

The Kokako Project, Hunua Ranges Mainland Island

The kokako is one of NZ's endangered and endemic (that is, only found in NZ) birds. It is a member of the ancient Wattle bird family and is not to be confused with the even rarer kakapo which is a flightless parrot now found only on islands with no predators. Kokako can fly, but not very well instead using their powerful legs to run and jump from tree to tree. Before the introduction of foreign mammals such as rats, stoats, weasels, ferrets and possums, kokako were very abundant but its numbers have now fallen to dangerously low numbers(approx. 550 pairs). The South Island kokako is already extinct. The females are particularly vulnerable as they spend far more time on the nest on eggs or brooding chicks.

Hunua Regional Park is 17,000 hectares of steep, hilly bush to the south east of Auckland. It contains the highest point in the region (Kohukokönui Trig at 688 m) and the only original native kokako population in the Auckland area. With the rest of the Hunua Ranges, it is also the largest area of native bush in the Auckland area, and through 4 reservoirs, supplies much of its water too. Hunua Regional Park is owned by Auckland Regional Council (ARC).



In 1994 the population in the Hunua Ranges was on the verge of extinction – there were 25 males but only one female ! Fortunately an intensive poisoning and trapping programme targeting foreign mammals saved this pair and the population has steadily and gradually expanded to 8-9 pairs (Feb 2006) in the management area, with other pairs outside it too. The management area is 850 hectares, set up with a grid of bait stations, 100 to 150 metres apart.

The poison put in these kills possums and rats. Traps are set along the ridges to catch stoats and ferrets.

The nearest village to the project is Clevedon where there are several small shops

Timing of work

The project is a joint one between ARC and the Department of Conservation (DoC) ARC staff have responsibility for most of the predator control and track and hut maintenance, and DoC staff for finding the nests and monitoring the birds, though there is a lot of cross over between the two teams. The DoC team live in a small bush hut (the Kokako Hut) during the week, as their work involves getting up at dawn to follow birds.

The ARC work starts in early August, the DoC work in early September. Both finish after the last known chicks have fledged (left the nest), which can be anytime from the end of January to the end of March

Kokako Need You ! – how you can help

Volunteers who come up for the day ,come every Tuesday and on the second Saturday of the month, from August to February. However if a group or an individual wants to come on another day this can also be organised. The work generally consists of following unformed tracks to go round the bait stations, putting fresh poison in if necessary, and clearing tracks and sometimes checking traps. As one volunteer put it “ its like going for a tramp in beautiful bush but with a purpose “

You need to be in Clevedon by 8 a.m. and you will generally be passing by it again by about 4.30 p.m. Age is no barrier – many of our day volunteers are in their sixties and seventies, but you need to be reasonably fit (the Hunuas are very steep) and be fairly confident in walking in unfamiliar territory. Don't worry -you will be paired up with an experienced volunteer. Training, first aid kits and maps will be provided. You will need good walking boots (ankle support is a must), **a watch**, good waterproofs, **spare** warm clothing(fleece, wool or polyprop) as in case of injury you might be out all night, lunch and extra food, water and a good sized backpack to put it all in. There is a small chance that you will see a kokako, but if you keep coming regularly a very good chance that you will at least hear one!

View from the K Hut



Resident volunteers, stay in the Kokako Hut with the DoC team of two who have already established where the territories are and then hopefully the nests. Once nests are found you could be doing nest watches (to see what stage of breeding the birds are at), and checking rat and stoat traps round the nest sites. You will definitely hear birds and almost definitely see them too. If lucky you may be involved in banding operations where young chicks have coloured bands put onto their legs for identification. Other projects you might be involved with are surveys for Hochstetter frogs and native NZ bats

As the level of training we need to give you for this takes some time we ask that a staying volunteer commits for a **minimum of three weeks**, with weekends off. You need to be fit and an experienced hill walker/tramper. You also need to be good at sharing a small space with other people (cooking is done together), happy at going to bed early and getting up before dawn and be willing and interested to learn. NB The environment is often COLD, WET and MUDDY ! Resident volunteers are often students doing an internship or gaining useful experience for their course, or local people and travellers from other countries who want to help conservation in NZ. There is a separate list for what you need, but it is basically the same as the day volunteer, plus food and sleeping bag. Coffee and tea are provided.

Contacts : Mags Ramsey is a Park Ranger and volunteer coordinator for the Southern sector Parks in Auckland Regional Council. **Please direct all volunteer queries to her initially.** Email mags.ramsey@arc.govt.nz Tel. 536 7012 or 021 489 046

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