

Endangered parakeet takes flight to Tuhua



FILE PICTURE

The Department of Conservation is hoping the unspoilt bush of Tuhua (Mayor) Island will prove a successful breeding ground for the rare kakariki.

TUHUA (Mayor) Island could soon hold the country's largest population of the rare orange-fronted parakeet/kakariki — if a recent Department of Conservation initiative to re-establish there is as successful as anticipated.

The orange-fronted parakeet is critically threatened, and has been extinct in the North Island since the late 1800s.

The first eight birds from the South Island, accompanied by Ngai Tahu representatives, were welcomed onto Tuhua by repre-

sentatives of Te Whanau A Tauwhao ki Tuhua last December.

A second group of 10 birds was successfully transferred by DOC staff last week with the assistance of a Coastguard vessel and crew.

"This is an historic event for Te Whanau A Tauwhao ki Tuhua and we have acknowledged Ngai Tahu for this precious gift to the people of the north," says Tuhua Trust Board chairperson Magda Williams.

The opportunity to provide a safe haven for the parakeet by

facilitating their return north "is a responsibility that we take very seriously", she says.

"One day we hope that populations from Tuhua will assist in re-establishing the species to the mainland."

Ms Williams says predator-free Tuhua is a perfect habitat for the kakariki, "and we believe that, like the other endangered species on the island, they will thrive.

"The board is playing a major role nationally by contributing to the restoration of a number of



One of the orange-fronted parakeets released on Tuhua. Picture: M Bodie/DOC

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threatened native species. Tuhua is already home to a small but thriving population of North Island brown kiwi, as well as pateke (brown teal), tuatara and toutouwai (North Island robin)," she says.

Translocations of captive-reared parakeet will continue for the next one to two years, until the department is satisfied that the population is established. The project has been made possible through sponsorship from BDG Synthesis and the Isaac Wildlife

Trust.

For the immediate future, it is likely that Tuhua will be the only place in the North Island where the public can see the birds in the wild.

Just 100 to 200 of the kakariki species remain outside captivity. Until the recent releases on Tuhua, all have all been located within a 30km radius in beech forests of upland valleys in Arthur's Pass National Park, and in Canterbury's Lake Sumner Forest Park.