

# WHAKATANE KIWI PROJECT

NEWSLETTER

3

July 2007

## KIWI RETURN TO WHAKATANE

The 2006/7 kiwi breeding season was one of the best yet for the Whakatane Kiwi Project. Twenty four kiwi eggs were removed from Ohope Scenic Reserve and surrounds and taken to Kiwi Encounter in Rotorua for hatching. This is made possible by the Bank of New Zealand Save the Kiwi Operation Nest Egg (ONE) programme.

Of those 24 kiwi eggs removed from the wild, seven were dead in the nest. One egg later died an early embryonic death at Kiwi Encounter, leaving sixteen viable eggs. These all hatched into healthy chicks and have been returned to Ohope Scenic Reserve and Moutohora (Whale Island).

At least 50 kiwi now reside either in or close to Ohope Scenic Reserve and have been seen on the walking tracks as well as on the main road after dark. OPUS and the Whakatane District Council have responded positively to this and new road signs now warn motorists of potential kiwi wandering in the area.

Moutohora has a genetically robust population of 20 kiwi sourced through the Operation Nest Egg programme in Ohope Scenic Reserve and Waiotahi pine forest. The island is predator free and the kiwi eggs are left to hatch in situ. At least three pairs have shown signs of breeding to date. One pair deserted their nest half way through incubation, cause unknown, but it is hoped that there will be live chicks on the island later this year.

Operation Nest Egg continues to be carried out in Ohope Scenic Reserve despite active predator control already in operation, (see overleaf). This is to ensure a high return of chicks from the four pairs of adult kiwi breeding there. Eggs will also be removed from radio tracked kiwi in the Waiotahi pine forest and from any recently radio tagged potentially breeding kiwi in the Wainui area.

Without Operation Nest Egg, at least 50% of all kiwi eggs left in the bush fail to hatch. Of that 50% that do hatch, 95% are lost to predators and of the 5% that survive, 1% make it to adulthood. Without intervention, this low recruitment rate will lead to local population extinctions and does not bode well for kiwi nationally.

In contrast, with Operation Nest Egg, hatching success rises to approximately 75%. Chick survival increases dramatically to 94% and more than 70% of the kiwi released back to the wild have made it to adulthood.

While kiwi numbers remain relatively low in Whakatane district, Operation Nest Egg is the best way to increase and stabilise the population.



Michelle Howard with kiwi chick in arms



Kiwi eggs in reeds

Adult kiwi being weighed



## PREDATOR CONTROL IN OHOPE SCENIC RESERVE

Intensive predator control targeting stoats currently operates in Ohope Scenic Reserve (500 ha) and on part of Ngati Awa Farm (1200 ha). Further extensions to establish a buffer zone around the main kiwi area are planned for 2007/8 (up 4,000 ha). This trapping which runs simultaneously and complements Operation Nest Egg, aims to provide sufficient protection to allow a high percentage of kiwi chicks to survive in the wild in the future.

Individual stoats can range up to 120 ha and overlap with other stoats in the area. To put all stoats at risk of capture, efficient and effective predator control must be carried out intensively over significantly large areas. Currently kill trapping is the only available tool capable of achieving any significant level of control over stoats. While this trapping minimises the risk of mustelid (stoat, ferret, weasel) predation on young returned kiwi, it does not protect them from dogs and feral cats also in the area.



*Stoat in Fenn trap*

Live capture cat traps are open periodically throughout the reserve, targeting feral cats roaming in the area. Any obvious domestic cats or cats with collars are taken to the SPCA or returned to their owners. Occasionally small feral cats have been caught in mustelid kill traps in the reserve despite the entrance hole being only 5cm x 5cm.

Regardless of obvious signs, dogs are still being taken into Ohope Scenic Reserve and other kiwi zones. Infringements can be reported to the Whakatane District Council on 306 0500 or 307 0729 after hours. Information should be obtained without confrontation and include the date, time,

description of the dog, vehicle registration and direction of travel. This will allow officers to meet dog owners at road ends and issue instant infringement fines of \$300 per dog.

After the death of a young kiwi in Ohope Scenic Reserve in June, live capture dog traps will be in operation. No dogs are allowed in Ohope Scenic Reserve without authority.

Kiwi Aversion training for dogs is offered free of charge and owners are asked to take advantage of this as kiwi are currently living in many unprotected bush areas in the Whakatane area.

Young kiwi are most at risk of predation when they weigh less than 1 kg. Studies have been carried out in the Coromandel Kiwi Zone to try and speed up this early growth of chicks and reduce the time they are most vulnerable. Chick growth rates have increased significantly when effective possum and rat control is in place, probably linked to reduced competition for food.

This is good news for Whakatane kiwi as Mokorua Scenic Reserve receives annual possum and rat control as part of Whakatane District Council's contribution to the kiwi project. Also, 140 ha of recently covenanted bush on Ngati Awa farm will be under a possum and rat control programme through a grant from the Biodiversity Condition fund. Most recently, Basil Dodds has agreed for possum and rat control to be carried out on his covenanted land adjacent to Ohope Scenic Reserve funded by the Queen Elizabeth II Trust. The Whakatane Kiwi project is actively looking for ways to continue this work on both private and public land in the area.



*Feral cat in trap*

## TRAPPING METHODS

The Whakatane Kiwi Project is guided by the Department of Conservation best practice for mustelid control. Trap lines should be no further than 1 km apart and trap density no less than 1 trap every 7-10 ha. To achieve this, Mark 6 Fenn traps in wooden covers were placed at approximately 100 m intervals around the perimeter of Ohope Scenic Reserve and along internal ridges and valleys. This is the core area and has one trap per 2 ha over 500 ha.

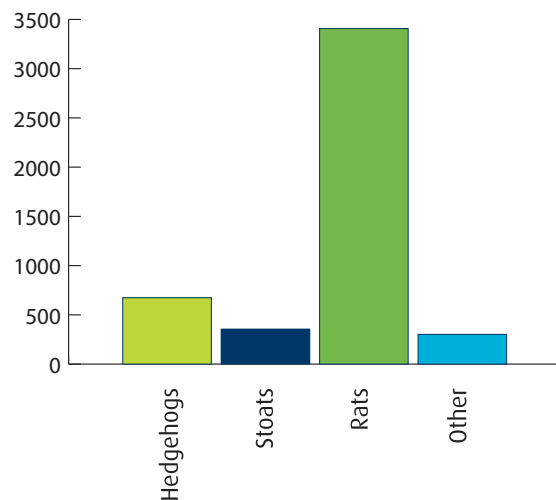
A New Zealand designed trap (DOC series) is now available and replaces the British designed Fenn Traps. The DOC series traps meets new animal welfare standards and have a greater trapping success rate. The large DOC 250s, which kills both ferrets and stoats effectively, have been used in all new lines on the bush / pasture margin and pasture habitat types at 1 trap per 7 ha, covering approx 1200 ha.

The Whakatane Kiwi Project traps are checked fortnightly by a contract trapper, Alister Coulter, and are baited with salted rabbit, alternating with fresh eggs during spring.



## RESULTS

Since trapping began in 2006, there have been 4738 recorded kills up to May 2007. Of these 355 have been stoats, the target predator.



Peak stoat captures coincide with when kiwi chicks would be hatching in the wild, and has not reduced during the trapping period. This is due to constant reinvasion from outside the core area. The only option is to create substantial buffer zones, preferably large enough to connect with and use natural barriers. Around Ohope Scenic Reserve the natural barriers are the ocean, Ohiwa Harbour and the Whakatane River.

In future the aim is to extend predator control out into Mokoroa Scenic Reserve and the matrix of private land next to Valley Road. This will bring 3500-4000 ha under predator control. Landowners willing to support this work can discuss potential plans and funding with the kiwi team.



## KIWI ON THE ROAD

Kiwi signs now grace the Ohope Hill Road following the sighting and capture of a young kiwi at 4 am near the Otarawairere turnoff and road works. The captured and unharmed kiwi was delivered to John Hohapata-Oke from the Whakatane Kiwi Trust and then collected by Tansy Bliss, the Whakatane Kiwi Project Manager. With help from VETS 4PETZ the bird was given a health check and identified as Hinepare by scanning the microchip under her right wing. As she had dropped her radio transmitter in January, she was fitted with a new one before being released back into the centre of Ohope Scenic Reserve. Two days later she had returned to within 10 m of the road and re-established her previous territory.

As well as the road signs, a kiwi proof fence may be needed along vulnerable stretches of this road.

Similar signs have been erected on McCoy Road where several kiwi road kills and recent sightings have occurred. Motorists are asked to take great care when driving at night in these places, as that possum in the edge of the headlights may now be a kiwi!

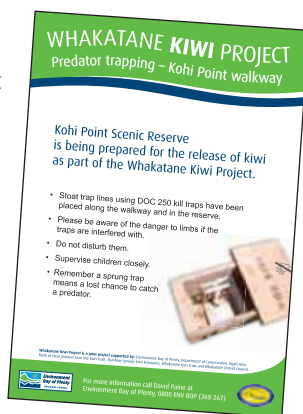


## KIWI CALLING

Thanks to the generous donation from R.N. Byrne, the Whakatane Kiwi Trust and 1XX, Whakatane residents heard the kiwi call every evening on the radio during April and May alerting them to the possible presence of kiwi in the area. All information received from listeners has been gratefully received and is being followed up with help from a Bay of Plenty Polytechnic student. CDs of kiwi calls can be borrowed from the Whakatane Kiwi Project by calling 307 0611.

## KOHI POINT PROTECTED

As part of the Bring back the Birds Care Group, West End residents are supporting kiwi protection. They're voluntarily checking new trap lines in Kohi Point Scenic Reserve and on Ngati Awa farmland north of the Ohope Road. The traps on the Kohi Point walkway should be respected and left undisturbed as they are very effective kill traps and serious injuries will occur if fingers are caught.



## WHAKATANE KIWI TRUST

The Whakatane Kiwi Trust has a key role as the fund raising arm of the Whakatane Kiwi Project and is also responsible for kiwi education and advocacy. The Trust is actively seeking members to help with this work and invites interested parties to attend the Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 8 August at 7pm, Lyceum Club Rooms, Domain Road.

## GREAT WORK!

Nga Tapuwae-O-Taneatua Tramping club very kindly donated their time and muscle power at the end of May and cleared a significant section of the predator trapping lines in the southern section of Ohope Scenic Reserve. The work was very much appreciated.

PF Olsen, is working with the Whakatane Kiwi Project to help protect kiwi in pine forests. Logging operators and managers met in the Waiotahi pine forest and looked at kiwi habitats and nest sites in an effort to work out safe logging practices in areas known to have resident kiwi. They also fund kiwi recovery work and the operation nest egg programme in the Waiotahi forest.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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A joint project supported by:

