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Bellbirds return to Motuihe Island

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Bellbirds return to Motuihe Island

They've been gone since the 1970s, but by Sunday afternoon, up to 50 bellbirds will be singing in the trees on Motuihe Island.

The release is part of an ambitious Department of Conservation/Auckland Regional Council initiative that will see up to 200 bellbirds/korimako from Tawharanui Regional Park and Tiritiri Matangi Island sanctuary released simultaneously on Waiheke Island, Hamilton Gardens and Motuihe Island.

The Department of Conservation has been working alongside ARC, the Motuihe Trust, Landcare Research, Massey and Waikato Universities, Hamilton Gardens, Environment Waikato and Fenwick Reserve to plan and prepare for this momentous project.

DOC's Auckland Area manager Brett Butland says this is the first time bellbirds have been released on a pest-free island.

"We know that bellbirds flourish in pest-free environments — such as on Tiritiri Matangi — so we're hoping they will become established and start breeding on Motuihe," he says.

DOC has been working alongside the Motuihe Trust to remove predators from Motuihe for over ten years. Norway rats and mice were eradicated in 1997 and cats and rabbits were removed by 2005.

Since 2003, volunteers from the Trust have planted about 50,000 trees a year, and several other translocations have taken place including tieke/North Island saddleback, kākāriki/red crowned parakeet, shore skinks and little spotted kiwi. Motuihe's shores are also home for two threatened bird species — the NZ dotterel and the variable oystercatcher.

"Motuihe Trust and its sponsors are delighted to be involved with the funding and reintroduction of bellbirds to Motuihe Island. It's another milestone, acknowledging the achievements of our group in the restoration of the island," says John Laurence, Chairman of the Motuihe Trust.

"A team of Motuihe volunteers will be replenishing the bellbird feeding stations daily for the next 12 months in the expectation that the bellbirds will multiply quickly and will soon populate neighbouring Rangitoto Island and then bring their loud medolic birdsong to Auckland's suburbs."

"The transfer of bellbirds is part of Motuihe Trust's plan to re-establish forest on the predator free island with native trees grown and planted by community volunteers, to provide a safe habitat for rare and endangered native birds."

Mr Butland says the bellbird release will help breathe life back into the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park.

"Working with community groups such as the Motuihe Trust means we can accelerate the restoration of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park, bringing more native species to islands where Aucklanders can enjoy them. We

hope the bellbirds will settle in well to their new homes, but we'd love to see them eventually spread throughout the Gulf and hopefully to the mainland too," he says.

"With Rangitoto and Motutapu well on their way to becoming pest-free, and many other islands in the Gulf already pest-free, there will be plenty of suitable habitats for these bellbirds to thrive. In fact we've already seen bellbirds make their own way to Motutapu."

He says that visitors to Motuihe can help these new arrivals survive by checking their boats and gear for rodents before they depart.

"We want to make sure that pests aren't inadvertently reintroduced," he says.

The public are invited to the releases on Sunday 9 May.

- Motuihe Island, ferry departs Downtown ferry terminal Pier 4 at 10am
- Whakanewha Regional Park, Waiheke Island, 11am. Meet at the conservation car park for the 10 minute walk to the release site.
- Fenwick Reserve release will take place at the same time as the Whakanewha Regional Park release.
- Hamilton Gardens, 8am, see www.ew.govt.nz for further information.

ENDS

Background information

- The bellbird/korimako is unique to New Zealand, occurring on the three main islands and many offshore islands. Once common, their numbers declined sharply during the 1860s in the North Island and 1880s in the South Island, about the time that ship rats and stoats arrived.
- See the Department of Conservation fact sheet on bellbirds at <http://www.doc.govt.nz/upload/documents/about-doc/concessions-andpermits/conservation-revealed/bellbird-korimako-lowres.pdf>
- For information on the Motuihe Trust see www.motuihe.org.nz
- For information about keeping the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park free of pests see www.treasureislands.co.nz