Monday, 1 August 2011

Dear Maungatautari supporter and friend

Reintroduction of Kokako to Maungatautari

Many of you recently supported the reintroduction of robins to Maungatautari. Your generous contributions towards funding the catching and translocation of the robins, made it all possible. The robins can now be seen in several places on a visit to the Southern Enclosure. I am sure they thank you, as does everyone involved. Incidentally, those volunteers who helped to train and capture the robins at Pureora all say it was a truly memorable experience.

Now is the time to move on to the next stage of the maunga restoration. A second pair of yellow-crowned kakariki will be arriving very soon, possibly in the first week of August. Their translocation costs are low, and can be met from the small surplus left over from the robins.

Next on the list is kokako. This is a bird whose arrival many have long anticipated. Their beautiful melodic haunting song is one of those sounds that once heard is never forgotten. The common name for them, the blue-wattled crow, does not do justice to them. They can be quite difficult to spot in the bush, as they run and jump without sound from one tree top to another with extraordinary agility. Then they sing! It is a sound that carries a long way and stops you in your tracks.

The kokako was, until recently, rapidly heading towards extinction. It is already believed to be extinct in the South Island. Sadly, it was last seen on Maungatautari in the 1980's. Rats, stoats and possum killed the females on the nest. But now the maunga could soon become a main site for the survival of the species.

Capturing kokako can be very difficult. Mist nets are set high in the canopy, and you have to hope a bird flies into them. Then the nets are brought carefully down to the ground and birds removed unharmed. It is a very skilled job and it may take many days or even weeks. The birds will be sourced from Pureora, Mangatutu, Tunawai or Mapara. We have been fortunate in engaging the country's leading expert, Paul Jansen, universally known as 'Scratch'. He plans to start work in September.

The kokako will be released in the Southern Enclosure, where they will be 'acoustically anchored' by playing their song to make them feel at home, and settle in that area.

We can only start the capture and translocation of the kokako once we have sufficient funds. As many kokako will be caught as we have money for each year until we have the necessary foundation population of 20 breeding pairs. We are applying to Birdlife International for funding help, but they never wholly fund a translocation. We have to demonstrate that we can raise some of the funds elsewhere.

So we are turning again to our supporters for help. Gifts are of course tax deductible. Please help us to bring this marvelous songster back to the mountain.

Gordon Stephenson
(Chair, Maungatautari Biodiversity Restoration Sub-Committee)

Name & Address

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