

Robins on Hirakimata

April 2022

When North Island robins were returned to Aotea Great Barrier in 2004, 2005, 2009, and 2012 to Glenfern and Windy Hill Sanctuaries it was expected that a certain number of them would disperse over the island. What wasn't expected was that by 2016 the only population of the birds left would be on Hirakimata.

Biz Bell's team who annually monitor the Black Petrel there reported up to 90 sightings one year. But this could have been multiple sightings of just a few birds. The Aotea Bird Count in 2021 heard/saw robins in three out of five bird count stations.

Two years ago, the Aotea Great Barrier Local Board approved a grant to the Windy Hill Rosalie Bay Catchment Trust to contract bird man Dr Kevin Parker of Parker Conservation Ltd to band some of these birds so data could start to be collected on how well these cheeky little birds were faring on the maunga.

After two years of delay due to Covid, Kevin finally spent four nights in late March on Hirakimata to lure, trap, and band birds with their unique identification leg bands.

Twelve birds were caught, carefully banded, and then released. It is slow and painstaking work as first the birds must be found. Fortunately, robins have a very distinct call and are curious birds often hopping along a track in front of people so are probably one of the easiest native birds to attract. Once a robin territory is identified a clever net Potter trap is set up with a tasty meal worm to attract the birds in.

The trap is triggered by the birds themselves and then the bird is carefully extracted, and 3 or 4 coloured plastic bands attached to its legs. These bands are unique to each bird and are read top left leg down then top right leg down giving a code. For example, the robin below has the ID code of YM-GY or yellow/metal left leg, green/yellow right leg.



If you are walking up Hirakimata and spot a banded bird please record the bands, take a picture if you can, and send that information to lovebirds@xtra.co.nz.

With enough records, over time we will be able to have some idea of how well these birds are surviving and if the population growing.

Kevin found one banded bird on the maunga and from our records we were able to identify it as a bird translocated from Pureora Forest in 2012 and released at Glenfern Sanctuary. That bird is now at least 10 years old! Keeping good records really helps for this kind of information.

DoC has now an established grid of A24 Good Nature traps on the maunga which will go some way to protecting the robins and the only Aotea population of tomtits from predation. Kevin commented that the habitat on Hirakimata and the surrounding area is high quality for many other species that might be reintroduced to Aotea, assuming that pest control could be extended and enhanced. He also said that, assuming community support, a pest free Aotea, especially removal of rats and feral cats, would allow even the most pest sensitive species to be brought back to Aotea, thereby restoring the motu to something resembling its former ecological glory, and making one of the most beautiful places in the Hauraki Gulf even more beautiful.



Kevin Parker is a dedicated conservation scientist, and we are really appreciative of the time he has been able to give to this work. He is also currently leading the proposed research based translocation of tieke (NI saddlebacks) to Aotea for Windy Hill and Glenfern Sanctuaries.

Thank you to Aotea Local Board for this funding, thank you to Auckland Council for allowing the delay of funding use for two years, thank you to Biz Bell and DOC for the accommodation on the maunga, and Ngati Rehua Ngati

Wai ki Aotea and DOC for your support. Its great to know we have a fledgling population of robins established after an absence of more than 160 years!

