

# ISLAND VISITS

HAUTURU SUPPLEMENT  
ISSUE 24 NOVEMBER 2010



## FOREST FLOOR GIANTS RELEASED

Hauturu is giving much more than birds back to other ecosystems. On September 24 the Motuora Island Restoration Society held its first release of 25 young wetapunga – 12 females and 13 males.

As Society vice-chair Robin Gardner-Gee wrote to the Trust, 'I'm delighted to let you know that 25 young wetapunga from Hauturu are ready for release on Motuora. These are the first offspring from a handful of adult wetapunga from Hauturu that were brought into captive breeding at Butterfly Creek in early

2009. As you will know, wetapunga have never been reared in captivity before and Paul Barrett (Butterfly Creek) and Chris Green (DOC) have carefully (and at times anxiously) watched over the wetapunga for the last year. This will be the first time wetapunga have been released to a new location beyond Hauturu and we hope that it will be the first of a series of releases throughout the Hauraki Gulf that will ensure the future survival of this fabulous weta.' A release for Tiritiri Matangi is planned for early 2011.

*Continues overleaf*



Scenes from the wetapunga release day. These impressive animals are half-grown as they are in their 6th or 7th instar or period between moulting. Wetapunga moult ten times to reach their full adult size. The female pictured above measures about 50 mm in length not counting legs or antenna; her body is about 100 mm long and she weighs between 25 and 30 grammes. She will weigh over 50 grammes when she is fully-grown and full of eggs. The males are smaller than the females. Translocating them at this size means they are able to defend themselves against other insect predators.

PHOTOS AND CAPTION TEXT: BRUCE ROSS

The following report by DOC's Chris Green aptly reflects the excitement of the day: 'After you all left on Friday I completed the release of all 25 wetapunga by the middle of the afternoon. They all seemed happy with their prepared accommodation. Bearing in mind I had no idea how they would handle the bamboo refuges (this has never been done before!) and expecting a mass exodus over the first night it was with some excitement I found seven remaining in their refuges on Saturday morning. They may not have actually left, just stayed put for the night to recover.

'However I was extremely pleased to find all seven still there on Sunday morning but as well three others had returned. Two went back to the refuge I put them in and the third went into one of the supplementary refuges in the same area. The latter is of huge significance. It is very normal for released invertebrates to disappear entirely and not be seen again for many years until numbers build up and only then do we know the outcome of the transfer. If these wetapunga do continue to use the bamboo refuges it gives us a chance to be able to monitor them in the coming months and years to follow their progress.

'Finding that three had come back was extremely gratifying. There are currently 150 bamboo refuges up in the release site and as of yesterday there were 10 out of the 25 wetapunga in residence! That is an extremely good outcome.

'This is a very significant event which I have been building up to for a long time. Quite a few years ago now I did a dry run of this whole thing on the Mercury Islands, where I successfully transferred a population of tree weta directly from one island to another using artificial refuges. The wetapunga have been hugely more complicated with the captive rearing and the need to formulate a different monitoring method. The bamboo refuges all have additional material inside to hopefully make them more attractive to the weta.'

The Trust is delighted the transfer went so well.

## CRACKING THE HAUTURU CODE

An exciting research permit application for a project on Hauturu has just been lodged. Dr Nicola Nelson, Senior Lecturer, Allan Wilson Centre for Molecular Ecology and Evolution, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington explains that the project is to 'biocode' all species in a location in New Zealand and understand their ecological relationships.

'We think Hauturu is an obvious choice for a location due to its amazing diversity, but also due to the similarity of parts of the island with the mainland (eg. it has kauri forest, it has a great altitudinal range, both of which are not usual for islands), she writes. 'An island is also optimal as it has defined boundaries. A similar project has been undertaken on Moorea (Tahiti) with respect to biocoding, but they have put less emphasis on understanding the ecology.'

'At this stage we are talking about a pilot study including 10 plots off a track heading up from the lodgings. Each plot would be 20m x 20m and we would aim to take a sample of everything in it – using traps and hides for reptiles (live capture and release), invertebrate traps, mist netting birds, plant sampling and removing soil samples. If the pilot was successful we would look to undertake plots across the whole island to capture all the diversity (species and habitats).'

Dr Nelson says, 'The biocoding aspect is a new approach for monitoring. By getting genetic markers for all species, it may in fact be easier to identify some species (especially the invertebrates where currently a specialist is required for just about every small group), but also to help us find whether there are species around that we just don't see. I'm particularly interested in this concept for monitoring for reptiles as we often don't see them. It would be great to take a sample of dirt and use the shed bits of DNA in it to help identify who frequents that area.'

'We intend this data to be useful. The uses I can see include understanding what species are where, and in what habitats (eg. valleys, wet areas etc), how they overlap with each other etc to establish a point in time for future monitoring of how well things are going on the island, to use for comparison with other locations, eg. how well might Taranga recover when kiore are removed etc. What happens to a healthy island when an invasion occurs, how do things change with climate changes etc. This project is likely to attract national and international attention.'

The Allan Wilson Centre for Molecular Ecology and Evolution is a group of scientists based throughout the country who focus their research on genetics, ecology and maths, and work with New Zealand's native biodiversity. Among the group are Lisa Matisoo-Smith, who works on the origins of people in the Pacific as well as the origins of the pigs, chickens, gourds, kumara etc that travelled with them. Nicola Nelson works with tuatara, and has helped incubate the juveniles on Hauturu. Most of her work focuses on islands in Cook Strait looking at effects of climate change on populations of tuatara. All her work has been with iwi and results are directly fed back into management.

The Trust awaits news on the proposal with interest.

## ARTISTS ON HAUTURU

An innovative project is under way to blend New Zealand creative talent with the raw beauty of Hauturu. Four notable landscape artists will be staying on the island for a few days in November, to be inspired to create works that will later be part of an exhibition at the Parnell Gallery. The brainchild of Rob Fenwick, commercial business advisor to the Department of Conservation and Sally Souness, the gallery's managing director, this scheme will allow artists to share with the public their interpretation of the island.

The artists involved, Tony Ogle, Cynthia Taylor, Brian Strong and Russell Jackson, will take away images and sketches to later create an exhibition about the island. The show will open in September 2011 at the Parnell Gallery, allowing people to see this inaccessible and special place through the artists' eyes. Funded by the Parnell Art Gallery with assistance from DOC, it is hoped that the venture will also lead to dollars being raised for island projects.

## KIWI MONITORING

The Trust's kiwi monitoring guru Lyn Wade reports that the Trust has received sponsorship from the BNZ SKT (Save the Kiwi Trust) for funding transport to Hauturu for kiwi monitoring.

Kiwi monitoring for 2010 did not go ahead because of terrible weather but the funding is available until mid-2011 so at this stage Lyn is planning for kiwi monitoring to take place in June next year.

### WORKING WEEKENDS: SPRING/EARLY SUMMER 2010

There is one working weekend planned for summer 2011.

All participants need to be reasonably fit and agile and 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)

**26/27 March 2011, with a back-up date of 2/3 April**

For further details re travel and costs, and to register your interest in this weekend, please ring Judy Hanbury (09) 817 7604 or email her on jrhanbury@actrix.co.nz, giving your full name, address and phone numbers

**Closing date for enquiries: Friday, 4 February 2011**



Left: The October working group. Trustee and group leader Lyn Wade is in the front row, second from right.

## WORKING WEEKEND REPORT : MAGICAL SIGHTS

*The following is excerpted from a report filed by volunteers Guy and Gloria Nash, who worked on Hauturu in October in a team led by Lyn Wade.*

Our preparations for a wet landing were warranted, and we took a rubber ducky across to the island and were helped ashore by the DOC staff stationed there. We then climbed the large boulders and walked the short distance to the cabin accommodation. After settling in and sharing morning tea we were introduced to the island by Shane and given our work for the day.

This consisted of digging out onion weed from an area close to the shore not far from the bunkhouse. We were very happy to undertake this task but feel that digging it out will never completely clear the problem and perhaps needs assistance from some form of organic plant control.

Around the bunkhouse were many kereru just sitting on the grass, as well as pukeko, brown teal, swallow, hawk. While we were weeding an absolutely magical sight was dolphins swimming and jumping just offshore. Before dinner there was also time to explore the tracks nearby and get a feel for the different varieties of bird life and fauna.

A shared barbecue at Shane and Liz's house with the other DOC staff was an excellent time for us to get to know one another and share other life adventures before we headed off into the dark under a starry night sky with our torches to spot gecko, kiwi, wetapunga and what else might be of interest. After our early morning and the adventures of the day it was a reasonably early retirement to bed in very comfortable accommodation.

On Sunday morning we headed up the Hamilton Track, a gradual climb peaking at 300 metres, through beautiful bush with beech and kauri growing side by side and many species of fern with marvellous patches of kidney ferns. Bird calls were prevalent; we saw and heard kokako, bellbird, saddleback, stitchbird, kaka, kakariki (red-crowned), tui, tomtit, long-tailed cuckoo and fantail. Our descent was down the steep Valley Track and at the end was a marvellous finale where eight or so saddleback flew and played around us unaware of our presence.

The early afternoon was spent relaxing and cleaning up. We enjoyed lazing in the sun watching gannets, shags and other sea birds fly by.

A visit to the tuatarium, spotting a wetapunga resting under the ranger's house and seeing a seal marked the end of a great visit. The change in weather conditions simplified our departure: we climbed onto the boat while it was in the cradle, it was then rolled down the slipway and we then boarded the *Norma Jean*. It was a truly memorable weekend.

### WEBSITE WIZZES WELCOMED

The LBIST website is an excellent one but it needs updating to meet current expectations and so it can be of more use to those interested in the island.

If you have website development skills that you could offer we would love to hear from you. Please contact the Trust secretary Sandra Jones on [kemsdale@ihug.co.nz](mailto:kemsdale@ihug.co.nz)

### HAUTURU ELECTRONICALLY

If you are receiving this newsletter by post but would prefer to receive it by email, please let us know at [info@littlebarrierisland.org.nz](mailto:info@littlebarrierisland.org.nz)

### About the Little Barrier Supporters Trust

The Trust was established in 1997 to help support conservation and research activities on Hauturu Little Barrier Island. Membership of the Trust is by subscription and donations are also welcome. All donations and subscriptions are directed towards activities of benefit to Hauturu.

Your subscription ensures that you receive *Hauturu*, the Trust newsletter, twice a year, bringing you up-to-date news about the island. Copies of past issues are available on request.

If you wish to become a supporter, make a donation or offer help in some other way, please contact the Trust secretary Sandra Jones, [info@littlebarrierisland.org.nz](mailto:info@littlebarrierisland.org.nz)

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*Hauturu* is produced with generous support from Paradigm Associates Ltd.

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