

# *New Zealand* Conservation Trust & Willowbank Wildlife Reserve

## *Kaitiaki*

December 2018



## FAREWELL AND THANKS FOR ALL THE WORMS

**The** kiwi keepers are the caretakers for the smallest section of Willowbank. Instead of wrangling a variety of animals like the exotics, farmyard and natives keepers, the kiwi team look after just kiwi. During the breeding season, up to sixty kiwi chicks from three different species move through our incubation room and crèche pens. Generally, they stay for a couple months before moving on to new crèche sites. There are around thirteen kiwi who stay at Willowbank year-round.

**These** individuals are the kiwi who live in the nocturnal house, displaying for the many visitors who pass through each day. Others live in the outdoor enclosures, some in breeding pairs and some alone, unseen by the public as they slumber the day away in their burrows. The kiwi keepers know all these kiwi ridiculously well. To the point where we talk about them as if they are old family members, each with their own quirks.

**There's** Nic- ten years old and feral. If you doubt the aggressiveness of these fluffy, goofy looking birds, we'll tell you all about Nic. He likes to growl and snap his bill when we lift the lid of his burrow to check on him. We sport scars where he's managed to claw us as we perform his monthly health checks.

**On** the other end of the spectrum, there's Elvis, another ten year old. He's regarded as the sweetest and calmest of Willowbank's kiwi. When we're training new staff how to hold a kiwi, we start with him.

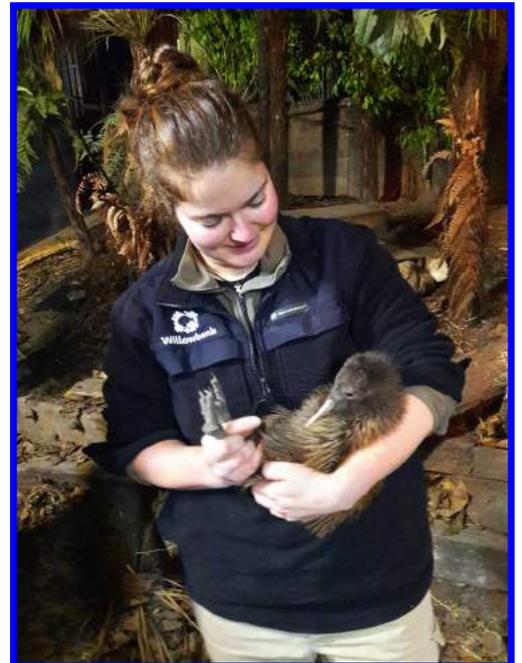
**In** the Nocturnal House there's Rātā, the youngest display bird still getting accustomed to life in the public eye.

In 1995 Rowi kiwi were thought to number just 160 individuals in the South Okārito Forest.

Thanks to the recovery programme over the last 20 years the forest has been filled to capacity and a new home needed to be found.

The Omoeroa Ranges were identified as being a perfect new home for Rowi.

A fantastic achievement from all organisations involved.



**Rata getting a health check**

**Luke**, is our prettiest kiwi with a sweet disposition, too.

**Two** of our girls, Lala and Shauny, are the best display birds. Of the kiwi you've seen in the Nocturnal House over the last year, there's a good chance it was one of them.

**Kiwi** transfers are common and necessary for the captive breeding programme. It's been years since any of our kiwi have been transferred away from Willowbank, but we have also received a lovely lady named Koru last year from Rotorua. Koru has been paired up with Matt who has been with us for twenty seven years. Koru and Matt are Rātā's parents.



**Frickleton interacting with Manukura.**  
**Photo credit: Pukaha Mt Bruce National Wildlife Centre**

**Over** the last ten months, four of our kiwi have left Willowbank destined for new homes.

**Frickleton** was the first to depart back in February - he flew up to Pukaha Mount Bruce National Wildlife Centre to befriend the famous white kiwi, Manukura. He made the newspaper; we have the article thumbtacked to the wall in our kitchen. We told his new keepers in advance about Frickleton's feisty attitude, and last we heard Frickleton and Manukura are good buddies.

**At** the end of October, Anzac moved down to Queenstown. There is a female around his age at the Kiwi Birdlife Park and in a few years, they could be a breeding pair, but for now they are getting to know each other. Anzac is a special kiwi to us keepers as being the first full term artificial incubation completed by our staff. (In most instances eggs are only removed at forty days but in this case it had to be removed from the first day) We sent a baby photo along with his records to his new home.



**Anzac's baby photo. Such a cutie!**

In November, it was Whenua and Tinkey's turn to leave. Unlike Frickleton and Anzac, these two weren't heading to another captive facility. Instead they were being released into the wild along with six other birds chosen from Orana Wildlife Park, Kiwi Birdlife Park, and Rainbow Springs Nature Park. They were flown up to the North Island and released into the Kaweka Forest Park, where the kiwi population needs some bolstering. We especially think Whenua will enjoy the wild lifestyle, as he used to defend his territory by chasing our volunteers out of his enclosure.

We know that each kiwi will be fine in their homes. We know that their departures help protect the future of all kiwi, by cultivating new breeding pairs and adding new genetics into wild populations. It's just a little sad seeing them leave. We've cared for some of these kiwi since before they hatched. But that's the job and it's a really cool job



**On release, Whenua is placed in a convenient crevice under a rotten log.**

**Photo credit: Kelly Eaton**

*Bethany Brett*

*Kiwi Husbandry Officer*

*"Birds were flying from continent to continent long before we were. They reached the coldest place on Earth, Antarctica, long before we did. They can survive in the hottest of deserts. Some can remain on the wing for years at a time. They can girdle the globe. Now, we have taken over the earth and the sea and the sky, but with skill and care and knowledge, we can ensure that there is still a place on Earth for birds in all the beauty and variety—if we want to ... And surely, we should."*

*David Attenborough*

# Kiwi Husbandry Report 2018

## Totals for the 17/18 season

By the end of the 17/18 Operation Nest Egg season, Willowbank released a total of fifty eight kiwi chicks. The first chick arrived October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2017 and the last chick left June 8<sup>th</sup> 2018. The kiwi team was joined in January by an American university student, Sage Dale, who interned with us for three months. Her timing was perfect - it was getting very busy.

Fifty three rowi chicks were transferred to either Motuara Island or Kaipupu Point. Over the season, we had some complications. Ten rowi chicks tested positive for salmonella. It was tested and determined to be a strain carried by passerines, most likely sparrows. Only two of those chicks experienced weight loss and were treated with antibiotics and the rest were retested after ten days and were found to be clear.

A chick named Flash was diagnosed with aspergillosis and flown to Wildbase Hospital, but the fungal infection was too advanced and the chick passed during a biopsy.

Two Haast tokoeka chicks were rehabilitated and released. We weren't expecting Haast chicks this year; however a drought in the Haast sanctuary sent the DOC team having to find accommodation for chicks who were starving in the wild. The first Haast chick, named Aotearoa, was wild the entire time he was with us. He never adjusted to the captive diet and determinedly ignored it in favour of a tray of dirt and worms. This wasn't enough to cause sufficient weight gain, so staff had to assist feed him four times a day. The second Haast chick, Ohm, was in worse condition and even had a near death experience which earned him some time at Wildbase Hospital. However he made a full recovery and was released to Orokonui Ecosanctuary.

Three great spotted kiwi chicks, Juno, Kaipō, and Jemstar, were released into the Paparoa Wildlife Trust crèche.

Over the last couple months, we've had some updates from last season's chicks: Jemstar was found in bad condition and Jo from Paparoa Wildlife Trust brought her over to be assessed by Pauline - who found some bone damage in one of Jemstar's hock joints. After some consultation, Jemstar was flown to Dunedin's wildlife hospital, but in the end had to be euthanized.

This season, we are working with the rowi team to test the current protocols for A24 traps used in areas with O.N.E. chicks and figure out better ones if necessary.

Another rowi chick from last season (Caramel Duchess, now renamed Caramel Duke) has returned to Willowbank for rehabilitation and monitoring after being treated at Wildbase Hospital for possible bacterial meningitis. He should be leaving us at the beginning of January.

## 18/19 season

This season has been much slower. The rowi DOC team will not be pulling as many eggs this year and we are only expecting six to ten chicks this year. At this point we have two on site and expect it will be another month before the next arrives.

The Paparoa Wildlife Trust has hit a run of bad luck. The first egg they pulled was damaged by the male. The central toe nail hole was patched up on arrival at Willowbank by Averill and Nick, but the damage was too severe and the embryo died a couple days into incubation. The last couple attempts to collect eggs have been thwarted by males leaving the nest when Jo goes looking for them. At last communication, Jo is monitoring three nests and will hopefully be able to collect one egg this weekend.

Matt and Koru laid an egg which had to be removed early on in the incubation period and was successfully hatched sixty six days later, which was Guy Fawkes Day. Just like last season's eggs incubated from day one, the chick hatched a week earlier than expected, but with no complications.



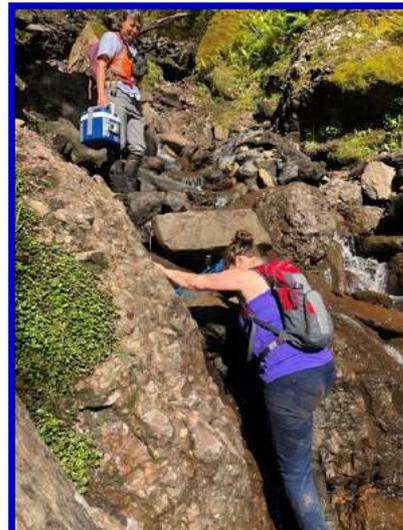
## GREAT SPOTTED KIWI EGG LIFT

This year, Beth and I had the privilege of accompanying Jo, from the Paparoa Wildlife Trust, on a great spotted kiwi or roroa egg lift. The previous day Jo had found the general area where our target male, Tawhai, was sitting on an egg and warned us that the nest was not easily accessible and, that we were in for a serious hike. That morning, as we drove up the hill to the nearest car accessible point to the nest, Jo pointed out territories of different nesting Roroa pairs and the pairs that had chicks.



It was a misty morning on The Paparoa Ranges so we weren't able to see exactly what we were getting ourselves into .... Jo insisted this was a good thing. As we made our way down an incredibly steep ridge on foot, Beth and I kept giving each other the look of "how on earth are we going to climb up this while carrying an egg?!" Jo the expert, of course, was completely unphased. When we reached the bottom of the ridge there was a very unstable portion of the path that

needed a rope set up to make sure we didn't slip into the creek below. Once we made it across the creek and its waterfall we began to hike up the ridge on the other side, once again Beth and I gave each other that very same look.



Several lumps, bumps, and bruises later we reached the top of the ridge that Jo had lead us to so we could identify the exact location of the nest. Soon Jo had us following her down through uncharted territories toward the nest following Tawhai's radio signal. Kiwi are tracked by transmitters, attached to their legs, that send radio signals to aerial receivers for people like Jo to find them. As the signal became stronger we replaced our chatter with hand signals so we did not disturb Tawhai, which could prompt him to abandon the nest and egg.

After Jo located the nest we were pleased to see that it was perfectly positioned in the middle of a collection of fallen logs. In order to gain better access to the egg we carefully, and silently, removed logs from in front of the nest entrance. Jo peered in and saw Tawhai proudly sitting with the egg then she quickly reached in and lifted the egg from the nest at the same time letting out a muffled "YESSSS!". It was a huge relief when the egg came out intact, warm, and free of suspicious smells. Earlier in the year when Jo collected the first egg of the season Tawhai's toe had gone through the top of the egg and the chick did not survive incubation.

**Next**, Jo carefully positioned the egg inside the transport box and we began to pack up our gear to make our way out of the bush. Now came the moment Beth and I had nervously been anticipating ... an elaborate game of pass the parcel on steep mountain ridges! Carrying such precious cargo across the room in the breeding centre is nerve-racking enough let alone an hour and a half hike back to the truck in the Paparoa ranges.



**We** took the journey back nice and slow, working as a well-oiled machine passing the egg down the line to keep the egg stable to prevent transport damage to the egg. Before we knew it, we were back to the rope railing and crumbling soil below. It was good to finally get past that difficult portion of the path and on to the final climb out of the bush.

**Four** hours later, we were back at the truck one roroa egg richer, and eager for the final portion of our journey ... a three hour drive back to Willowbank through Arthurs Pass, with very precious cargo on board.

**After** a long but very rewarding day Beth and I made it back to Willowbank about 5:30pm. We took the egg to the Breeding Centre to be cleaned and settled in an incubator. Before we closed the lid and tucked the egg in for the night we candled the egg and glowing back at us was a beautiful 30 day egg free of any obvious transport damage and most excitingly we saw embryotic movement (WOOHOO!!! A chick is growing).



**Before** this journey, Beth and I had only heard stories and seen pictures of the conditions Jo faces to collect these valuable eggs. With this experience we have a much deeper appreciation of the work that Jo and The Paparoa Wildlife Trust do to ensure the survival of this beautiful species. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Jo and the Trust for allowing us this opportunity and acknowledge what a privilege it was to assist Jo on this egg lift.

*Averill Moser-Rust*

*Kiwi Husbandry Officer*

# VOLUNTEERS

**Volunteers** are the backbone of our organisations. Without their help the Trust and Willowbank would not be able to achieve many of its projects.



**They** often have a passion for working in a specific sector, be it at the Exotic, Farmyard or Native section at Willowbank, or being outdoors helping the NZ Conservation Trust monitor the trap lines in the Craigieburn Forest Park or the Carlyle Valley.

**At** Willowbank volunteers play an important part ensuring the daily operations run smoothly. There is lots of food preparation and cleaning out pens to be done on a daily basis, but there is also interaction with the animals or birds.

**Volunteers** who help with the trapping programme are invaluable, as without their help the 550 traps the New Zealand Conservation Trust has in the field would be very difficult to monitor.



**In** recognition of the many years Mary-ElLEN has volunteered at the kiwi breeding centre she was awarded the Volunteering Recognition Award by Volunteering Canterbury.

## EDUCATION

**Educating** the public about our endangered native species such as the kiwi and tuatara is always rewarding. We are always looking for opportunities to expand this important part of our work and have recently spoken to cub and Rotary Clubs.

**The** 'Travelling Tuatara' visits to schools are popular with Frost, Gumpy, Burke or Hudson being model display reptiles. Always the most exciting part of the visit is feeding the tuatara its 'lunch' of worms and beetles. Having a kiwi specimen skin that people can touch almost always produces surprised reactions on what kiwi feathers feel like. Being able to show people the actual size of a kiwi egg fascinates most. The three mounted predators that we take with us is a great discussion point. A new addition at the presentations in 2019 will be a mounted kiwi.



# TRAPPING PROGRAMME



This year we have secured funds to purchase traps for the predator trapping programme at Craigieburn Forest Park and the Carlyle Valley from PF2050 DOC Community Fund and the Sargood Bequest. The Trust also received petrol vouchers from BP to help with mileage costs.

## CARLYLE VALLEY

The restoration of the Carlyle Hut is completed and we are now in the biodiversity phase of the project.

After the successful results from the first wasp eradication programme in February a second one is planned for 2019.

Of the eighty possum kill traps we have purchased twenty five have been positioned. The target is to kill 400-500 possums in 2019.

### Catches in 2018:

- Stoats - 11
- Hedgehogs – 14
- Rats – 8
- Weasels – 1
- Possums – 23 (project started in October)

In 2019 our aim to have a second survey carried out in the valley. In addition to the fauna survey we want to include flora, invertebrates and lizards

## CRAIGIEBURN FOREST PARK

Traps are currently being refurbished and modified with a number of the double traps being altered into single traps and a different type of entrance which will hopefully entice predators into the traps.

Overall there have been less catches this year than in 2017.

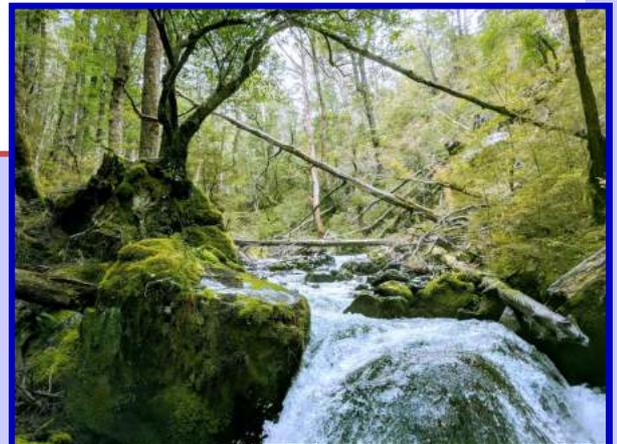
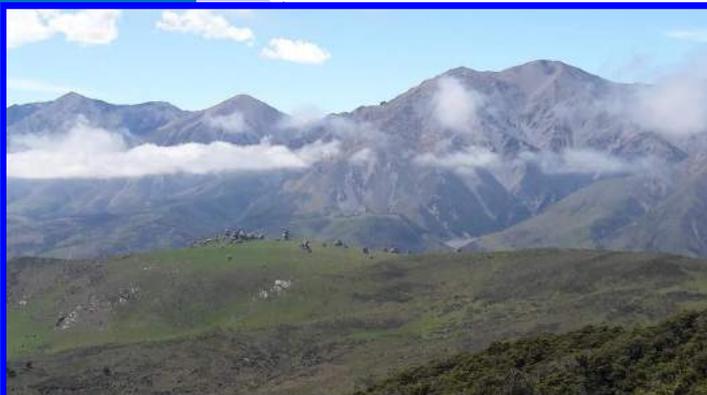
We hope to extend the trapping programme to Cass River in 2019

### Catches in 2018:

- |                |             |
|----------------|-------------|
| Stoats – 28    | Weasels – 3 |
| Hedgehogs – 17 | Possums – 3 |
| Rats – 7       | Rabbit – 2  |
| Mice – 6       | Ferret – 2  |

Possums eat about 21,000 tonnes of leaves and flowers in just one night.

One possum can eat 60 giant Powelliphanta snails in a single night.



## Kaka babies prepare to move on from Willowbank

Willowbank has been looking after some juvenile kaka. The youngsters are collected from captive breeding pairs around the South Island. They live over winter in Christchurch where they learn to eat the supplemental feed they will get in the wild and become stronger fliers.

In the spring they will be transferred up to Nelson to be released around the Abel Tasman National Park. Project Janzoon has carried out restoration work in partnership with the Department of Conservation. These kaka will supplement the existing wild population and hopefully create breeding groups in the park. Kaka are susceptible to predation on the nest. Because the females do the incubation of the eggs the population is now biased toward males. For this reason all the kaka travelling on from Willowbank are females.



## STYX MILL RIVER

This year Willowbank received a city council grant for riparian planting along its part of the Styx mill river. This involves planting native grasses alongside the river such as *Carex secta*, whose roots reach 1-kilometre end to end and filter out excess nutrients and sediment before they reach the stream. In other areas evergreen native trees are planted alongside the river to provide a constant flow of organic matter to support invertebrate life, unlike deciduous trees that drop all their leaves at once. These trees also provide fruit and nectar for birds and insects. Further away from the river, exotic broom is being cleared to make room for native shrubs chosen specially to support the native reptiles and insects that are commonly found naturally at Willowbank, particularly in our predator free area.

Some of the grant money is also being used to expand Willowbank's existing predator control program. Work started with lure filled chewable cards being placed around the park to identify areas where the pests were escaping the existing pest control program. The way different animals chew on these cards allows us to differentiate each species of predator.

Part time Native animal keeper Sam Willyams has returned to his former profession as a Restoration Ecologist to carry out this work with support from the rest of the park.



**Broom before and after**



**Overflow carpark**

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT—22nd AGM DECEMBER 2018

This past year has certainly flown by and has been another year of change for the trust. We are evolving as a group of conservationists and should be proud and celebrate our achievements. In an extremely difficult funding environment we must be streamlined and efficient in our operations. Jan, our General Manager and Education Officer, continues to deliver an ongoing education programme to schools, Rotary Clubs and other community organisations. Our trapping programs in the Craigieburn Forest and Carlyle Valley achieve positive conservation outcomes and are going from strength to strength. We have a core group of volunteers whose hard work and enthusiasm are a credit to themselves. They travel long distances, work hard, and give up much of their spare time in protecting our native flora and fauna here in Canterbury.

This year we have ended our telemarketing campaign as we endeavour to directly seek funding from corporates, community organisations and sponsors. We have reduced our telecommunication costs and all in all operate a more sustainable business model.

My thanks go to Willowbank Wildlife Reserve for hosting us on their premises. We continue to have a positive relationship and I look forward to an ongoing relationship based on mutual respect.

Sadly, yet again we are losing a long serving trustee from our organisation. Malcolm Ravenscroft has been a pillar of strength in all the years I've known him. He has financially supported the trust and provided much wisdom and stability in the field of kiwi conservation.

To the Kiwi husbandry team, I offer my thanks and appreciation; your passion and dedication to your work is exemplary.

My thanks go to our donors. I hesitate to single any one donor out but this year I will. The Rātā Foundation has been a great supporter of the trust for a number of years and I greatly appreciate their ongoing support.

To my fellow trustees and associate trustees I thank you for your support and wish you all the best of the Festive Season.

2019 will bring challenges for sure, we will be finalising our Strategic Plan and working on updating our Trust Deed. We aim to expand out predator trapping programs and work closely with the Department of Conservation in assessing areas that we can contribute to the protection of New Zealand's unique flora and fauna.

*Nigel Babbage*

*Chairman New Zealand Conservation Trust*

*The New Zealand Conservation Trust would like to thank the following supporters*



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**A big thank you for the invaluable contributions from individual supporters.**

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VISIT OUR WEB SITE: [www.nzconservationtrust.org.nz](http://www.nzconservationtrust.org.nz)

Or contact us: Tel: 03 359 6226 ext 704 Email: [conservationtrust@willowbank.co.nz](mailto:conservationtrust@willowbank.co.nz)



## You can support the Trust by becoming a 'Friend' or sponsor a native species

### Become a FRIEND of the NEW ZEALAND CONSERVATION TRUST for \$20 a year

When you become a **FRIEND** you are directly contributing to the ongoing work of the Trust in ensuring the continual survival of our endemic/native species.

Being a **FRIEND** entitles you to one free 'behind the scenes' kiwi breeding tour for you, and three children. This tour varies during the year, and must be booked 24 hrs before your visit.

Reserve entry is at an additional cost.

Receive our newsletters.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
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### SPONSORSHIP

Sponsorship gives you the opportunity to support the Trust's goals by providing care, rehabilitation and breeding programmes for our native species.

Sponsorship entitles the sponsor to:-

- ◇ Laminated certificate of acknowledgement
- ◇ Update of your animal's welfare

**Tick the species you wish to sponsor**

Kiwi

Tuatara

Kaka

Morepork

NZ Wood Pigeon

Kakariki

Buff Weka

White Faced Heron

Kea

Takahe

Brown Teal

NZ Falcon

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