

BRING BACK KOKAKO

For more about bringing back Kokako to GBI, see our website: <http://www.gbiet.org/kokako>

Imprinting

While I was thinking of what to write the Paradise Duck I have been looking after came over to see what I was doing. So there was my answer.

This bird came to me as a half fledged, fledgling, covered in feathers and able to fly, duckling from Awana campground. It was being beaten up by the resident adults. My first peek in the box explained everything. The duckling had been hand raised then abandoned, presumably when the person's holiday came to an end. The ducks it had been left with would not accept a duckling they didn't recognize as theirs and the duckling was too young to fend for itself.

The bird was very dehydrated, starving and confused. Probably as a result of the adult bird's attacks. At first I was angry that I (or rather Ken) would have to euthanize a perfectly healthy young bird because of these people's stupidity. Then, after rehydrating and feeding, accompanied by an array of big mirrors, I realized this bird was aware it was a duck. Something had been done to maintain contact with the other ducks. Not knowing the circumstances under which these people came by the bird led me to conclusions which may not be right. The bird wasn't talking, well in fact it was, heaps, I just had no idea what it was saying.

So this duck has stayed. It needed training to stay outside and not depend on human company and although it is slow to mature i.e. it doesn't know when to leave home and hang out with the resident Pateke at night, I think it will be okay.

In fairness to the birds please don't try and raise a duckling by itself. It is very hard to raise one duckling without it imprinting on people and unfortunately if it does imprint, although it survives, it will never breed and be a productive member of its species.

Imprinting is when a very young bird learns to respond to nurturing by humans that would normally be associated with the parent birds. They relate to this stimulus rather than to what is natural for their particular species. Their nesting choices won't be normal, mating will be directed at other species. Feeding themselves and their foraging scents and preferences for food are unnatural and can lead to starvation. A lot of bird species that hatch covered in fluff and able to follow their parents are susceptible to imprinting as are parrots and raptors.

It's easy to make a mistake, nobody wants to see a baby or young bird die but extreme care needs to be taken.

Karen Walker

Congratulations Okupu Beach

This year's breeding season we can be very proud of the fact we raised five New Zealand Dotterel chicks to add to the number of these endangered birds.

There were 3 nesting. The first two chicks disappeared within the first few days. The second nest of three did very well on their own with three fledging. The third nest of two had a fence put around the nest area. This worked well. The chicks seemed to look upon the area as a safe place when people were close by.

Okupu is a busy beach in the summer so thank you to all the beachgoers for respecting the birds space. A special thanks to dog owners for keeping their dogs under control and away from the area.

They say it takes a village to raise a child

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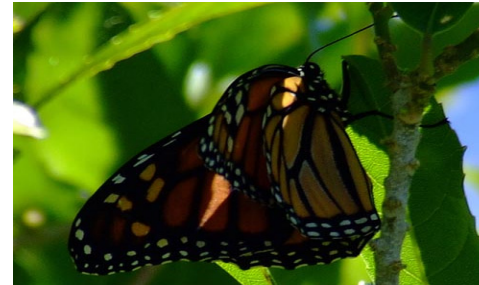


Issue 16: March 2016

FREE

BUSH
TELEGRAPH

Monarch Butterflies



For years I have had a very healthy Swan plant but no Monarch butterfly caterpillars. I have put this down to the thriving Asian Paper wasp (*Polistes chinensis*) community I have around my deck and beyond.

This year though, with all the rain we have had, I am guessing that the wasps have not had a good year because it was a great year for the Monarchs. The plant was nearly overrun with caterpillars in a short time. The biggest of these were transferred to another plant.

This plant was in another part of the garden with no obvious sign of caterpillars. After transfer it was found that some of them were being killed off. Hanging upside down with their "blood" dripping out. Some brown bugs similar to the green shield vegetable bug were seen in the vicinity and digitally dispatched. After some consultation it turned out these were a native soldier bug.

Eventually from the two plants, 27 and 13 chrysalis formed with only one not being able to emerge properly. A very good result.

Strangely though there never seem to be more than 5 or 6 butterflies in the garden area.

Emmy Pratt

Photograph: K Stowell

Fling a Rat

As many people will be aware I am the Project Coordinator of the Mulberry Grove Pest Project and have been trapping rats in the area since last February.

The question I am most often asked is what I do with the dead rats, dead bodies seem to be a fascination to all ages, no matter what the breed, origin, or cause of death.

Well, what I do is fling them. At this time of year and particularly with the high humidity we have been experiencing the rats are usually already full of maggots by the time I get to them and rats, slugs, and ants etc are waiting eagerly in the surrounding undergrowth for a welcome feed.



Flinging rotten rats, is a practised art and a slap across the ear with a wet one is not a pleasant experience, but every job has to have its upside, and one of the things I most admire about human nature is the ability to find fun anywhere.

I don't like killing anything, including rats, and sometimes feel as if we are playing god by deciding what should live and what should die, but I can tell you now, if I had to fling a cat, I could probably do that too.

Nothing is wasted if we can throw it back into the food chain.

Happy hunting everyone

Cathy Scott.

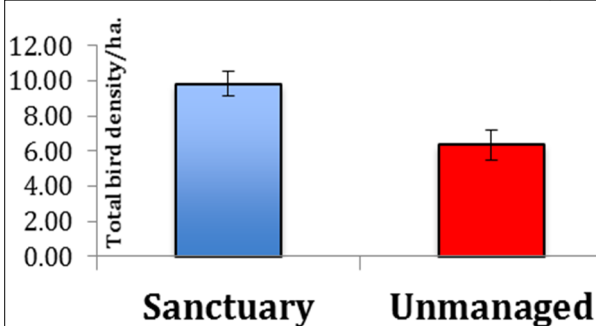


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83,841 dead birds from a cool bar graph

I have been accused of blinding people with statistics, so I'll keep it simple! In the last issue (#35) of ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS I came up with some 'back of the envelope' calculations about the numbers of feral cats, and rats on Great Barrier. The number of feral cats came out at 854, and the number of rats at about a quarter of a million (251,000). The *number of birds killed by rats each year on GBI* came to **86,545**. This was by nest predation on eggs and chicks, for which there is plenty of evidence. The actual figure means diddley-squat, but the order of magnitude explains why visitors to the Island often say how quiet the forest is, and why landowners who reduce the rats on their property soon start to see more birds (Google: GBI Environmental Trust Videos).



The Windy Hill Sanctuary is managed for rats with bait stations and traps, while the unmanaged areas have no rodent control. Both areas have sets of tracking tunnels monitoring rat numbers five times per year. The bar graph above gives average bird densities in managed and unmanaged areas over six years. The difference (3.45 birds/ha) is the number of birds per hectare killed each year in forest and mature scrub habitats. It may seem like a small number, but if we multiply this by the area of



such habitat on Great Barrier (24,285 ha) we get - wait for it - **83,841**. This figure is very close to 86,545 derived earlier by a completely different

(more complex) process, and it is obtained entirely from data from the Island; the order of magnitude of the effect of rats on the birdlife of our Island is now established!

Feral cats also kill birds, but predominantly they feed on rabbits and rats, killing an estimated 19,652 rats per annum. This is a large figure, but it is only c.8% of the rat population. The Windy Hill tracking tunnel results show that the rat population must be reduced by *at least* 50% to achieve the benefits for the birds indicated in the bar graph. Cats cannot control the rat population to the level required, and moreover, they eat birds and lizards too! John Ogden

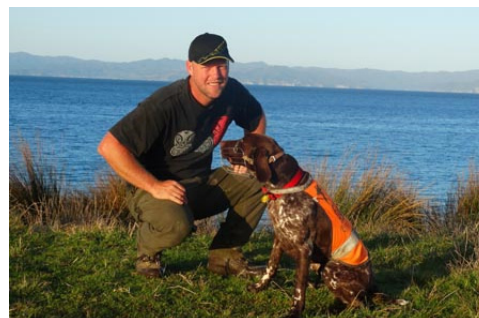
Angel's Wings

For many the term 'angels wings' congers images of chubby cherubs poised among the clouds or haloed Christmas tree ornaments. For those involved in conservation 'angels wings' is a dreaded term as it refers to the winged remains of birds predated by cats.

Part remains and scatterings of feathers found within Kotuku Peninsula earlier this season were quickly confirmed as a Cook's petrel/titi, fallen easy prey to a feral cat. It's pretty devastating when we have spent the past four seasons successfully attracting Cook's to the peninsula. Just like many other native species, Cook's were once prolific on Aotea, but populations have been devastated by rats and cats. Meanwhile on adjacent Hauturu/Little Barrier Island the population of Cook's has

skyrocketed (following the eradication of firstly cats (in 1981), and then rats (in 2004)). It's a sorry state when we have successfully maintained low levels of rats within the Sanctuary enabling Cook's to breed successfully, only to have a cat wander in and destroy these breeding seabirds.

Scott had spent three weeks searching for and finally trapping a cat previously, so this time he decided to call on specialist cat trapper Brad Windust and his 'cat' dog, Milo. The team quickly located the elusive cat, but it took six days to finally hunt it down. A huge expense, but a successful outcome. On a much larger scale, DOC allocate many hours of cat trap monitoring during the winter season to combat feral cats within Okiwi basin, trapping on average 100 cats a year.



There must be a better way? Obviously prevention is better than cure. If we could eradicate the cats we could be one step closer to better managing and protecting our native biodiversity. Perhaps we could consider being leaders within NZ and begin working towards being the first cat free community in the country. I don't mean to terminate your cuddly moggie, but to consider, in the future, NOT having a pet cat. Or at the very least taking measures to ensure your cat isn't contributing to the feral cat problem on the island by committing to having your cat spayed.

The GBIET has historically subsidised cat spaying with assistance from Auckland Council and the Trust has had recent confirmation that Auckland Council will provide up to \$2000 annually towards cat spaying via the GBIET. (See advert below). Whilst cats may help predate rats, their impact on native species certainly does not justify a cat population on Aotea.

Stop and consider an alternative reality, where you could have seabirds breeding among the surrounding hills, pateke pottering in your back yard (that's a reality at Glenfern) and native bush birds occupying your garden. It IS possible, but it takes some special people to make it happen. We can become another Auckland suburb or something very unique. Are you up for it?

Dr Emma Cronin

Sponsored by Auckland Council the GBI Environmental Trust is offering **FREE Cat Neutering** for island residents. Contact the local Vet, Anne Kernohan, on 463 to book an appointment.



<http://gbiet.printpoppa.co.nz>

Movie Nights

April 28th - "Bee Movie" 3pm

April 28th - "River Dog" 7pm

May 12th "Pestfree NZ" 7pm

June 9th "Last Ocean" 7pm

at the Community Room, Okiwi School