

Little-spotted Kiwi to be given a helping hand by our rock lobsters

The Fiordland Lobster Company is once again lending a helping hand to the most iconic of our endangered native birds, the kiwi. This time it's the little spotted kiwi, *apteryx owenii*, the most vulnerable of our national bird to introduced predators.

Originally from the South Island, it's the only one of the kiwi species to become extinct on the mainland. Offshore predator-free islands have become essential for its long-term survival. As early as 1890-1910, a number of the little spotted kiwi were translocated to Kapiti Island. The first transfer back to Fiordland was in 2008-10, to Chalky/Te Kakahu Island.

Although the overall population has grown to around 1500, more help is needed to ensure its long-term survival.

So when the Fiordland Conservation Trust in partnership with the Department of Conservation called for help to establish another offshore island population in Fiordland, Alan Buckner, CEO of the Fiordland Lobster Company, felt that it ticked all the boxes.

Firstly it is a Fiordland project. As Alan explained, the shareholders of the lobster company are still mainly fishermen who live and work in the Fiordland area and Te Anau is still the home base of the Fiordland Lobster Company even though their business is international.

It was back in the late 1980s that the lobster company first took on the responsibility of helping to conserve the Fiordland environment in which it worked with a Breaksea Island rat eradication project.

Secondly the project is focussed on helping kiwi. The company has previously worked with kiwi in Fiordland, having sponsored the cost of translocating Haast Kiwi to Coal Island in 2009. This project, to establish a new population of the little spotted kiwi on Anchor Island/Pukenui in the Dusky Sound complex, is further evidence of the company's commitment to our iconic species.

Now stoat-free, forest-clad Anchor is an island with an ecosystem becoming as healthy as it has been in decades. As Hannah Edmonds, DOC biodiversity ranger explained, the plan is that between 2014-2016, up to 45 kiwi will be transferred from Kapiti Island to Anchor, with up to 20 birds being transferred at any one time.

The best time to undertake translocations is from March-June, just before the breeding season. On Kapiti Island, the kiwi will be fitted with radio transmitters several months in advance and then tracked on transfer day, ensuring as smooth a transfer as possible. Air New Zealand are providing the wings from Wellington to Queenstown for these little flightless birds. From there to Dusky's Anchor Island, helicopter transport will be needed. Three to four separate transfers may be required over a number of years with the first cohort being closely monitored for health and weight gain to ensure the project is going according to plan.

The third reason why the Fiordland Lobster Company wanted to be involved in this project is the Fiordland Conservation Trust's project management experience. FCT chairperson, Murray Willans, explained it was exactly the sort of translocation project that the Trust loves undertaking. It will be another jigsaw piece being put in place in the restoration of Fiordland's Dusky Sound complex and an essential part of ensuring the survival of our little spotted kiwi.

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For more information please contact:

Rachel Cockburn – Manager, Fiordland Conservation Trust
03 249 8240 or 0274 952 954;
email: info@fiordlandconservationtrust.org.nz
website: www.fiordlandconservationtrust.org.nz

Hannah Edmonds - Ranger, Biodiversity Fiordland, Department of Conservation-Te Papa Atawhai;
03 249 0200;
email: hedmonds@doc.govt.nz
website: www.doc.govt.nz

Alan Buckner - CEO, Fiordland Lobster Company
03 249 0023
email: alan@flc.co.nz
website: www.lobster.co.nz

