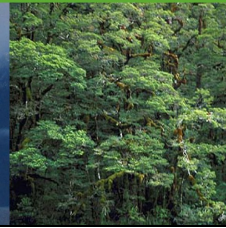
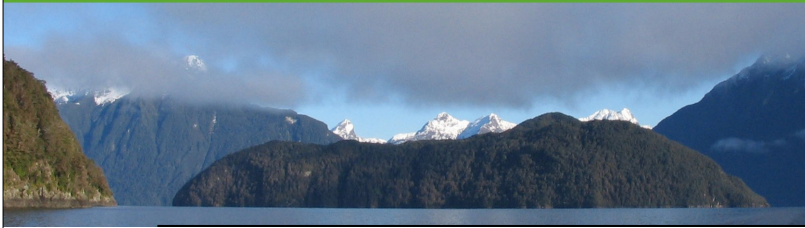


Pomona Post



April 2019



Tieke settle and breed

Following the release of 45 tieke on Rona last year, it is really good to be able to report that the birds have settled well into their new home. "These days when we arrive on Rona" said Trust Project Manager, Viv Shaw "it is very common to be greeted by tieke. Their call is so distinctive you can't miss it".



Juvenile tieke on Rona (Photo: Lynley King)

They've settled so well that volunteers have now spotted juvenile saddleback, or jackbirds, on the island. Trustee Lynley King was the first to spot an unbanded tieke. "I was so excited to see a jackbird that it was difficult to hold the camera still to get a photo" said Lynley.

Over the summer a number of different sightings of jackbirds have confirmed that several pairs of tieke have successfully bred on Rona. "We are really hopeful" said Trust Chair, John Whitehead, "that the tieke will go on to thrive on Rona". To ensure this happens the Trust, with funding from the Leslie Hutchins Conservation Foundation, is planning a further tieke translocation to bring

the founder population up to 60.

"Experience has shown that the more birds you translocate, the greater the chance of a permanent population becoming established in the long term" said John.

Robins for Rona

Approval has been received from DOC to release robins on to Rona. The Trust has previously transferred robins to Rona, but the numbers were too small for a viable population to become established on the island. "With efficiency in mind" explained Viv Shaw "the Trust is hoping to undertake a combined tieke/robin translocation from Breaksea Island to Rona. We are now just waiting for a suitable weather forecast.....".



Juvenile robin on Pomona (Photo: Viv Shaw)

Robins have done really well on Pomona, so if sufficient birds can be released on Rona they, like the tieke, should also thrive.

Mouse-free Rona

Volunteers have been working hard to maintain Rona as a safe haven for species such as the tieke and the Haast tokoeka. Much of the Trust's focus is on maintaining the island as a completely pest-free sanctuary. This includes working hard to keep Rona mouse-free for long periods of time. "With tracking cards present in tunnels on a permanent basis" explained Viv Shaw "we are able, very quickly, to pick up any signs of a mouse incursion". The last time a mouse was seen on Rona was in January 2018. "With a significant beech mast event about to hit" said Viv "we are aware there is an increased risk of mice returning to Rona." The Trust has plans in place to respond to any incursions.

One particularly positive outcome of a mouse-free environment is an increase in sightings of geckos. The *Woodworthia* Otago-Southland large gecko has been seen before on Rona, but in recent months Trustee Lynley King "has been really fortunate to see some geckos during trap checking trips on Rona".



Gecko on Rona (Photo: Lynley King)



Jo Marsh with a kiwi on Rona about to be returned to the sanctuary at Haast (Photo: Viv Shaw)

Rona kiwi go full circle

It's not just the tieke that have been doing well on Rona..... For the past year, Rona has been temporary home to 15 Haast tokoeka chicks. Living on a pest-free island gives these critically endangered birds the opportunity to learn to be kiwi whilst growing big enough to fend off nasty predators such as stoats. As soon as the chicks reach 1.5kg they can be returned to their permanent home in the kiwi sanctuary at Haast.



Jasmine Zingg helping a kiwi on its way back to Haast (Photo: Viv Shaw)

Earlier this month a team of volunteers helped DOC staff catch the kiwi. "Transfers are always a good opportunity to involve students from the local schools" said Viv Shaw. On this occasion exchange student Jasmine Zingg, from Switzerland, was the lucky one. "I'm really interested in the natural environment" said Jasmine "and the opportunity to help with kiwi conservation is something I will never forget".

Unprecedented stoat incursion on Pomona

Since the end of last year the Trust has been battling an unprecedented stoat incursion on Pomona. During a routine post-Christmas trap check, four stoats were caught within a relatively small area. "Knowing that a female stoat can give birth to up to 10 kits" said Project Manager Viv Shaw "we were pretty sure that there would be more of these nasty critters on the island". With kiwi eggs potentially about the hatch, the Trust stepped up its efforts. The frequency of trap checks was increased to fortnightly and by the end of January a further seven dead stoats were removed from our traps, bringing the total number to eleven.



Spot the stoat caught on camera on Pomona

"The key question" said Trust Chair, John Whitehead, "was have we caught the adult female?". Unfortunately the answer appears to be no! Cameras deployed after the incursion show a stoat still roaming the island. "Sadly, no more stoats have been caught in our traps since one was caught on camera" said

John. "But rest assured, the Trust is doing everything it can to catch this elusive predator before it can do any damage".

Kiwi safe

The appearance of so many stoats on Pomona was of major concern, not least because of the kiwi on the island. For the past eight months, thanks to funding from Kiwis for Kiwi and Meridian Energy, the Trust has been monitoring six kiwi on Pomona for signs of breeding. To add to the stress of the stoat incursion, two of the kiwi were due to hatch eggs around the time of the stoat incursion. "DOC staff were brilliant" said Viv Shaw. "They had arranged to remove any chicks that hatched from Pomona to ensure that they didn't get predated by the stoats".



Kiwi visiting its nest site on Pomona

Unfortunately when the nests were checked there were no chicks—the eggs had failed to hatch. "This is quite common for the Haast tokoeka" explained Jacinda Amey, DOC Ranger. "Our experience in the sanctuary at Haast shows that it often takes a few failed attempts before kiwi pairs successfully hatch an egg". The main reasons for failure are poor incubation or damage to the egg, because of inexperienced parents, or the egg may be infertile. The good news is that the kiwi were NOT predated by a stoat.

"Having cameras on Pomona has not only revealed our elusive stoat" said Viv Shaw "but has also enabled us to get some really good footage of the kiwi living on the island".

Ongoing kiwi monitoring

With no eggs having hatched this year, the Trust has decided to continue its kiwi monitoring project during the 2019/20 breeding season in the hope that an egg will be successfully hatched on Pomona.

Valuable volunteer support

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Trust. "We have been really impressed with the way in which our volunteers have stepped up over the past few months" said Trust Chair, John Whitehead. "Not only have we increased the frequency of trap checks, but there are now cameras to check and lots of photos to analyse". Since January over 6,000 photos have been taken and each one needs to be checked for sign of stoat, rat and/or kiwi.

Assistance has also come from Meridian Energy staff, with the whole Hydro assets management team spending time recently on Pomona helping to check traps. "Our staff pass Pomona everyday on their way to work" said West Arm Station Manager Brett Horwell. "It was a great



Meridian Energy staff learning how to set a trap on Pomona (Photo: Viv Shaw)

opportunity to spend time on the island to learn more about the Trust's restoration work and to get our hands dirty! "

Encouraging Creativity

It's not just volunteers who visit Pomona. In February, Trust Project Manager Viv Shaw hosted a group from the Otago-

Southland Regional Embroiderers. "This was an opportunity for people who would not usually visit Pomona to come and get creative ideas for their needlework" said Viv.

"Nature provides lots of inspiration" said the group's leader Sue Elliott "and I'm looking forward to seeing the work our members produce having spent a day on Pomona".

If your group is interested in spending a day on Pomona, either helping check traps or seeking inspiration, contact Viv at pomona.rona@gmail.com.



The Otago-Southland embroiderers on Pomona (Photo: Viv Shaw)

Pomona Personalities

The tieke (saddleback) is the newest Pomona Personality to be profiled in our newsletter.

Tieke Facts

At the time of European settlement, tieke were commonplace and found in the forests across New Zealand. As rat numbers increased, the South Island saddleback disappeared from the whole of the mainland. Fortunately, a small population remained on Taukihepa (Big South Cape Island) off the south-west coast of Stewart Island. This population was used as the source for transfers to Breaksea and other islands off the Fiordland and Stewart Island coasts. With around 650 birds, the tieke is now classified as 'at risk-recovering'.

Tieke nest in tree holes, rock crevices, and tree-fern crowns, usually close to the ground. They build nests from rootlets, leaves, twigs, grasses and bark fibres. Between one and four eggs can be laid between October and January. At sites with good resources (hopefully Rona!), they can raise up to four broods. Females incubate the eggs for about 20 days, but

both parents feed the chicks during the 26 day fledging period. Their diet consists mainly of invertebrates but they will eat fruit and drink nectar. They use their strong bill to prise bark off trees looking for food. They can be quite noisy and attract other birds which feed on the insects the tieke have disturbed. Tieke are territorial birds that tend to hop from branch to branch rather than fly. The oldest tieke is known to have reached the ripe old age of 17.5 years.

(Source: Heather and Robertson,



Tieke on Breaksea Island (Photo: Barry Harcourt)