

REINTRODUCTION SPECIALIST GROUP, AUSTRALASIAN SECTION
FEBRUARY 2001 NEWSLETTER

WELCOME

Welcome to the various new people who I've added to the list since the last newsletter. A big welcome in particular to Phil Seddon, chair of the bird section of the RSG, and partner Yolanda van Heezik, who have returned home to NZ after many years doing reintroduction work in Saudi Arabia. Phil and Yolanda are now working at the Department of Zoology at the University of Otago.

KEEP THE INFORMATION FLOWING

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE provide information on your reintroduction projects, publications, new guidelines etc. so I can pass along and add to the website (<http://www.massey.ac.nz/~DArmstro/rsg.htm>). The website is an extremely valuable resource. For example, there is currently information on 123 reintroduction projects conducted in NZ since 1990 involving 61 species!!

NEXT ISSUE OF REINTRODUCTION NEWS

The next issue of Reintroduction News will be a general issue including a rundown of the activities of each section over the last 3 years. I need to write a report on the Australasian group's activities, so this would be an excellent time for you to forward information.

RECENT ISSUE OF REINTRODUCTION NEWS

The recent "special bird issue" of Reintroduction News (November 2000) had a strong emphasis on Australasia, with NZ articles on Campbell Island Teal, kaki (black stilts), hihi (stitchbird), takahe, shore plover, and toutouwai (NZ robins), and Australian articles on orange-bellied parrots, helmeted honeyeaters, noisy scrub-birds, and malleefowl. Information given in the NZ articles is summarised on the website (New Zealand/Reintroduction Projects).

AUSTRALASIAN ISSUE OF REINTRODUCTION NEWS?

The Earth Sanctuaries Foundation was seriously considering sponsoring an Australasian issue of Reintroduction News, but they have now decided not to do so, at least in the near future. The cost of such an issue would be \$US 3,100 for a 28 page issue or \$US 6,200 for a 56 page issue. I (again) welcome suggestions for sponsors, or particularly welcome anyone who wants to chase this. I have personally given this low priority, and would prefer to spend time improving information flow via email and the website than chasing sponsors. If we were going to seek sponsors, I wonder whether it would be better putting this toward another conference than toward a newsletter. On this note, I have thought about a conference from time to time (to follow up the 1993 meeting), but haven't had time to do anything about it. Again, if anybody else wants to pursue this you are more than welcome.

RSG LISTSERV

An international listserv is now available for members of the Reintroduction Specialist Group. To send information to everyone on the listserv, mail to: reintro@indaba.iucn.org. To join the listserv mail to: reintro-join@indaba.iucn.org.

DATABASE OF NEW ZEALAND PLANT TRANSLOCATIONS, NZ

Suzan Dopson and Rachel Coombe of the Biodiversity Recovery Unit, NZ Department of Conservation, have put together a database of plant translocations in NZ over the last 10 years. A hard copy will be available soon, and I will also add information from this database to the website.

TRANSLOCATION OF THE IMPERIAL MARQUESAS DOVE, FRENCH POLYNESIA

An article on this translocation will appear in the next issue of Reintroduction News. Contact Caroline Blanvillain (cblanvillain@mail.pf) about this translocation and other bird conservation work in French Polynesia.

PROPOSED TRANSLOCATION OF SOUTHERN EMU WREN, AUSTRALIA

Marcus Pickett (marcus@olis.net.au) is planning a translocation of the Southern Emu Wren in the Mount Lofty Ranges. Marcus is interested in feedback on holding, transport and hard release of small passerines (e.g. transfer boxes, feeding, timing).

REINTRODUCTION OF BLACK-EARED MINERS TO VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

A healthy population of the endangered Black-eared Miner (BEM) exists in the Bookmark Biosphere Reserve, South Australia, covering an area just under 400,000 ha. The potential scale and severity of wildfires in the mallee habitat means this single population is at risk of extinction, or at the least severe depletion, from a single wildfire. To establish a second population, 4 colonies (30, 10, 12, 17 birds) were translocated during September-November 2000 to the Murray Sunset National Park (633,000 ha), Victoria. This area once supported colonies of BEM but colonies became isolated through habitat clearing, uncontrolled wildfires and fuel reduction burns. Areas of the park containing mallee of suitable age (40+ years) for BEM were identified. While these areas are not extensive, additional large tracts of mallee will reach an appropriate age within the next 10 years. Two hard and two soft releases were trialed, both proving successful. In total 59 adults and 10 fledglings were moved, with only one fledgling lost during its week housed in the aviary. Radio-transmitters were attached to 5 birds in each colony, with a plane on standby. However the miners surprised everyone by staying at their release sites for the life of the transmitters. Incredibly, the first hard-released colony started building nests only 10 days after their release, subsequently producing 2 fledglings. One soft-release colony returned 7 weeks after their release and started building 80m from the aviary. The outcome of these nesting attempts is unknown. Colour band sightings revealed at least 75% adult survival after a month. Interaction between translocated and existing colonies has already been witnessed with unbanded birds joining translocated birds and a banded juvenile moving colony. A further 4 colonies will be translocated during the next breeding season. Contact Rebecca Boulton (R.Boulton@zoo.latrobe.edu.au).

SADDLEBACKS AND ROBINS TO ULVA ISLAND, NZ

30 saddlebacks from Big Island were reintroduced to Ulva (269 island ha in Paterson Inlet, Stewart Island) in April 2000. Norway rats were eradicated from Ulva in 1996. There has been subsequent sightings of rats on or around the island, and it is accepted that there are likely to be rats arriving occasionally. The approach of the Ulva Island Management plan is to maintain lines of traps and bait stations on the island, plus wharfs that boats are likely to be arriving from, that will hopefully prevent the rats from breeding and expanding. Because saddlebacks are extremely sensitive to rats, they are regarded to some extent as a "sentinel species" that will indicate whether the low-level presence of rats will be a problem for any rare species reintroduced to the island. A survey 1 month after the release located 22 of the saddlebacks. Contact Brent Beaven (bzbeaven@doc.govt.nz).

16 robins from Freshwater catchment of Stewart Island (18 km west of Ulva) were reintroduced to Ulva Island in September 2000. 14 of the birds have been seen since November, but this includes 5 birds that returned to their original territories in Freshwater catchment. At least some of the birds remaining on Ulva have started to breed. The return of some robins to their capture site is fascinating given that robins were thought to have extremely poor dispersal capabilities. The robins would have needed to do flights of 2-4 km over water to follow a direct route. Alternatively, they could have flown the shortest distance of 750 m over water to get off the island, but this would have required them to start in the opposite direction and then do a circuitous 30 km journey around Patterson Inlet. Contact Brent Beaven (bzbeaven@doc.govt.nz).

NORTH ISLAND BROWN KIWI TO BOUNDARY STREAM MAINLAND ISLAND, NZ

4 kiwi were reintroduced to Boundary Stream (ca. 800 ha managed mainland area, Hawkes Bay) between March 2000 and January 2001, and another is due for release in a few days. These kiwi have come from eggs removed from wild kiwi in the eastern Kaweka ranges. Eggs are transferred to captive incubation and rearing facilities at the Westshore Wildlife Centre, Napier, and chicks kept in captivity until they are at least 800 g. The birds released so far have been 3-4 months olds and weighed from 850-1150 g. Kiwi had slowly declined in the Boundary Stream area over many decades, and appear to have become extinct in the late 1990s. The extinction is attributed to exotic predators, particularly stoats. Control of rats, cats, mustelids and possums since 1996 has now reduced these predators to low levels, and the size of the juveniles released should ensure that they are not taken by stoats. The first male released died during a storm in September 2000, but the other two birds released in 2000 have now survived for 7-8 months and have gained weight. Female kiwi can begin breeding from about 30 months of age (males earlier), so the first female released could begin breeding by late 2002. Contact Tamsin Ward-Smith (twardsmith@doc.govt.nz).

REINTRODUCTIONS TO KARORI SANCTUARY, NZ

Karori Sanctuary is a 250 ha water catchment area in Wellington ringed with a predator-proof fence. Mammalian predators have now been eradicated from Karori, and reintroductions are proceeding. 20 Little Spotted Kiwi were reintroduced from Kapiti Island in July 2000, and the first nest has recently been found. Other reintroductions to date include 1 pair of shoveler from Wellington Zoo, 8 brown teal (captive bred), and 9 weka. Further reintroductions planned include bellbirds, kaka, tuatara, robins, and possibly whiteheads and tomtits. Contact Raewyn Empson (raewyn@sanctuary.org.nz).

LIZARD REINTRODUCTIONS TO WHATUPEKE ISLAND, NZ

Whatupuke is a 102 ha island in the Hen and Chickens Group, off NE North Island. 30 Mokohinau skinks and 30 McGregor's skinks were reintroduced from Middle Stack (200 m away) in 2000. These skinks are assumed to have become extinct due to predation from kiore, which were eradicated by aerial poison drop in 1993. Contact Richard Parrish (rparrish@doc.govt.nz).

UPDATE ON LIZARDS REINTRODUCTIONS TO LADY ALICE ISLAND, NZ

Richard Parrish recently searched Lady Alice Island (138 ha, Hen and Chickens Group) for Pacific geckos and Mokohinau skinks reintroduced in 1997 following eradication of kiore. Pacific geckos were found, including a gravid female and a juvenile, but no Mokohinau skinks. It therefore appears that the reintroduction of Mokohinau skinks may have been unsuccessful. If the reintroduction on Whatupuke (to beach habitat) is successful, this will suggest that the forest habitat on Lady Alice is unsuitable for this species. Contact Richard Parrish.