



# Matiu Matters

April 2005

## From our Chairman

Kai ora koutou, Greetings to you in 2005, with this first newsletter of the year

This month is a good time to tell you of all the exciting events that will take place on the island and to remember again that the Trust is committed to restoring the mana of Matiu/Somes. The Trust is making it a show place the region can be proud of, not only because of its ecological and historic values, but because it provides a practical demonstration of what a real partnership can achieve.

Especially important then is the upcoming release of North Island Robin on Matiu because this project combined a number of "special" elements. The North Island Robin is a rarely seen native bird presently well established on Kapiti Island. Its re-introduction in to the harbour region will enhance our natural environment and provide Wellington and Hutt Valley communities with easy access to experience these special creatures.

It also is a partnership between a government department, community and iwi. If sufficient funding can be raised, the robins will be gathered on Kapiti Island and transported to Matiu/Somes in late May. Iwi in Wellington and Kapiti are involved with all phases of the project to ensure appropriate protocols are observed. Therefore the addition of the North Island Robin will enhance ecological values of the island and will add to its appeal as a destination for visitors, locals and school groups. We look forward to your support.

**Mark Te One, Chair**

### Forest Gecko Release is NOW

The release of up to 25 forest geckos onto Matiu/Somes Island happened on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> April during a low key event at the wharf where some of the geckos were released. See p.3.

### UpDate from David Moss

On the island it's been all go – Geckos, Robins, weed busters. See the next column.

### Release Aviary for Robins

In preparation for the release of North Island Robins the aviary needed to be rebuilt due to slumping of the ground on half of the site. Gary, David, the Global Volunteer Network and Area staff all did their bit and recycled some of the old MAF aviaries.

The floor of the new section has been filled with leaf litter and small invertebrates have been added so the robins will have some practice foraging before they are released on 28 May.

### From Drought to Floods

With extreme fire danger and wilting plants, the decision to shut the Island for half days was made in late February. Since then the rain has started with a vengeance and we have had a few minor slips off the banks. The large cracks that were appearing in the soil seem to be closing up again and, although we lost some plants to the drought, the use of irrigation and the occasional day on the end of a fire hose seems to have kept some of the newer plantings alive.

### Karo Killers (aka Weedbusters)

The concerted efforts of a range of groups have made a great impact on the two species of Karo we have on the island. *Pittosporum crassifolium* and *P. ralphii* are diminishing in number and no longer showing the silvery green foliage as the obvious canopy in a number of areas.

We are well aware that this is a long-term battle and are slowly working our way around the island. Then we will have to go back and start all over again. Some of the areas will require abseil access and we are looking at various options for these sites.

### Weed Monitoring and Mapping

Over the next month Jon Terry will be scrambling up and down the island looking for our weeds and mapping either their spread or diminishing area.

His job is to look at all the historic weed records and see if he can locate any of the ones we've missed or any new sites. He comes to us after having working on weeds in the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary and is keen to learn more of the secrets of the island.

### Robin Information

The capturing of Robins on Kapiti will start on 16th May. The release event on Matiu will take place on the **morning of Saturday 28th May**. Come along and welcome the robins to their new home on Matiu.

### Karo Busters on Matiu Somes

The first team of 14 volunteers headed for Matiu/Somes on the 19th of March and tackled a Zone near the wharf and a second on the western side just above the monument. They removed Karo ranging from tiny seedlings by hand pulling and large trees/saplings using hand tools. It was a very successful day and most returned for the next weed busting event on **17-18 April**.

For future weed-busting action, contact

**Jo Greenman,**  
**Community Relations Ranger, Poneke Area Office,**  
**P.O. Box 5086, Wellington**  
**ph: (04) 470 8416 Fax: (04) 499 0077**  
**e mail: jgreenman@doc.govt.nz**

### KAPITI ROBIN TO POPULATE MATIU/SOMES

Hutt Valley residents are being asked to help the Matiu/Somes Charitable Trust bring one of New Zealand's most charming and friendly birds to Matiu/Somes Island.

Matiu/Somes Trust is working to raise \$3000 towards the costs of transferring 20 to 30 North Island robins from Kapiti Island in late May. Chairman Mark Te One said the project combined a number of "special" elements.

A highly successful transfer of red-crowned parakeets has already been completed with generous support from the community.

The addition of the North Island Robin would not only enhance ecological values of the island it will add to its appeal as a destination for visitors, locals and school groups, Mr Te One said.

Matiu/Somes Island is within the boundaries of Hutt City and this latest project provides an opportunity for the community to make an significant contribution to a major asset for the city.

The **North Island Robin** is a sub-species of the New Zealand Robin, characterised by dark slate grey upper parts with an irregular shaped patch of white on its chest, long thin legs and an upright stance. The female is generally browner and lighter coloured than the male.

Robins are found mainly in mature native forests, common in beech or podocarp forest, and in manuka or kanuka scrub. They are territorial all year round but especially so in the breeding

season. They usually mate with the same partner year after year.

Several characteristics have prompted the mistaken linking of the NZ Robin to its European namesake, the robin red-breast. However the two birds are not at all related.

Robins are extremely bold and fearless and will approach humans with curiosity. They feed on insects, grubs and worms on the forest floor and are often seen to tremble one leg to cause a vibration in the ground to induce prey to move. They can be enticed to approach closer by clearing a patch of leaf litter to expose potential food.

They are extinct in the Wellington region except for populations on Kapiti Island (their local stronghold) and Mana Island, and they have recently been successfully introduced into the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary.

Because of their fearless nature and ground-feeding habits they are extremely vulnerable to mammalian predators.

Future species transfers will include the bellbird and fluttering shearwater as well as a range of reptiles, invertebrates and rare and endangered native plants. The Trust also intends to help the Department implement a broad interpretation plan that will enhance visitors' experiences on the island.

### Details for further information

Matiu/Somes Charitable Trust,  
Colin Ryder (460 3325 or 0210 383 655)

Department of Conservation  
Peter Simpson or Rob Stone (472 5821)

Donations to bird relocation or other projects can also be made to  
**The Matiu/Somes Charitable Trust,**  
c/- Wellington Tenth's Trust,  
PO Box 536, Wellington.

### KAKARIKI DO WELL thanks to WCC and HCC

The Kakariki (red crowned parakeet) are very busy about the island, and we are seeing them all the time now, chattering above us as they speed round the island in their busy-busy way.

**Wellington City Council and Hutt City Council** both gave generous contributions of **\$1,200** each for the May 2004 Phase 2 of the kakariki translocation. Thank you.

We are grateful for their contributions as they topped up the funds so the work could go ahead.

## WETA WORKINGS

The tree weta population on Matiu has developed a new awareness of location, location, location over the last two seasons.

The result is that the old pohutukawa forest above the wharf, where they thrived for the first seven years after release, seems to have lost its appeal. However, numbers are rising in other more choice locations, especially on the western side of the island where they can relax in the warm afternoon sun among the earliest of the re-vegetation plots.

Another popular location, with the upwardly mobile jet-set, is the vicinity of the lighthouse where perhaps the night-life is more appealing. Here reside the island's most macho male weta. Although rare elsewhere, huge-headed males are the rule at the lighthouse.

Why this should be the case is the subject of some breeding trials at the moment, and to date it appears that diet may be the key. Young weta gain weight better if given a weekly protein supplement with their veges. Perhaps the lighthouse youngsters have access to more seagull poos than those elsewhere on the island and hence grow larger?

The shifting pattern of tree weta life-style blocks has led to the installation of a brand new 'weta motel' for public viewing. It is on the lighthouse track, still in the 'weathering' and 'settling in' stage, but should be worth a look this winter. The original 'motel' is now on the western track, where it has not yet made a favourable impression on the locals.

Contact **George Gibbs (562 09920)** to find out more.

## REPTILES MOVING INTO TREE HOUSES ON MATIU/SOMES ISLAND

Another of New Zealand's declining native species is to take up residence in the regenerating bush on Matiu/Somes Island.

Following in the footsteps of kakariki, giant weta, and tuatara is the forest gecko. Twenty-five captive-bred geckos were released onto the island on Saturday morning 9<sup>th</sup> April, to enjoy a relaxed lifestyle in this mammalian predator-free haven, complete with their own purpose-built housing. It is the first-ever release of captive-bred forest geckos into the wild. Before they were let free though, they had to endure a fair bit of human interest.

DOC biodiversity programme manager Rob Stone says gecko numbers have declined nationally due to habitat loss and predation by introduced species. Forest geckos are now rarely found in the Wellington area. However gecko populations have shown the ability to recover after mammalian predator eradication.

For example, goldstripe gecko numbers on Mana Island has increased significantly in the 15 years since mice were eradicated from the island.

"Because of this we are hopeful that the forest geckos will establish a sustainable population on Matiu/Somes," Rob said. "and will bring us another step closer to restoring the

island's ecosystem and securing a future for a declining native species."

DOC ranger Andrew Morrison had designed and built 10 gecko shelter boxes which have been attached to trees to provide instant accommodation. These will supplement natural tree holes which forest gecko like to live in.

"If they take to their new homes we will have developed an easy way of monitoring this gecko population," says Mr Morrison.

Common geckos and three species of skink (common, copper and spotted) occur naturally on the island but there will be plenty of tucker for all. The locals are terrestrial feeders while the forest geckos prefer to feed in the trees. Like their fellow introduced islanders, the tuatara, forest geckos like to bask in the sun, and are nocturnal hunters.

New Zealand geckos, including the forest geckos, are unique in the world because their young are born live as opposed to laying eggs.

They are the longest lived geckos in the world. The oldest recorded wild gecko is 42 years old and forest geckos can live up to at least 45 years in captivity.

Forest geckos are among at least 30 species of geckos in New Zealand. Other geckos found in the Wellington region include common, goldstripe and Wellington green geckos.

Geckos have loose skin with small dome-like granules that do not overlap and are not shiny like skinks the other family of lizards found in New Zealand.

The flattened undersides of their toes have ridges bearing minute hairs that enable them to climb up quite smooth surfaces.

They shed their skin every few months in the summer more or less in one piece.

They have fixed transparent eyelids so can not blink and vertical slit-shaped pupils (skinks can blink and have round pupils).

The skin of forest geckos has a range of bark-like patterns in grey, brown and sometimes green for camouflage. The inside of the mouth and tongue is bright yellow to orange.

### STOP PRESS

Lower Hutt Branch of Forest and Bird has agreed to contribute \$2000 towards the cost of the Robin transfer and even to consider favourably meeting any funding shortfall over and above that.

The Trust is absolutely thrilled to be acknowledging this very generous support. Thank you very much Lower Hutt F&B – you are an inspiration.

Maybe other groups and members of the public will be inspired too to support this transfer, or any of the other projects that are in the pipeline.

**PLANTINGS OVER WINTER**

Lower Hutt Forest & Bird's winter planting days will soon be on us for successional plantings as well as the ongoing planting of new areas.

**PLANTING DAYS:** mark these dates in your diary for winter 2005, and phone

**Alex Kettles 569 6208** or

**Stan Butcher 567 7271**

to put your name down or to find out more.

**Matiu/Somes Brochure update**

The brochure is on its way to the printer. We hope to print 10,000 copies which the Lion Foundation has agreed to fund (\$2554).

**MAY 23 Mon; 29 Sun**

**JUNE Mon 13, 27; Sun 19**

**JULY Mon 11, 25; Sun 3, 17, 31**

**AUG Mon 8, 22; Sun 14, 28**

**SEPT Mon 12; Sun 18**

Ferry Departs: Wn 10.00am; Days Bay 10.30am.

Returns: 2.30 to Days Bay; 3.00 to Wn

For more information contact:

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