

Greetings Friends of Rotokare Trust

Just a short note from the 'Chair', the only sort of note he knows!

On the surface it seems that nothing is happening at Rotokare, but plans are in action to shift and upgrade the old school building, also the caretakers house is being altered, painted and getting ready for delivery. Power and phone supplies are being costed. Also Kara is flat out like a lizard drinking, doing all that damn paperwork that I hate so much.

Our pest eradication group are also busy planning for a show down with Mr Rat and his friends around July next year. To this end we have a great bunch of volunteers marking and cutting tracks through the reserve ready for "D" day.

The automatic gates in to the reserve will be installed in January/February, when we hope to have the caretakers house moved in.

Well this note is about done, but I would like to "Thank" all those who have helped in this terrific project over 2007 and encourage anyone that might like to help us to be in touch, and invite a friend!



Thanks again – Joe Menzies

Landscape Planning

The Trust has been working with architects Richard Bain & Alice Cullen to develop a landscape plan for the main public area at the lake. The purpose of these plans is to set a vision for future development, so that via good planning we can maintain an aesthetically pleasing environment, whilst providing facilities to enhance visitor experience.

We hope the end result will be functional, relatively-natural, welcoming and a pleasant environment around the lake edge. We've taken a fairly low key approach. We are expecting more visitors to the sanctuary in future, including regular busloads of school children, so the changes to car parking etc need to accommodate the extra visitor numbers while not being "over the top" or intrusive in terms of development. We want to retain the family-oriented, informal style at Rotokare, while also preventing the trees, facilities and lawns from getting vandalised.

We would love to hear your comments on the plan - to view the plan you can visit the new Rotokare website www.rotokare.org.nz (look for the link on the main page), visit Eltham library, or contact Kara to send you a copy (06 764 8756). We have recently received a grant for car park improvements, and we hope to begin work on this as soon as possible (whilst the weather is on our side!).

Pateke

The Trust were excited recently to receive a visit from two members of the Pateke Recovery Group - Jason Roxborough and Ossie Latham - who made a special trip to assess Rotokare as a potential reintroduction site in a few years time.



Pateke (Photo: B Hartley)

Pateke (also known as Brown Teal) is a small dabbling duck species endemic to this country. Once widespread, Pateke are now restricted to only a few sites, Northland and Great Barrier Island. This rare duck numbers fewer than 1500 individuals, so it would be fantastic to have such a species back in Taranaki after being lost so long ago due to habitat modification and predation by introduced pests.

We should hear back from the Recovery Group in the next few months. Fingers crossed!

Pest Eradication

With the predator-proof fence complete we have started planning the next important step in creating a safe sanctuary for wildlife - the eradication of all pest species from within the reserve.

The Trust has spent many hours researching the best method for eradication - taking into consideration costs, benefits, environmental and social impact. With advice from a specially formed advisory committee, we believe we are formulating a plan for success. Here we should highlight the difference between control and eradication - control is to maintain low numbers, whilst eradication is complete removal. Control would be a disadvantage here as it would mean trapping and use of poisons for ever, and the Trust would much prefer to use poison bait in a one-off operation rather than sustaining its use over the long term.

We will be using the only recognised effective bait for rodents, "Brodifacoum", a second generation anticoagulant (sold over the counter for household use under the trade name of Talon™ and Pestoff). Brodifacoum is a good choice because it comes as highly palatable cereal bait and rodents cannot detect the poison, therefore preventing the possibility of bait shy animals. Its application is strictly controlled and will be undertaken according to a Code of Practice that was approved by the NZ Food Safety Authority in 2004.

We will be applying bait aerially as this is the most proven and cost-effective method - ensuring we get the best bait coverage possible. The idea is to make sure every rodent has a chance of encountering bait, and this is extremely difficult to do if bait stations or hand baiting alone were used. The baits will be applied only within the fence by a helicopter and experienced pilot, using custom designed equipment. This equipment includes specialised baiting buckets and GPS technology to ensure flight lines are accurate. Two applications will be undertaken next year (with provision for a third drop if mice prove to be a challenge) and their timing will start in winter. Winter is an ideal time as this is when rodents are not breeding and therefore are not in dens for long periods. Additionally winter is typically when natural food supplies are at their lowest.

Common concerns relating to poison use is their effect on soil and water quality. As Brodifacoum bait disintegrates, mainly by rain, it is absorbed and bound in soil where it slowly degrades. Brodifacoum has a very low solubility in water so leaching from soil into water is therefore unlikely to happen. Only erosion of the soil would allow Brodifacoum to reach water, and if this did happen then it would remain bound in organic material and settle out in sediments. Thorough research at other sites have shown that even when bait is sown directly in to streams, Brodifacoum residues can not be detected. Also, all trials in NZ have failed to show an effect on invertebrates following consumption of Brodifacoum bait.

Other concerns relate to effects on livestock. Yes, livestock are susceptible to Brodifacoum poisoning, and for this reason we must carefully follow the Code of Practice, taking all steps necessary to ensure bait is laid only within the predator-proof fence. We will ensure helicopters fly generous buffer zones near the fence, and hand baiting will take place where necessary. The Trust will consult closely with neighbouring land owners to ensure there is no disruption to lambing times or other farm practices.

We think it would be silly to try and tell you that there will be no impact of baiting what so ever on the native fauna. It is a risk. But as mentioned, we have spent some time researching the options and feel very confident that this is the best option for Rotokare. As shown at other similar projects terrestrial bird populations will benefit hugely from the eradication of pest species - all species are expected to increase in abundance due to decreased egg and chick predation - an increase in nectar supplies will provide more food for Bellbird and Tui. Most importantly, eradication of all pests will mean that Rotokare will be an ideal site for translocation of species such as Saddleback, Kiwi, Pateke, and perhaps even Kokako in the near future! Many of these species would not be considered if we were only maintaining a control operation.

There are several examples where mammalian pest species have been totally eradicated from offshore islands in New Zealand, for example Kapiti Island and Tiritiri Matangi Island, and there are many sanctuary projects on the mainland such as Maungatautari in the Waikato and Karori in Wellington where native fauna has absolutely thrived following pest eradication using the same techniques. Pest free areas are the only way of guaranteeing the survival of many endangered species in NZ - predator-free Rotokare will be an enormous contribution to conservation.

The Trust understands that the idea of using toxins can be a scary, so we encourage you to ask us questions about the operation, and we will endeavour to give you the best and honest answers we can. As questions come in or new information becomes available we will provide it in the following newsletters. Kara Pranker would be happy to receive your queries or chat in further detail about the project - (06) 764 8756 or kara@rotokare.org.nz

Shags

Regularly seen roosting on the bollards at the lake edge in front of the picnic area are Black Shags (*Phalacrocorax carbo*). They are a cosmopolitan species known as Great Cormorants around most of the world where they are found in Greenland, north-east America, Europe, Eurasia, Africa and Australasia.



Above = A black shag at Rotokare (Photo: B Hartley).

Sometimes as you walk around the lake below them you will hear an weird drawn out croaking call from the birds which, for the first time if you are alone, can be scary.

The breeding adults can be seen to have a white patch on the thigh. Immature shags will be seen feeding in the lake with the adults, and can be recognized by being brownish with a variable pale front.

Also often seen is the Little Shag (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*). Usually just one, but sometimes two, they have not been recorded nesting at Rotokare.

They are a smaller bird with a shorter bill and usually with a white throat. This last feature can be confusing as some birds have a completely white front from throat to tail but these have not been seen here. Adding to the confusion the young ones have no white throat or front.



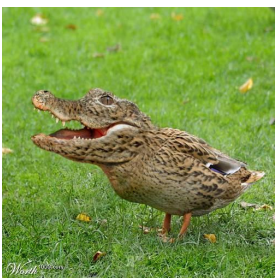
Above = Little shag (Photo: B. Hartley)

In Taranaki they nest in on rivers or lakesides. One colony is nesting above the Fountain lake in Pukekura Park, New Plymouth.

Both species feed on freshwater and marine fish, crustaceans and other invertebrates. At Rotokare Perch are popular catches and sometimes present quite a challenge to get from bill to stomach. Perch up to 200mm have been seen caught, and can take several minutes to swallow during which its progress can be observed as the throat stretches as the fish goes down.

Lake closure

Unfortunately the lake at Rotokare has been closed for boating and swimming due to an algal bloom. The algal culprit is a cyano bacteria (or blue-green algae) called *Anabaena*. This is naturally occurring, and is typical of many lakes worldwide. Unfortunately there is little we can do but be patient and wait for them to take their natural course.



The Taranaki Regional Council is monitoring the water on a regular basis and will give the green light for re-opening as soon as tests show it is safe. You can visit their website www.trc.govt.nz to see the latest monitor results.

It is just the lake that is closed for precautionary purposes, so we look forward to seeing you out enjoying the bush and walkway!

Is that a duck? Or a plane? No wait, maybe it's an algaegaitor from Rotokare! Just kidding - the waterfowl at Rotokare are just fine!

Working Bees

Thank you to everyone who has been volunteering to help mark and cut monitor lines - so far so good - we estimate we are about 25% complete. If there is anyone else out there who is able to spare a Sunday morning, we would be appreciative of the help. In order to keep things moving we are now meeting each Sunday at 9am, and working through to lunch time. The trust will provide lunch and a few drinks afterwards as our way of saying thank you.

Look forward to seeing you out there.....

(ps if you are a bit late, look for directions stuck to one of our car windows)



Our new website is now live



www.rotokare.org.nz

~ Membership ~

I have had some queries as to when membership is due. As the financial year finishes 31 March membership will be due from then unless you have paid within the last six months. I will put a reminder note in the next newsletter. If you have any further suggestions to any improvements to this or if you have any queries please contact me on 06 7648756 or at prankerdclean@xtra.co.nz

If you know of anyone wishing to become a "Friend of the Lake" please forward me their name or get them to send their \$30 membership and contact details to the address below.

Thank you for your support over the past year and we look forward to your continued support in 2008.

I would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Be sure to spend some of your holiday time visiting the Reserve to see the completed fence and taking a walk around our beautiful mainland island.

Beverley

Merry Christmas
Merry Christmas



ROKARE
SCENIC RESERVE TRUST

Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust

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