

HAUTURU

LITTLE BARRIER ISLAND SUPPORTERS TRUST

PATRON: DON BINNEY OBE
PO BOX 48-232 BLOCKHOUSE BAY AUCKLAND 0644
WWW.LITTLEBARRIERISLAND.ORG.NZ

NEWSLETTER
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NEW SECRETARY WELCOMED

The Little Barrier Island Supporters Trust's new secretary is Sandra Jones, who volunteered for this pivotal role following the resignation of Denise le Noel after several years' sterling service.

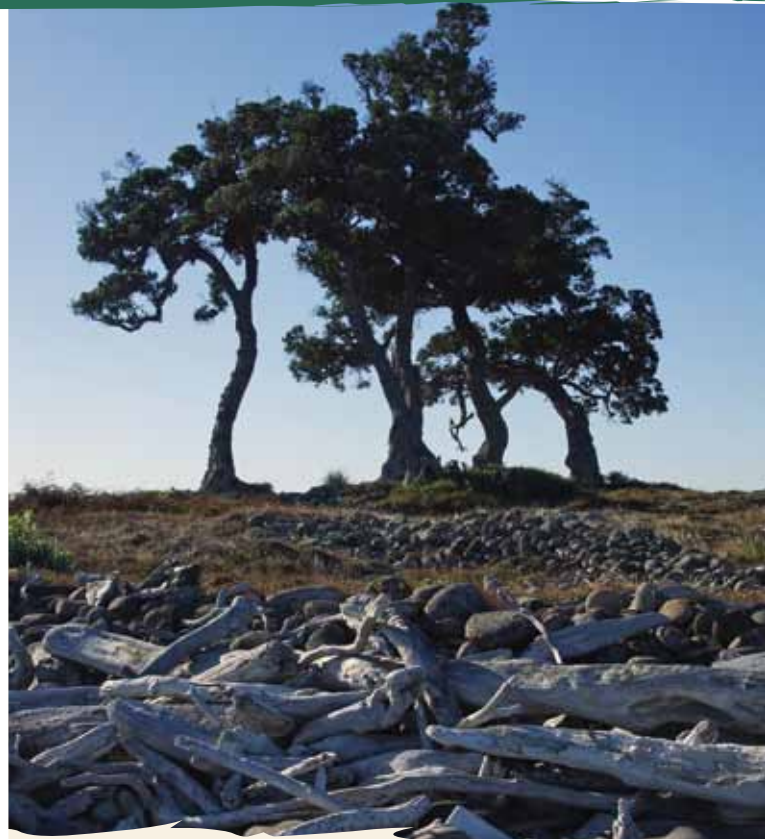
Sandra says that when she saw the advertisement in *Hauturu* for someone willing to replace Denise, she felt the time was just right. She had retired a year before as Registrar of the School of Biological Sciences at The University of Auckland and was ready to take on a role that wasn't too demanding, but satisfied her desire to support those actively involved in conservation. Sandra is a keen amateur botanist and has had a long-time interest in Hauturu, having visited the island three times in the early 1980s and again in 1993, for periods varying from three to five days.

Although she is particularly interested in the flora, she is also interested in the fauna and recalls the excitement of coming upon a kiwi out and about in daylight on the Thumb Track; the shock of seeing a tui being attacked and killed by wasps at the Tirikakawa Stream mouth, where she had gone to see the regionally acutely threatened species *Euphorbia glauca* (long since disappeared from this site apparently, but present elsewhere on Hauturu); and the delight of watching short-tailed bats flying over the hut at dusk each day.

Welcome to the trust Sandra!



The March weekend working group poses for the camera during a beach clean-up.



FROM THE CHAIR

Since the last *Hauturu* newsletter more translocations from the island have taken place very successfully. While the Trust supports these in principle, our first and foremost interest is in protection of the present inhabitants and their continued health.

As previously noted, the recent spraying of the pampas was funded by the Lion Foundation and this programme went very well. Unfortunately it will be a continuing issue as the seeds travel easily from the mainland. Thus we are grateful to local councils and the many volunteers who work to prevent such undesirable transfers.

We are currently looking to find sponsors for work that needs to be done. This includes: monitoring species populations on the island (it is important to know what is there at present), eliminating pockets of climbing asparagus, eliminating pampas, and further work on tuatara breeding. If anyone can help with these projects please feel free to call me to discuss.

John Hagen
Chairman

NEWS FROM HAUTURU

The Big Dry

At the time of writing this, the island remains as dry as a bone. We can't remember a drier summer here on Hauturu and the lack of water is evident everywhere, with many birds turning up in the garden in search of water. The well from which we get our water all but dried up in March and we came very close to having to close the island for visitors in what is generally our busiest time for translocations etc.

Kiwi have been one of the hardest hit, with many birds being seen out during the day and quite a few not surviving the summer. We have one young kiwi that we have named Awatea who is seen almost daily in the garden. Usually these young birds are out during the day in January but by now are usually able to cope with just feeding at night. The groups that have been catching birds out here have also remarked that most birds are full of mites.

Translocations

Another busy summer/autumn translocation period is almost at an end, with a few species being taken to other areas in the country to try and establish new populations or supplement others.

Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi came out to the island and caught several riflemen to complement the birds that were taken to Tiritiri last year. Fourteen birds were released onto Tiritiri this time round to add to the 31 last time round. A survey has just been completed, and 21 founder birds and seven new ones were identified. This is said to be an underestimate of the population so it would seem the translocation is a great success!

Twenty hihi were also taken to Tiritiri to top up the gene pool over there. Higher numbers of hihi are regularly taken from Tiritiri to other places such as Ark in the Park in the Waitakere Ranges, which takes a huge load off the Hauturu population.

Cooks Petrel were also translocated from Hauturu to Cape Kidnappers Wildlife Preserve. Fifty birds were taken down there and we have just heard that they have all fledged successfully, which is great as these birds have never been moved before. Seabirds provide somewhat of a challenge as they return to their place of birth when it's time to breed so chicks have to be moved instead of adults, as is the case with other birds. It is planned to move more birds over the next few years to establish a self sustaining population at 'The Cape'.

Luis Ortiz-Catedral has just finished a translocation of 50 kakariki to Tawharanui Regional Park which, at this stage, signals the end of kakariki being taken off the island. Birds have been moved to both Tawharanui and Motuihe Island. The benefit of sending birds to places like these is that you get a spillover effect, and this has been seen with kakariki turning up on Motutapu and Rangitoto.

HAUTURU ONLINE

As well as the supporters' website www.littlebarrierisland.org.nz the island has gone online via a couple of other means. The first is an Island Diary written by the island rangers that is a bit more frequent than the Hauturu Supporters' newsletter. It has information about what's happened, what's going to happen, who's doing it and why, and most of all, how all the flora and fauna are doing. You can ask questions or leave comments too!

The last translocation of the season was our national bird. In mid-May 30 kiwi were flown off the island via helicopter to Whenuapai, then onto a RNZAF Hercules for a noisy jaunt down to Masterton. From there they got a police escort to Pukaha Mount Bruce. The project, called 'Flight of the Kiwi' has been undertaken to supplement the population of North Island Brown Kiwi in the south of the North Island. The event got plenty of media coverage.

Last year, you may recall, there was a translocation of kiwi to Rimutaka Forest Park. We have since learned that the first chick from those 20 birds has been released back into the park after going through the Operation Nest Egg programme. The chick's name is 'Hauturu'.

Weeds

The island's weed programme received a huge boost late last year with Hauturu Supporters' Trust securing \$50,000 for the removal of pampas from the island. This work has been completed and it was great to get that much further ahead in the programme, so well done and thank you to all those involved in securing that funding.

At this time of year we are looking at starting to recruit for the weed team and hope to have them starting in mid-August.

Tuatara

The tuatara are starting to slow down for the winter now, and it has just been business as usual with feeding and watering. We will be releasing the younger ones in the next few weeks, which will just leave a few adults for us to look after for the next year or so and hopefully we will get some eggs later this year to bolster the population even further!

Working Weekends

As always, the two groups we had out this year enjoyed themselves immensely and got lots of work done in the tuatarium as well as a lot of hedge pruning. A big thank you to those people for your help. Working weekends provide a great opportunity for people to not only see the island by day but also to see what happens at night where the wild things are. If you've thought about coming on one of these trips, you won't be disappointed as there's plenty to see and do and always great company.

Coming up

In the last newsletter, I started this section by saying that it wasn't going to be a busy season with translocations but as you can see above, we've been flat out! Winter is generally a quiet time but we have a few projects on the go over the next few months: there are surveys on wetapunga, hihi, kiwi and also dactylanthus.

*Shane and Liz
Rangers, Hauturu Little Barrier Island*

The diary can be found at <http://blog.doc.govt.nz/category/haturulittle-barrier-island-diary/>

The other site for Little Barrier information is the social networking site Facebook. The special page dedicated to Hauturu is where people can share stories, look at other people's photos or video, post questions or even start discussions. If you are a Facebook member, search for 'Little Barrier Island' and it should lead you there.



ERIC WILSON

THANKS FROM RORY

Thanks to the Hauturu Supporters for obtaining funds for pampas control this summer. Most of you know what the work involves and know that it is an ambitious project and the use of helicopters is costly. I'm really excited about this as the additional funding is a big help to getting on top of this rather daunting problem. We should be able to see some good

headway this coming year because of the knockdown this summer.

There was very strong support at the Hihi Recovery Group meeting in April for monitoring of hihi on Hauturu to continue, so Shane and I are currently planning to get Robin Toy back to repeat the distance sampling in the SW corner and to do some in the area around Orau, where they started setting up last year. We are also looking into using remote devices that will record sound from peak times of the day over a period of one to four weeks, from which we hope to be able to derive hihi call counts from hundreds of hours of recordings using computers.

The call counts could then be used as a population density indicator for hihi, and possibly other species. If this is successful then we will be able to collect huge amounts of data at a relatively low cost. This would be useful for remote sites like Orau, and would be extremely useful in sites where birds are at very low densities and many hours are required to detect very few calls, such as after translocations to large sites such as Ark in the Park and Maungatautari.

Rory Renwick

Regional Manager, DoC Warkworth office

WORKING WEEKENDS: SPRING/EARLY SUMMER 2010

There are two more weekends planned for the spring and summer. All participants need to be reasonably fit and agile and to be prepared to cope, if necessary, with a difficult wet landing over large slippery boulders, and with a variety of tasks. There will be time for walking, bird-watching and botanising.

Target dates (weather dependent)

October 2-3 (Back-up: 9-10)

November 13-14 (Back-up: 20-21)

For further details re travel and costs and to register your interest in either of these weekends, please ring Judy Hanbury (09) 817 7604 or email her on jrhanbury@actrix.co.nz, indicating your preference for dates and giving your full name, address and phone numbers.

Closing date for enquiries: 27 August.

Opposite: February working group sets off.



KIWI MONITORING

Three call monitoring surveys of kiwi have been carried out on Hauturu: 1993, 1994 and 2002 using the 'kiwi call scheme' at six listening sites. Inclement weather prevented further surveys in 2006 and 2007 and so last year it was decided that the Hauturu Supporters Trust would organise a team of volunteers to carry out further kiwi surveys using the 'kiwi call scheme' methods at the same sites.

In July 2009, 12 intrepid volunteers spent a wonderful week on Hauturu counting kiwi calls for two hours every evening. The average number of calls (male and female) for all sites during the first hour was 8.76. This compares with the 8.2 average of the 2002 survey, four in 1994 and 6.37 in 1993. A crude estimate was made of the number of kiwi present at each site by observing the time, distance and direction of each call. This

gave a total of 55 birds over a listening area of approximately 590ha. On extrapolating this figure for the whole island (on the assumption that kiwi are evenly spread over the island), we get 286 kiwi. It is to be remembered that 20 kiwi from Hauturu were translocated to the Rimutaka Forest Park in April 2009. This number is expected to be somewhat less than the actual number of kiwi on the island.

The Supporters Trust provided the transport to and from the island and the DOC rangers made us welcome. A special thanks to those intrepid volunteers: Wendy Sporle, Lesley Baigent, Evan Hamlet, Duncan and Bonita Sutherland, Laura Lynch, Mel Willmott, Josh Thoresen, Chrissy Luey, Sian Portier and Toby Sharnley. The plan is to carry out annual surveys for four more years, using volunteers, then five-yearly thereafter.

Lyn Wade

LBIST Trustee



RUUD'S RAVINGS NO 12 A MISSING TOP PREDATOR?

It recently occurred to me that after visiting Hauturu for more than a decade I have never seen or heard a falcon on the island. As a keen raptor man, I find this quite remarkable; falcons tend to be noisy buggers when they patrol their territory and with the harriers cruising the flats you'd expect quite some commotion, from time to time. So I asked Liz.

Nah – never seen one, she said, although there are some old records, apparently.

It is perhaps not common knowledge that our native New Zealand falcon is regarded as an endangered species: perhaps 4000 pairs roam Aotearoa, and this would make them rarer than North Island brown kiwi, for example. Their numbers have declined over the past decades, for the same old reasons other bird species are struggling: introduced predators (stoats, ferrets, possums, rats, cats, dogs) and perhaps also pesticide use. If the percentages of injured falcons delivered to Wingspan in Rotorua are anything to go by, deliberate shooting appears to be a major mortality factor. Yeah: pigeon or poultry fanciers and misguided farmers, hunters and shooters.

Our falcons are distributed almost right around the country; basically from Auckland, Hunua and Coromandel down. They come in three 'races' depending on where they live: northern forest falcons, the bush falcons and the mountain falcons, each with subtle differences in size and hunting techniques. Our falcons have rather long tails, compared to the species elsewhere in the world. It helps with manoeuvrability in forest margin habitat. A quick change of direction and small passerine birds are prey; it's that simple.

Although insects are also on the menu, birds appear to be the main fare. That doesn't mean that rabbits are safe, or ducks and pheasants for that matter, even though they are several times the weight of an adult female falcon. Agility and speed, that's the hunting modus operandi. Peregrine falcons have been clocked at 389 km/h in a fast dive; that earned them the *Guinness Book of Records* as the fastest animal on the planet.

Our falcons may not be fastest on earth or the biggest or most beautiful falcons ... but they certainly are the meanest. Just take one look in their eyes and you'll know you are dealing with a top predator. Their eyesight is fantastic; about eight times better than a human's. Even their hearing is sharper than ours: a falcon picks up the sounds of nestlings of prey species begging for food and simply targets this potential food source on auditory cues alone. Sounds all very brilliant, doesn't it?

A year or so ago I discovered that you can see it all live for yourself at Wingspan (Paradise Valley Rd, Ngongotaha) when the birds come out to fly in the early afternoon. The experienced team (Noel, Debbie, Andrew and a raft of enthusiastic associates) are dab hands



at falconry, because that's the way they train their charges to, well ... charge around the Ngongotaha airspace.

It's spectacular to see the birds in action and it gives you an immediate impression how these top predators rule the skies. The Wingspan folk use the ancient art of falconry to make them fly and teach them to hunt, just like their mum and dad would in the wild. And the neat thing is that falcons, liberated in a suitable habitat, quickly forget their human imprinting and connections and go as wild as the wild ones.

The aim is to rehabilitate rescued eggs, chicks and injured falcons, but at the same time gather data on their behaviour, their likes and dislikes. At the same time the whole operation becomes an educational facility, a research station and a cultural centre for ancient arts and crafts. Additional activities involve natural pest control of grape-stealing little birds in the Marlborough district: imagine having falcons chasing the pests away in the vineyards! Yep, our falcons have adapted themselves to target introduced finches and blackbirds in modified habitats. They love the clear-felled forest compartments and forest margins of Kaingaroa with yellowhammers and such European cuisine. It's all about the ambush.

How does that translate to Hauturu and its habitats? The forested slopes of the island are steep enough to provide exactly the sort of hunting territory a falcon would welcome; the Te Maraeroa flats would be paradise, especially if the harriers can be dive-bombed (I've seen falcons noisily chase away harriers on Southland beaches). Hauturu is big enough for a few territories, the potential prey is brilliant, stupid and slow: think saddleback or kakariki, with a kokako for dessert. So what's stopping them being top predator? I believe it's a numbers game.

Arguably, Hauturu is on the northern end of the natural distribution range of our falcon. If the falcon populations do well, they'll be numerous and looking to extend their range: individuals will then be pushed out towards the limits. When falcons are struggling, the populations will occupy the original 'strongholds' and retreat from their marginal areas.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could welcome back a pair of falcons on Hauturu? Never mind the fact that they'd be dining on endangered bird species. It would be a great indication that our conservation efforts are starting to pay off and that ecological restoration in New Zealand is becoming more and more complete. Keep your eyes on the top predator! They will always be the top prize.

Wingspan is open just about every day of the year (falcons don't take holidays!) The best time to visit is from 1pm onwards, before the birds are flown. It's at 1164 Paradise Valley Road, Rotorua, ph (07) 357 4469 www.wingspan.co.nz

*Ruud Kleinpaste
LBIST Trustee*