

## Tiny kiwi move into a new island home

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By [Eloise Gibson](#)



A Motuihe Trust volunteer helps introduce one of the 15 little spotted kiwi to the island. Photo / Motuihe Trust

The shrill, eerie call of the smallest species of kiwi can be heard by campers on Motuihe Island near Auckland after a small group of birds were taken there on Saturday.

Up to fifteen little spotted kiwi, which weigh up to 2.4kg and are about the size of a bantam hen, were released by Department of Conservation staff in front of a crowd of about 400 onlookers.

They join kakariki, kereru, dotterels and native skinks on the island 30 minutes from Auckland by ferry.

Motuihe Trust chairman John Laurence said the island was shaping up to be a miniature version of New Zealand before humans introduced mammalian predators.

"Spotted kiwi live predominantly on Kapiti Island, so not many people get a chance to see them," said Mr Laurence.

"We thought it would be a good thing for Aucklanders to know there were kiwi on their doorstep."

Stoats, cats and larger predators devastated mainland kiwi populations in the 1980s.

A spokeswoman for the BNZ Save the Kiwi Trust said the little spotted kiwi population would increase by 7 per cent a year if breeding and relocation projects worked.

About 1500 little spotted kiwi are left, mainly living on offshore islands.

Mr Laurence said people who chose to stay overnight on Motuihe might see kiwi eating sandhoppers on the beach or foraging for bugs in the long grass.

He said ground-dwelling bugs were not the food of choice for other native birds on the island "so the kiwis will have a field day".

Department of Conservation spokesman Brett Butland said the new kiwi population was the closest one to Auckland.

Overnight visitors to the island would hear the kiwi calling just after dusk.

He said the kiwis should thrive in their new home. But to help their chances human visitors should check all bags and boats for rats and stoats, and should not bring dogs to the island.

The 179ha island in the Waitemata Harbour, with its sandy beaches and native wildlife, draws thousands of visitors each year.

Coastal forest is being replanted by volunteers at a rate of about 50,000 trees a year.

Since tree planting began in 2003, conservationists have introduced saddlebacks, kakariki and skinks.

Eight pairs of rare dotterels have also settled there.