Biodiversity Management (Native Species) Report;

9 October 2011

(Last report 14.9.2011)

Kiwi

The male kiwi Mark has produced one dud egg this season (he had a single egg clutch), and Mark (the bloke) removed it to encourage him to re-nest early.

Mark (the bloke) has tagged a chick each from Robin's and Elmo's nests. Both males had 2-egg first clutches (as normal). Elmo is still incubating his second egg – but Mark had to modify Robin's nest burrow while radio-tagging the first hatched chick, so as a precaution he rescued the second egg for artificial incubation at Kiwi Encounter. It has successfully hatched there, and the chick should be due for release back onto the mountain soon.

Puke, Parure and Tari are currently incubating eggs – as well as Elmo still incubating his remaining egg, which might actually be hatching right about now.

Mark is currently preparing to send approximately 7 export kiwi to Taranaki at about the end of this month – if that timing suits all players. They will be our first kiwi exports to Taranaki, and there will be due ceremony associated with the transfer.

We are currently discussing with Taranaki Kiwi Trust the transfer to Maungatautari of some birds whose siblings/relations we have already received. Those birds have dropped off our radar here (e.g. through failed or dropped transmitters), and Mark & Bella haven't yet come across them for re-tagging. So just in case they have 'demised' for any reason (unlikely but possible), we thought it would be sensible to get more offspring from the relevant wild parent birds. But we can't really count them as 'new founder birds', as they won't necessarily bring new genes to our founder population. It's just a precautionary measure.

Karuwai is one of the first 4 young kiwi that we received (they came from Tongariro), and she is now a 7-year-old adult female. But she has never reached full adult size, and as far as we know she has never bred. Mike Goold found that she had some relatively minor blood abnormality when she arrived, but he didn't think it would necessary affect her too much. But perhaps it is that which has prevented her from developing normally, or at least contributed to it. Whatever the cause, we have now decided to discount her as a potential effective breeder – and that means that in effect we have only 18 founder birds in our kiwi population so far. We need 40 unrelated founders to have a good chance of creating a genetically robust population here.

We are continuing with our efforts to source new founders, especially from one or two potential sites in the Whanganui area – and Tongariro DOC staff and Ngati Hikairo in particular have offered to help us obtain birds, as much as they can. Our goal is to have our founder population in place by the end of next season (9 years after we got our first kiwi), but the trajectory of our kiwi reintroduction programme so far does not inspire confidence that we'll achieve that. Like nearly all the other aspects of this (or any other) community

ecological restoration project, sourcing wildlife (especially kiwi) from other places is more often about human relationships and issues than it is about wildlife management. There are currently still reasonable numbers of western NI brown kiwi in some parts of their remaining range, but those numbers will be diminishing as we speak.

Takahe

Ngutu Whero and Mārōrō have now been returned to the South Cell, with their remodelled feet. Thanks to Massey for all their TLC, and to bird handler volunteer Nola Tamaki for bringing the birds home. Both birds weighed close to 2kg on their return – and we expect them to gain a little on that, now that they are back in their normal habitat. Mārōrō has been fitted with a radio transmitter, to monitor for nesting. Mark has resumed his former intensive food/weight management of these birds, and we do hope that they will breed this season.

Jan Olsen reported last week that the adult pair Hauhanga and Matariki in the Tautari Wetland had started to show signs of nesting. We hope that they will be successful again, especially with a young auntie and uncle to help with family duties this time (as Tautari helped with auntie duties to raise them last season). If the nest is successful, the chick(s) might hatch about the end of this month – but takahe chicks are often quite secretive and hard to see for the first few weeks.

The Takahe Recovery Group requires names for their database, so I have given last season's 2 chicks the interim names of Jekyll and Hyde (Hyde was a bit cranky when we handled her for disease sampling, when Tautari was being quarantined for translocation to Motutapu). So Jekyll is the male with colour combo YG/WM and band number R-60572, and Hyde is the female with colour combo GY/WM and band number R-54578 – but they might eventually get proper names.

The last word from Motutapu is that Tautari has moved from the release site to 'Mullet Bay' (wherever that is), and seems to have already teamed up with one of the other released takahe.

Pitoitoi/robins

Mark and some volunteers have started some low-level monitoring for nesting activity. Some promising signs have been seen, but no nests have been found yet.

Hihi

Kate Richardson will be undertaking field work on the mountain again this season, as part of her PhD project. She will be keen to receive any sightings of hihi on the mountain, especially with colour-band combinations – and she expects to find a minimum of 30 occupied breeding territories this season, which will provide further indication that our population is on the way. Offers of help to find birds will be appreciated.

General

The first shining cuckoos started calling in Cambridge about 2 weeks ago. Landcare Research undertakes regular bird monitoring on Maungatautari, and this was one of the first species that they discovered was increasing significantly on the mountain following pest removal. Last summer their increased abundance was quite noticeable to casual observers on the maunga – and they could often be seen from the tower, flying across the surrounding treetops. Shining cuckoos are often heard in spring and summer, but not often seen – but on Maungatautari last year they were often seen, as well as being frequently heard.

They now seem to be more visible in Cambridge as well – and indeed as I am writing this, I can hear and see one calling from the top of a golden elm outside my house.

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