



Remutaka Kiwi Milestone Achieved

The Remutaka Conservation Trust celebrates 15 years since the reintroduction of kiwi in the Remutaka Forest.

From an initial release of 6 birds in 2006, the kiwi population is now estimated to be over 150.

Kiwi have dispersed in all directions from their original release area and can now be heard across a significant part of the Forest.

The Trust goal of establishing a self-sustaining wild kiwi population in the Wellington Region has been achieved.

The Trust continues to support its kiwi by intensive trapping and monitoring across 7,000 hectares of forested land, through the dedication of a strong team of volunteers.

At the end of May the Remutaka Conservation Trust will celebrate a milestone. It will be 15 years since the Trust (then known as the Rimutaka Forest Park Trust) released its first kiwi into the Remutaka Forest, becoming the first community group to reintroduce kiwi to the wild in New Zealand.

On 24 May 2006, six adult North Island Brown Kiwi were released in the Turere valley. These were the first kiwi to return to the area in over 100 years. These first six were birds that had been bred in captivity and needed new homes. There were doubts about their future and no guarantees that they would survive in the wild in the Remutaka Forest.

15 years later the kiwi population in the Remutaka Forest is estimated to be some 150 individuals and we believe that the Trust's vision of achieving a self-sustaining population has been realised.

Years of hard work went into preparing for this initial release.



Photo: Neil Hutton

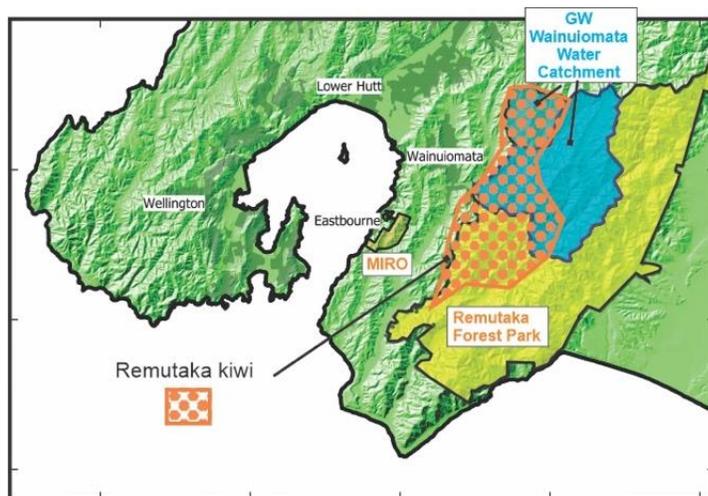
Marcel, a Remutaka kiwi.

Through the 1990s there was a growing awareness that the forests in most of the Remutakas were quiet, based on observations by regular visitors who had concluded that this unnatural silence was in large part caused by introduced pests, particularly possums, rats and stoats. These introduced pests had severely reduced bird populations and contributed to the extinction of some species locally. An extensive predator control programme was put in place with the goal of making parts of the forest safe for the return of natural birdlife. This led to the 'Restoring the Dawn Chorus' project which commenced in earnest in mid-2000 over about 200 hectares of forest.

Building on the practical experience being gained in the *Dawn Chorus* project, a vision of something much more ambitious emerged. The question was asked, why not design and orchestrate a more extensive pest trapping programme, in an isolated part of forest park, with the aim of creating a secure environment that might allow kiwi to be reintroduced?

A kiwi translocation plan was prepared in 2004, and the plan was approved by the Department of Conservation. The initial location chosen was the Turere catchment, a tributary of the Orongorongo River, and it is here that a more extensive trapping programme was introduced. In January 2004, several hundred traps were deployed by helicopter to various release sites. By late 2005 sufficient progress had been made to be optimistic about releasing those first kiwi.

After the release of the first six birds in May 2006, it quickly became evident that the Remutaka forest environment was suitable for kiwi. There was plenty of cover and food, and it was clear that stoat numbers had been significantly reduced and the adult kiwi were coping with the small numbers that were present. Breeding commenced and the first eggs were laid – possibly for the first time in about 100 years in the Remutaka forest. A second release of 20 kiwi from Little Barrier Island was completed in 2009. Since then, apart from the release of a small number of chicks from eggs laid by the Remutaka kiwi but hatched in the safety of a hatchery, the population growth has been the result of natural breeding within the forest.



Since these early days our kiwi have dispersed throughout the Remutaka Forest Park and the adjacent Greater Wellington water catchment. The kiwi are now closing in on the Wainuiomata township from several different tracks and kiwi calls can be heard at night throughout the area. Recent acoustic recording and trail camera monitoring detected a kiwi pair across the Orongorongo river!

Our trapping network has expanded to over 2,000 traps spread across 7,000 hectares of the Forest.

It has not all been plain sailing. Keeping predator numbers down has required intensive effort from our trapping teams, all of whom are volunteers. We have not always had the success we would have hoped for. Predation of kiwi chicks has been an ongoing concern, particularly in mast years, when beech trees have an overabundance of seed, and a dramatic increase in the rat population is accompanied by a corresponding increase in stoat numbers. We are also aware of a number of adult kiwi being killed by

uncontrolled dogs – it is a very sad occurrence when all the hard work of providing a safer environment for our kiwi is so easily undone by a careless dog owner.

It has been hard work, but the reward has been the establishment of a viable kiwi population.



Photo: Susan Ellis

A young chick outside the burrow of Rata, one of our resident kiwi, photographed in 2019.

Our success over the past 15 years has been due to the efforts of a number of very dedicated people who have been prepared to devote a lot of their time to achieving our vision. We are an all-volunteer organisation and we are totally reliant on grants, sponsorship, and donations, without which we could not carry on. We sincerely thank all those who have supported us both physically out there in the bush, or operating quietly in the background, or financially. The continued success of this important project will depend very much on the ongoing support from you all.

Finally, we have not achieved this all on our own. We are extremely grateful for the support we receive from Taranaki Whānui, the local Iwi, and the Wainuiomata Marae. Their keen interest in the return of this taonga to our forest should not go unrecognised. It is also important to acknowledge our links with the Department of Conservation with whom we have cooperated closely over the past 30+ years. We also appreciate the support we receive from the Greater Wellington Regional Council, on whose land some of our kiwi have chosen to set up home.

For more information, email info@remutaka.nz



www.remutaka.nz