

# MOTUIHE PROJECT RESTORATION

March 2010

## Kapiti Kiwi Recovery Trip 7 – 12 th March 2010

**Our mission** - to find 26 Little Spotted Kiwi on Kapiti Island and relocate them to Motuihe Island.

**Rules** - to take birds in good health with a balance of male to female. Not to take Kiwi close to the Lodge, within 600 metres of the listening posts nor in the study areas.

**Composition of teams** - Steve Nelson, Phil Francis and Jill Bishop from the Trust. Hazel and Rogan from DOC and two kiwi recovery contractors – James and Natasha. 4 dogs – two English Setters, one Irish Setter and a Labrador.

**Level of difficulty** - challenging.

**Pre-trip planning** - logistically demanding to co-ordinate animals people, vehicles, ferry trips and flights.

Leaving Paraparaumu Beach on Monday 8 March 2010, those of us new to the experience of Kiwi Recovery work could not imagine what we were in for. We were quite a spectacle - 7 people, 4 dogs, kitset dog kennels, kiwi boxes and a myriad of other gear. 15 minutes later we landed on the northern end of the island to be warmly greeted by Kapiti Nature Lodge operators John, Amo and Minnie. Once all the gear was carted up to the Lodge it was time for the Kiwi hunt to begin.

Three teams were created and with a quick check of the maps, off we headed to various locations. The maps indicated that the island was crisscrossed with tracks – maybe in the late 1800s - but we certainly did not have the pleasure of walking on many tracks. The hunt was on! The speed at which the dogs moved through the steep, rocky and bush clad terrain was incredible. Natasha and her dog Breeze were relatively new to kiwi recovery work so it seemed Breeze was eager to please. On the first day the speed at which Breeze zoomed up and down ridge Lines made it difficult for Natasha and Jill to bush bash through to



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keep up with her. Even with the help of GPS and tracker collars it was still a difficult task to stay with the dog. On many occasions Breeze took them to wekas. She knew she had got the scent wrong. On that first day all the dogs took the teams to kiwi burrows, resulting in 6 kiwis being caught. Followed by 4 on Tuesday, 7 on Wednesday but could we get the remaining 9 on Thursday? All week the pressure was on knowing that people on Motuihe were booked to see kiwi being released.

The dogs ability to locate kiwis by scent is a huge advantage in the recovery of kiwi. All the dogs were muzzled and at no stage posed a threat to the birds. Having located a kiwi burrow the hard work began. Invariably we were perched on a steep slope having to search with our hand for kiwi. If you could not feel a kiwi you then carefully put a stick in to see how far the burrow went. Sometimes at this stage you could hear kiwi thumping their feet on the ground. With some idea of the direction of the burrow you then gently excavated a hole about a metre away from the entrance. You then used this hole to feel for the kiwi making sure to block the entrance. This process of digging holes continued on until you could feel the kiwi (hopefully a pair) and retrieve them. All of us have scars as testament to the kiwis' determination to stay on Kapiti.

Having caught the kiwis the next task was to check them over, band them and then carefully carry them back in canvas bags. Steve on one occasion had to carry 4 kiwis down

very steep terrain back to the lodge. Fortunately his training at the gym had given him excellent upper body strength for this difficult task. At the end of each day we swapped stories and compared scars. We were fortunate to have Rogan, Hazel, James and Natasha to share their experiences and knowledge.

Each day one of us would take the kiwis across on the boat and drive them to Wellington airport. We all admitted we drove like "nanas" with our precious cargo on board. The weather gods played a major part in us being able to get the birds off the island in time to get the 12 o'clock flight to Auckland. Air New Zealand was helpful and generous in flying the birds at no charge. Andrew from DOC then met the birds in Auckland, got them to the ferry and guided the release of the birds. It was like a military operation in that all those involved made sure the kiwis got to Motuihe with the minimum of delay.

Steve, Phil and Jill are extremely grateful for the experience of being involved in the recovery of 26 kiwis. Behind the scenes there were many people who contributed so much to make the operation a success. Without John Laurence, and Hazel Speed driving this project we would not be in the position of having 40 Little Spotted Kiwi on Motuihe. Thank you for your commitment and energy. Jill Bishop.



### **VOLUNTEER DATES:**

**Every Saturday/Sunday:** April/May/June/July

**Transport:** 360 Discovery: (Every Saturday/Sunday) (Advise Ticket Office you are a Treeplanter for discounted fare)

Depart Auckland Pier 4: 0800hrs, 1000hrs

Depart Motuihe for Auckland: 1305hrs, 1540hrs & 1700hrs

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## TRANSLOCATIONS:

**Little Spotted Kiwi:** It is great to hear these birds are becoming a little more vocal in recent weeks. Resident Ranger John Mills & Sam (Summer ranger) had night sightings on various beaches and kiwi claw prints are being found around the island. Relieving ranger Louise has also reported hearing Kiwi outside the volunteer house and around the nursery. With the dry conditions on the island, Kiwi are visiting the nursery at night. The watering system at the woolshed is keeping the ground conditions moist. This assists Kiwi in search of worms. 26 more Little Spotted Kiwi were successfully translocated from Kapiti Island between 9-13 March. A superb up close experience for Conservation Minister Hon. Kate Wilkinson, Motuihe volunteers and sponsors on all four Motuihe release days and although hard work, a very rewarding opportunity for those volunteers on the catching team. These birds were well travelled with different modes of transport by the time they arrived on Motuihe. It just goes to show that Kiwi can fly—thanks to Air NZ's support in the transporting of their precious cargo. Thanks also to Anne Rimmer for her excellent commentary on two of the release days. The 40 Kiwi now in residence on Motuihe fulfills the translocation permit. There will need to be monitoring undertaken in the future to comply with permit conditions.

**Bellbird:** Planning is also underway for translocating Bellbird from Tawharanui and Tiritiri Matangi in early May. These fabulous birds with their beautiful birdsong will be a welcome addition.



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## WEEDWORK / TRACK MOWING:

Weed control and track mowing has continued quietly over the holiday period. Now is a great time to tackle the mothplant with its white flowers visible and making for easy identification. A rewarding job knowing the pods have not had the chance to form. Each season there is a noticeable difference in the amount of mothplant growing. We still need to keep on top of it, however we are winning this battle. Volunteers are always welcome to help with this task.

## ISLAND NEWS:

This summer season so far has shown a decline in the number of dogs being brought ashore on to Motuihe versus last year. This is great news and we hope that this is as a result of the publicity from the Kiwi translocation. It may also be as a result of a permanent ranger on the island.

Plant growth this season has been tremendous. Up to a 12-18 inches growth on volunteer planted areas has been noted.

In our last Newsletter in August, we reported the ill health of a great supporter—George Nelson. Unfortunately George passed away shortly after the Newsletter was sent out. To Joan, Steve and families, we extend our belated sympathy. For those volunteers who knew George, he will be remembered each time we see the Sponsors Board in the Woolshed and Coffee Table in the volunteer house which he so kindly made for the Trust and other wooden memorabilia given to Volunteers.

## GUIDING:

Numbers on guided tours have been moderate over the season, however numbers have increased on last year. Weather conditions appear to have affected visitors to Conservation Islands. Camping numbers on both Motuihe and Motutapu are not as high as last year's cracker season. We would also extend thanks to our guides for their support. If you are able to assist with guiding please forward an email with your contact details.

## INFORMATION KIOSK:

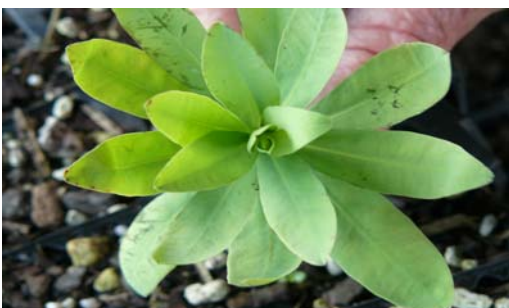
Thanks to all the volunteers who have assisted in the Kiosk over the summer. Sales of ice creams, water and hot drinks were excellent and provided us with a great opportunity to update visitors on progress being made by Motuihe volunteers and to also enlist new helpers. While some products for sale in the Kiosk have been phased out, other items have been added due to visitor requests.

## NURSERY NEWS:

Motuihe's nursery is close to full with 2010 plants. There has been a noticeable change in the plant growth with the new potting mix. Root trainers are looking great with new seedlings and a lack of weeds.

### **Euphorbia Glauca:**

Cuttings recently translocated by DOC Steve Benham are growing well in the nursery. Thanks to Steve for his efforts in introducing this new plant to Motuihe. Thanks also for his talk on this plant and showing volunteers how to propagate the cuttings.



## ISV:

The January ISV group again worked like Trojans. The Motuihe supervisors were delighted to be involved with this hard working group. We hope the students had an enjoyable 2 week adventure trip around NZ.