

Parakeet 'squatters' start family on Mana Island

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Yellow-crowned parakeet (kakariki) chicks have been spotted on Mana Island, just seven months after 26 adult birds were transferred there from Te Kakaho Island in the Chetwode Island group, Marlborough Sounds.

Friends of Mana Island volunteers, who have been monitoring the birds since they arrived on the island, reported their first confirmed sighting of at least three chicks in a kingfisher hole during the weekend of January 8 and 9.

"While there had been many examples of breeding behaviour, such as prospecting for nesting sites, it was not until last weekend that we finally found the first small green needles in the green haystack," Friends of Mana Island president Brian Paget said.

Department of Conservation Wellington conservator Allan Ross said it was ironic that the nest of at least three chicks was found in a kingfisher hole when "deluxe" nesting facilities had been laid on for them.

"We had expected to find nests high in the mature macrocarpas and in several of the 200 nesting boxes built and installed by volunteers in 2003. We are hopeful that several other birds have already taken advantage of these more 'up-market homes' and have fledged or are raising offspring."

There has already been an unconfirmed sighting of a juvenile bird and several other pairs are behaving like doting parents.

Mr Paget said it was obvious that the parakeets found the island very much to their liking and he anticipated that visitors to the island would, in only a few years time, be able to enjoy the company of flocks of these attractive birds. He paid tribute to the volunteers who had committed their time and enthusiasm to monitor the fortunes of the parakeets, often under trying and frustrating conditions.

Mr Ross said the project was a good example of the department and the local community working together on a project that could not have been implemented without the participation of a wide range of individuals, groups and companies.

Future transfers to the island will include fluttering shearwaters, starting from January 2006, and other species such as fernbirds, bellbirds and whiteheads in the near future.
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Background

Mana Island is a 217ha scientific reserve; 4kilometres offshore from Titahi Bay near Wellington. Following the removal of farm stock in 1986, and the eradication of mice in 1989/90, Mana Island is free of all introduced mammals. Ecological restoration of the island is guided by the Mana Island Ecological Restoration Plan. This programme has been characterised by high levels of community input, and is actively supported by the Friends.

Community involvement has extended, in several cases, to the funding and resourcing of important conservation projects; including the mouse eradication project in 1989/90 -

still one of the world's largest - and the establishment of the famous concrete gannet colony.

One of the principal restoration goals for Mana Island is to introduce (or reintroduce) threatened and locally extinct indigenous species of the southern North Island that are not able to exist in the presence of mammals, and are likely to have occurred in coastal habitats in the Wellington region.

Parakeets were part of the original Mana Island ecosystem. Reintroduction of parakeets will benefit Mana Island's long-term goal of restoring threatened species, restoring typical communities and restoring ecological processes of the island. The transfers will contribute to the Mana Island Ecological Restoration key task of reintroducing avian pollinators and seed dispersers.

Parakeets are an important part of a forest ecosystem. Although much of Mana is not forested, revegetation of the island is well underway and the established plantings will provide plenty of food for parakeets. In addition, parakeets are expected to exploit the super-abundance of exotic grass seed. These food sources are considered more than sufficient to support a viable population.

While both yellow-crowned and red-crowned parakeets are uncommon in the southern North Island, there is a secure and growing population of the latter on Kapiti Island. Yellow-crowned parakeets maintain a precarious foothold in the Tararua Ranges.

Transferring yellow-crowned parakeets now will allow a population to become established on Mana before the apparently more competitive red-crowned parakeets self-colonise from Kapiti Island, about 22km to the north.

Friends of Mana Island was established in 1999 to:

Promote and enhance the Scientific Reserve on Mana Island; and to encourage the general public to take an active interest in all aspects of conservation on the island.

It currently has approximately 260 members; including a significant number of families and groups. Over the past six planting seasons FOMI has organised and substantially funded the volunteer effort in planting almost 100,000 trees, and provided support for several other projects and activities, including the successful transfer of fairy prions to the island.

Essentially it sees itself as the umbrella organisation facilitating community involvement in the restoration of Mana Island, either through organising and managing projects and activities in its own right, or by assisting other organisations, such as the Ornithological Society, which may take the community lead on specific tasks.

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