Report from the

Waikato Biodiversity Forum

held on Saturday 31 October at Papa o Te Aroha Marae, Tokoroa

Purposes of the day

- Work together to maximise outcomes for the ecosystem of the Mokaihaha Ecological Area
- Learn about kōkako management
- Visit the Mokaihaha Ecological Area
- Network and share ideas with others who undertake conservation work
- Learn about opportunities to be involved in the project.

Powhiri and Introduction to the day

The Forum participants were warmly welcomed to the marae by local mana whenua. Dame Malvina (Patron of the National Kokako Recovery Programme) attended the hui, along with sixty five people. The Forum hui was supported by South Waikato Forest and Bird, Carter Holt Harvey, Waikato Regional Council, South Waikato District Council and Hancock Forest Management. Speaking at the event, Dame Malvina said she was pleased to be lending her support to the Mokaihaha project. Being from a farming background in the Waikato, she appreciates the importance of conservation of natural biodiversity and the benefits to the community.

Presentations

Presenters included Erin Patterson from Department of Conservation who reported on the logistics and results of a census of kōkako carried out in the 2,100 hectare block in May 2015. There were 104 birds found mostly in the West Block: 44 pairs and 16 singles. Monitoring of pests was carried out soon after which revealed rats at 30% and possums 12%. An aerial 1080 operation was carried out in August 2015 over the whole site and the follow up monitoring showed rat numbers at 0% and possums at 1%. With fewer pests it is hoped that monitoring over summer will reveal higher breeding success. Ongoing pest control is planned with ground control in the West Block during 2016 and 2017 and aerial control of the whole site in 2018.
It is estimated that the carrying capacity of kōkako at the site is approximately 250 pairs.

Audience at the hui

Dame Malvina Major and John Innes talking kōkako

The importance of eliminating possums and rats from the area was also stressed by John Innes, from Landcare Research, who gave an outline of the history and current research that is happening in the 24 populations of kōkako in New Zealand. Since awareness has increased, managed populations are growing. Eggs, chicks and adults are vulnerable to animal pest predation. Detailed research in unmanaged block shows that 61-77% pairs attempted breeding each year but 86% attempts failed, mostly to predation.

For kōkako recovery to be successful there needs to be residual indices of one possum per 100 trap-nights and a 1% ship rat tracking rate on 1 November each year for several years at a site. More than10 on either count is considered a failed operation.

There are 24 populations of kōkako including 14 of the original 17 sites and all the sites are managed (including three islands). There are now 1310 pairs compared to 330 pairs in 1999. John concluded with the question of 'How many kōkako are enough?' And that the future may lie in managing communities, not species. Kōkako management involves pest control, pest control and pest control, genetics, community groups and DOC.
Leader of the National Kōkako Recovery Project, Tertia Thurley outlined kōkako recovery work around the North Island. She detailed how genetic diversity ensures the best chance of long term persistence of a species. For kōkako, long term genetic viability involves the number and genetic diversity of founders (>40), a high growth rate and the carrying capacity (>500 individuals). The methods to enhance long term genetic viability include annual pest control, increasing area of pest control as kokako population expands to >2000ha, creating habitat corridors, increasing habitat quality, translocations of kokako into site and minimising translocations out from site.

It is now understood that the relict kōkako populations have been harvested from too early in their recovery which may

have put those populations at greater risk than they would otherwise have been. Ideally populations need to be around 500 before birds are harvested from them. Growth rate has not been high (with possible exception of Little Barrier). There are many question marks because the birds are hard to monitor (or in some cases monitoring is not given priority). So as far as translocations go, the targets of having 40 founders and fast population growth to 500 birds is still a long way off. Translocations are glamorous, attract a lot of attention and coverage, but at the moment with kokako recovery could be achieved more kokako, and generally at less cost, by concentrating on existing populations and growing them to 500 birds, and at that stage then look more at translocations. Half of all kokako populations are managed by community groups.

Dame Malvina speaking at the opening of the hui

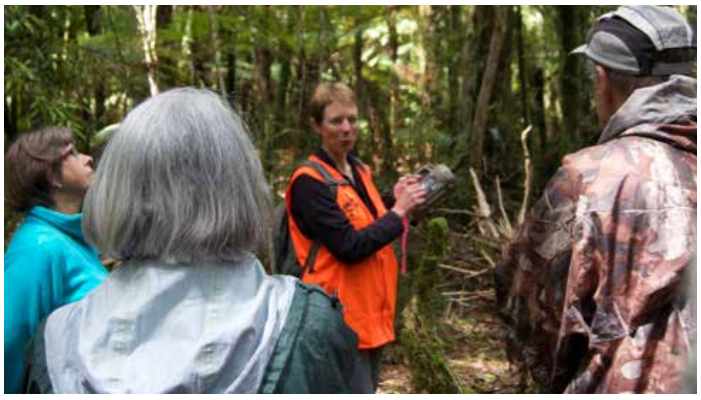
Erin Patterson presenting on the census

Field trip at Mokaihaha Ecological Reserve

The participants were taken on a fieldtrip to the Mokaihaha Ecological Reserve, twenty minutes north east of Tokoroa and were able to see the Kaimai plateau native forest which remains in this area where this population of kōkako have managed to survive. The groups followed a rough track put in to access the bait station lines which will be used to monitor and control animal pests in the future. Fox Pro recorders were used with the local kōkako dialect recorded on them but no calls were heard. Perhaps an early morning visit is needed.

A Mokaihaha Kokako Recovery group has been formed comprising representation from local iwi, community groups, businesses and councils. It is hoped that the local community will get in behind the project to help with some of the work.

Field trip gathering



Tertia Thurley using a Fox Pro recorder to attract kōkako

Opportunities for future involvement

The following points were raised in relation to Mokaihaha Kōkako Recovery Project:

- Public access in the future with a well marked network of tracks (or loop track) in conjunction with traplines, positive for locals to have access
- Move gate to allow access to reserve
- Signage which details forest ecology and birds
- Guided tours
- Benefit community -stay night and visit reserve
- Memorial
- Initial pest management control involving neighbours

Future Trust/Incorporated Society Aims

- Provide conservation education in liaison with Universities, Enviroschools and local schools
- Protect and enhance the biodiversity of the reserve including growing kōkako number
- Promote forest conservation
- Promote ecotourism
- Raise funds
- Collaborate with other groups such as, trampers, cyclists, hunters, mountain bikers
- Link with other ecological networks
- Provide involvement and opportunities for local community

Powerpoint presentations are available by emailing Moira m.cursey@xtra.co.nz