Tours staff with two kiwi chicks being relocated to Moutohorā (Whale Island).

Photo 5 – Kiwi chick being relocated to Moutohorā (Whale Island).

Photo 6 – Kiwi chick being relocated to Moutohorā (Whale Island).