



The Southern Bell

News from the Deep South



Autumn 2008

Dotterel News

Three Southern Sector Parks invest time and resources into protecting the rare and endangered NZ dotterel and, as with our other conservation projects, volunteers play a crucial part. As protecting these birds usually means controlling predators this also benefits other shorebirds like variable oystercatchers (VOC), bartailed godwits and wrybills.

Duder: with more volunteers coming forward we have been able to expand the number of bait lines to give better protection to the pairs on the shell bank. There are lots of mangroves and other plants for chicks to hide in and so it is difficult to say for sure how many chicks were fledged (can fly independently). However at least five chicks were seen at different times. In early January a total of 18 dotterel were seen at one time. Many of these birds were probably non or early breeders that had come together after the main season. Yet interestingly they were all protective towards the chicks and distracted poor observers trying to count them with extravagant displays of calling and flight.

High rabbit numbers were supporting high numbers of ferrets and stoats, so several shoots were undertaken with the resulting rabbits shot (over 1000, with 300 in one night!) providing good bait for the traps in this and other projects



A dog's life... not just a bed of roses

Really good news for the Duder dotterel is that, with the cooperation of Ardmore Airport, the boundary of the low flying area is soon to be permanently changed so that helicopters will no longer hover above the shell bank.

Three VOC pairs had three young including Blanche who is pure white (pictured above right). S/he hatched an off-white colour (good camouflage on the shells but not on the mudflats) and grew glossier and whiter with age.



Ambury is a working farm park, much enjoyed by the many school groups and the public that come to see the animals in action there. It is right beside the Manukau Harbour, a very important site for shore birds because of its mudflats which provide good food. Up to two thousand wrybills roost (sleep) there and spoonbills can always be seen. There are three shell 'islands' which this year had a total of 17 dotterel, ten of these making up five pairs. One adult and at least one chick were lost to a cat and several nests were either lost or abandoned. Ambury's proximity to so many houses results in a lot of human disturbance and more pests like rats and cats. On the plus side, at least one chick fledged and possibly two other. Thanks to volunteer Ray Clough for his vigilant monitoring of the birds there.

This season 13 dotterel were resident at **Whakanewha on Waiheke**, - an extra two pairs of young birds arrived to swell the breeding population for the beach, plus a 'floating' bird which attempted unsuccessfully to pair up. In total six chicks were fledged from six pairs. As two pairs were first time breeders, this is a good result though there were in fact 13 nests made with a total of 33 eggs laid! There were five pairs of VOC (up from two last year) - they produced six chicks, but may have even depressed the dotterel success. VOCs get aggressive and territorial especially when their chicks have hatched and so may have caused the abandoning of some of the nests that failed.

Whakanewha is the park which has had the longest history of intensive pest control to protect its dotterel and we caught no stoats at all this year which is probably a reflection of how low rat numbers are. The fact that, despite this, less than a fifth of the eggs laid actually went on to become independent adults, shows how complex interactions are between not just pests and our birds, but between native species too.

Kokako News—a Good Season

Another successful year with the focus from the DoC team on releasing more kokako from other areas in North Island, to increase the genetic diversity of our Hunua population. Since 2006 a total of 26 birds have been released - fourteen from Mapara and four from Waipapa (which are both near Pureora Forest), and eight from Tiri Tiri Matangi island. The latest four from Tiri were released in mid April in the Flat Bush area (Hunuas) and like all the others have been fitted with tiny radio transmitters that enable us to track where they are for 6-8 months. Acoustic anchoring (essentially loudspeakers up trees playing kokako calls in the morning) is being used once again to encourage them to stay in the release area- where the pest control means that they will have a much better chance of surviving and having young. Interestingly, the first four released from Tiri, did *not* have acoustic anchoring and they have not settled in the Flat bush area.



Volunteer Ian Wallis and kaka (on Little Barrier Island)

In the Kokako Management Area (KMA) itself, nine Hunua pairs were found (two of which produced three young), one Hunua/Mapara pair (which produced two young) and three Mapara pairs (two of which produced four young) As Hazel and Stacy's main focus was on tracking the new birds this year, it is highly probable that the Hunua pairs produced more young that escaped being seen.

The expansion of the KMA into the Flat Bush area (which is the bush roughly opposite the start of the Kohukohunui track) and the spreading out of the new pairs, meant a lot of work for our volunteers in cutting new tracks for bait lines, but now done, it is clearly proving good habitat for the birds and a lot easier for access to do things like acoustic anchoring. This area is favoured by robins as well, so hopefully we will have a survey of them too next season. Kaka are now regularly heard and seen and three chicks were spotted.

Volunteers contributed over 3,500 hours (or 435 days) to the project this season and were a fundamental part of both DoC and ARC teams. For more details about volunteering in the kokako project see page 3.

New Volunteer Profile - Mark and Scott Johnston

Mark and Scott (10) took on a bait and trap line at Duder 5 months ago. 'Scott is very into birds and so I wanted to encourage his interest while it is still so strong' said Mark.



'Every 2 weeks we check the wetland line at Duder which means Scott gets to see lots of shore birds and its also a good excuse for a walk together. Scott sets the rat traps with nutella and I set the DoC 200 traps with rabbit meat. It takes us about an hour and a half and sometimes Scott sometimes takes a friend along, or if he is playing cricket I take his younger sister Jemma instead. It's a beautiful place and you feel you are doing something worthwhile. People visiting the park often ask us what we are up to, and have even thanked us for our work. Scott is now thrilled to see anything about pest control on TV.' Scott likes 'seeing the dotterel, catching stoats and walking along the beach. But the mudflats can be annoying especially if you fall over!'

Old (i.e.experienced) volunteer Profile - Viv Carey

Viv has been volunteering at Whakanewha on Waiheke for over seven years. The tree nursery is her domain, she spends two mornings a week raising all the trees that get planted out in the park-from 650-2000 of them! She first came to the park after seeing an advert in the local paper appealing for volunteers.



Viv says 'I grew up near the Waitakere Ranges and have always loved the bush. I really enjoy collecting the seed from the native trees and then bringing them to the point where we can plant them out. I get great satisfaction from watching them grow up in the park.'

Viv just had normal gardening knowledge when she started so has learnt and taught herself a lot on the way. At the moment she is experimenting with growing cuttings of natives like kotukutuku.

Thanks to Jac Cerfontaine and Suzi Phillips for use of their stunning bird photos in this edition.

Gumboot Donning Time—it's the Tree planting Season !

All tree planting days start at 10am and finish early afternoon. A sausage sizzle is provided at lunchtime.

Please remember to wear sensible footwear and bring a spade if you can

Monday (Queen's Birthday) 2nd June - Whakanewha (on Waiheke)

Sunday 15th June- Tapapakanga

Sunday 22nd June - Awhitu

Sunday 29th June - Mutukaroa (Hamlin's Hill)

Sunday 6th July - Duder

Sunday 20th July - The *Volunteer Mid Winter Feast*, which this year is at Ambury- see separate invitation

Other volunteer opportunities in Southern Sector Parks.....

The Kokako Project - putting out bait and clearing tracks on the north side of the Hunua Ranges. For June and July, fortnightly Tuesdays. From August, every Tuesday, the 2nd Saturday and *now - the 4th Sunday* of each month too. A full day (8.30-4ish)

NB: You need to be fit and have tramping boots and bush tramping experience for this project.

NEW! The Hunua Falls Project - putting out bait and clearing tracks in the Hunua Falls area. Similar to the kokako project but ideal for those with limited time or leg power as will only take 2-3 hours. Every Wednesday morning from 9am starting on 6 August.

Hamlin's Hill - meet every Wednesday at this green oasis in the middle of Penrose. Work involved is mainly weeding around trees and removing plant pests.

Omana Nursery - help with weeding and potting up young trees. Every Tuesday from 9.30am.

Hunua Mountain Bike Days - Saturday 21 June, Sunday 21 September, Saturday 18 October and Sunday 16 November. Constructing new and maintaining old mountain bike tracks, this is very physical work.

Events - Help us at the ARC's biggest event: **Ambury Farm Day Sunday 12 October**. You would assist us with running games and activities for children and helping with car parking.



Ambury Easter Clean Up Event '08 – 140 attended !

Ranger Scott and CVNZ form a new track at Duder



And those without fixed dates.....

Wader Protection at Ambury or Duder – take on a bait /trap line to help protect shore birds. Once you have your line, you do it in your own time. (see profile on p.2). If you don't like the idea of dead animals we also need help in monitoring the birds.

Education at Omana, Duder and Hunua – help primary school groups to appreciate our bush and coast. Would especially suit retired teachers, scout leaders and interested mums.

Whakanewha (on Waiheke Island) - volunteers welcome any day to tackle weeds, work in the nursery , build tracks and so on.

Kokako Monitoring - At the moment Hazel (DoC) is looking for volunteers to help track the newly released Tiri birds. This involves walking slowly through the bush and listening to sounds from a transmitter, so you don't have to be super fit.

For more details on any of these projects, please email volunteer coordinator Mags Ramsey on mags.ramsey@arc.govt.nz or ring her on 536 7012.

Armchair volunteer? That's fine, just ask to be put on our email list which will keep you up to date with events and opportunities that happen at short notice like a kokako release.

Volunteer Farewells - Mike and Sue Locke



Mike and Sue Locke were dedicated kokako volunteers. One or both of them would invariably be there every Tuesday, if not the Saturday too. In addition they would also go down to the volunteer weekends at Rosemary's 'other' kokako project in Maungatutu forest in the King Country. This involves a long drive down there, a fairly hairy bridge crossing in the dark and then a long walk to the 2 bunk goat hunters hut (and it's much colder down there too).

As with several other Manukau Trampers they have moved from Papakura to the Nelson area, lured by the prospect of all that mountain tramping. Definitely our loss - but not perhaps for the kokako. DoC are at this very moment checking out an ear witness report of the (supposedly extinct) South Island kokako in the Cobb valley area. Knowing Mike and Sue it won't be long before they get involved!

Auf Wiedersehen Pets



Dutch, French and now Germans – we are lucky that European students are keen to do their OE with us.

Thomas Welz Muller (left) and Jonas Rapp study forestry at Rottenburg college and stayed with us for 12 weeks working at all the different Southern Sector parks, as well as Tawharanui, Tiri Tiri Matangi and a stint in Pureora Forest helping Hazel catch kokako. Always keen to show their prowess with a chainsaw, they were fun to work with and good at practical problem solving.

So at the end of their time which park would they most like to work in?

Both plumped for Whakanewha and the Hunua Ranges because the work there 'was closest to our studies'. The studious boys also found time to do a trip around South Island.



The loss of **Steve Mackay** is another big blow to our parks. For the last five years during term time, Steve has been taking a group of kids from **Waimokola School** out to Omana and Duder every Tuesday and then on Wednesdays a group from **Mt. Richmond School** in Otahuhu out to Ambury. The students are not your average pupils but once in Steve's hands are able to create all kinds of amazing things.

For example, at Omana, they have made and installed several seats around the perimeter walk, made rabbit hutches that look like trains and at Duder checked predator traps thereby helping the survival of the dotterel breeding there. At Ambury his team help with tasks around the farm, they've made another original rabbit hutch and painted the striking mural on the chicken shed. Steve is very much a man of action. He volunteers once a month at Howick historical village dressed in a smock and "bodging" * After the 2004 tsunami he took six months unpaid leave to go to Thailand where he built a workshop to enable him and other volunteers to help Thais build new furniture.

Steve has been tempted from our shores by the prospect of the excitement (and OK, the money may play a part too...) of working at Kalgoorlie mine in Western Australia. We wish him luck and air conditioning.

*bodging - the art of shaping green wood on a hand powered lathe.

Although this is a volunteer publication how can we let Ranger **Phil Lugton** slip away without a word or two. Phil has been with Southern Sector parks for eight years now, firstly at Hunua and then at Tapapakanga. He is passionate about rangering (and duck shooting) and worked well with groups of volunteers like the mountain bike clubs on the bike tracks, and CVNZ. He, Jackie and Fletcher are moving back down to the family dairy farm in Matamata. A keen Mooloo supporter he painted the chemical spray tank on the park quad red, yellow and black. This individuality was key to us getting it back after it had been stolen and was spotted by the police hooning up and down Waharau beach...

