


Kiwi find gulf sanctuary

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Auckland Central MP Nikki Kaye with one of the kiwi now at home on Motuihe Island.

Nine endangered little spotted kiwi were released on to an island sanctuary in the Hauraki Gulf yesterday.

The birds were taken to Motuihe Island, 30 minutes from downtown Auckland, from a population on Wellington's Kapiti Island.

Motuihe Trust chairman John Laurence said over the next three years 40 birds will be taken to the island, which has been free of pests such as mice, rats, rabbits and cats for five years. It is hoped the population will grow to around 200 over the next 20 years.

Laurence said it was exciting to release the kiwi, which will join other endangered birds including saddlebacks and kakariki. There are only around 1500 little spotted kiwi left and having them on the island would let visitors see them in their natural habit, feeding on worms or sandhoppers in the early evening.

"There's nothing like seeing a New Zealand icon close up."

More than 260 people attended the ceremony yesterday, including Conservation Minister Tim Groser, who released the first bird. It was very docile and settled comfortably into a burrow. Groser said the release was the culmination of five years of hard work and that

it was an exciting step in the long-term restoration programme for islands of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.

Work to rid Motuihe Island of pests and predators started in 1997 and it became a sanctuary in January 2005. Laurence said since then plant and insect life had boomed and bird populations were doing well.