

THE REMU-TALKER

Celebrating 20 Years of Remutaka Kiwi

Twenty years ago, the Remutaka Conservation Trust released six adult North Island brown kiwi into the Remutaka Ranges behind Wainuiomata, returning wild kiwi to the southern North Island forests for the first time in more than 100 years. It was the first release of our national icon to be carried out entirely by volunteers.

Years of hard work went into preparing for that initial release in the Tūrere Valley. During the 1990s, there was growing awareness that the forest had become unnaturally quiet, largely because introduced predators had severely reduced native bird populations. In 2000, a more extensive predator control programme, Restoring the Dawn Chorus, was launched to make parts of the forest safe for the return of native birdlife.

From this foundation, a much more ambitious vision emerged: could the forest once again support a wild kiwi population?

When the first kiwi were released in 2006, there were no guarantees they would survive and breed in the wild. But thanks to years of predator control and habitat restoration, **what began with just six birds has grown into a thriving wild population now estimated at more than 300 kiwi.**

Over the past two decades, the kiwi have spread east beyond the Ōrongorongo River, north towards Upper Hutt, and south to the edges of Wainuiomata township, with kiwi calls now heard close to our communities once again.

This extraordinary conservation success story has been made possible through the dedication of RCT volunteers, mana whenua, conservation groups, Hutt City Council, Department of Conservation, adjoining landowners including GWRC, and many supporters who believed kiwi could flourish here again.

Twenty years on, the sound of kiwi calling in the Remutaka ranges is a reminder of what can be achieved when a community works together to restore our natural heritage.



A wild Remutaka kiwi - Hiwi



Newspaper headline - May 2006



Rimu (Rosemary) and Alan Thompson, Wainuiomata Hill - 20th May 2026

Release Day - 20th May 2006

Those who were there share their memories

ZEALAND TUESDAY, 23 MAY, 2006



► **MY BROTHER:** Wainuiomata Marae kuia Maheno Taiapa embraces the kiwi named Waikiwanui, one of six blessed at the marae on Saturday before they were released in the remote Tūrerere Valley. relations duty for the Rimutaka Forest Trust's kiwi programme. There were plenty of people at the marae keen to stretch to touch his furry feathers and be able to boast they'd had live contact with our national icon. ■ Photo by Michael Kopp. Michael's account of the release day is on page 2.

Phil Waddington "After a big build up over years of designing and testing traps in the Ōrongorongo Valley, then helping lay out traplines to D.O.C standards...finally the exciting day arrived, with the overwhelming experience of



Phil Waddington

witnessing the release of the first six kiwi and seeing the expertise of the many volunteers, with young and old sharing this monumental day. I personally had the honour of helping carry the prolific Lorenzo up to the Tūrerere catchment. **That spark of excitement still remains when celebrating with fellow volunteers of twenty years since the release of Kiwi into the wild in the Wellington area"**



Annette and Melody



Anania Randall

Whakapapa o ngā o Wainuiomata

- Ko Tokomaru Te Waka
- Ko Pukeatua Te Maunga
- Ko Wainuiomata Te Awa
- Te Āti Awa Te Iwi
- Ko Ngāti Wainuiomata Te Hapū
- Ko Pukeatua Te Wharenui
- Ko Te Puna O Te Ora Te Wharekai
- Ko Wainuiomata Te Marae
- Kei Te Ngahere O Te Rimutaka Forest Park



Volunteers and kiwi being welcomed onto the Wainuiomata Marae



"To be part of the kiwi release was an amazing experience. I was privileged to be a member of the team who carried and released the kiwi into their new home at Rimutaka Forest Park." *Hon Trevor Mallard, (then) MP for Hutt South. Pictured below*





Scratch and Susan Ellis



Scratch and Annette Harvey checking the transmitter



Sandy Toy carrying a bagged kiwi into the Tūrere

“Rewilding of deep endemic species once lost from Lower North Island now a stunning success”

Paul Jansen (Scratch)

While the above is a fabricated headline, it encapsulates 20+ years of work from a dedicated group of volunteers. The application of their quiet magic introducing and then expanding a thriving kiwi population in the hills of the Remutaka Forest east of Wellington is a clear example of the power of community-led conservation.

The project was almost thwarted right at the start when a senior Department of Conservation manager called me into his office for a “Please Explain!” The tone was clear and, for the sake of brevity and not to offend anyone, let’s just say the senior manager was not impressed that I had proposed the idea of kiwi introduction to the Rimutaka Forest Trust. To be fair, he was unaware of the scale and success of community engagement with kiwi conservation in Northland and the Coromandel happening at that time. Consequently, he firmly believed a conservation project of this nature would be beyond the capacity and, as stated at the time, the “abilities” of the Trust to plan, let alone undertake.

Several “hurdles” were put up to test the introduction, but due to the determination of the Trust and a few key members in particular, the battle to introduce kiwi was won.

The first abiding memory of the 2006 release is when the birds were brought onto the Wainuiomata Marae and the impact this had on the attending throng of people present. It puts truth into the phrase coined by one of our best kiwi science kaumatua, Doctor John McLennan: **“Kiwi are like a class A drug. Experience a kiwi once and you are addicted for life.”** These first birds were from captivity so were unfazed by a brief show and tell and a gentle touch of the feathers from the tamariki present.

The second recollection is from later that night at our Tūrere Stream campsite. Here, kiwi were calling in the darkness, a sound not heard in those hills for many decades. I heard a clattering under our tent fly and thought someone was up mighty early to get the brew on! Peering out of my tent I caught a glimpse of a kiwi probing the ground around our cooking utensils. As it casually wandered out of my torch beam, I retreated back into my sleeping bag and smiled smugly as I drifted back to sleep.

Class of 2006

The founding kiwi who started the wild Remutaka population



Pōtiki

The six kiwi released on 20 May 2006 were named by local Wainuiomata schools: Tahunahuna, Milo, Waikiwianui, Koniwi, Lorenzo, and Manaia. Of these, five were males, with Manaia the sole female. In August 2006, two additional females, Pōtiki and Pounamu, were released. Their names were gifted by Whaea Jean Puketapu.

These founding kiwi soon got to work on Remutaka Conservation Trust's aim to establish a self-sustaining kiwi population!

- Waikiwianui and Pōtiki were the first of the 2006 release pairs to produce a chick, Mātāmua, hatched at Puhaka Mt Bruce as part of the BNZ Operation Nest Egg in February 2007. Mātāmua means "firstborn" or "eldest" in te reo Māori. In September 2009 they also produced the first chick left to hatch naturally in the Park.

- Tahunahuna and Manaia have produced 30 live chicks, that we know about, including PC, Mattie and Jaybee.

- Lorenzo first paired with Pounamu then with Pōtiki, when her mate Waikiwianui was killed by a dog. Their territory is around the West Whakanui track near the head of the Tūrere Stream. Lorenzo has sired well over 20 chicks to date, including Elvis and Sir Angus who are now breeding wild chicks of their own.



Ehlana promoting the schools naming competition



The day Pounamu's tracker was removed making her a truly wild kiwi. L-R: Mike, Susan and Mara



Pukeatua Primary School named their Manaia

- Tahunahuna - Arakura Primary
- Milo - Fernlea Primary
- Manaia - Pukeatua Primary
- Waikiwianui - Wainuiomata Primary
- Koniwi - Konini Primary
- Lorenzo - St Claudines Primary
- Pōtiki - Whaea Jean Puketapu
- Pounamu - Whaea Jean Puketapu



Lorenzo at the Marae on release day



One of Lorenzo and Pōtiki's chicks

Getting Stuck In

“Celebrating with the crew who were involved in releasing the first kiwis into the Remutaka Forest Park 20 years ago (20 May 2006). We enjoyed a pot-luck dinner and had a toast to the success of the project. A slideshow from those early days showed our younger looking selves getting stuck into the work.” *Anja van Kesteren & Maarten Vink*



Back L-R: Simon Grant, Paul Jansen, Mike White, Peter Simpson, Alan Thompson, Phill Waddington, Anania Randall Front L-R: Rosemary Thompson, Melody McLaughlin, Maarten Vink, Kirby MacLeod, Susan Ellis



Colin McLaughlin



Bill McCabe



Mike White and Alan Thompson



Whaea Mate, Linda and Pāpā Sep



John Rush, Melody McLaughlin, Bill McCabe, Susan Ellis and Russ McStay



Paul King & Mark Graham



Lynn Adams (DOC) and Bill Milne



Alwyn Rees holding a bagged kiwi ready for release

Carrying the Torch Onward

While some of the Trust's volunteers have been involved for years - some over 20! - rangatahi like Taita College Head Student TJ Pihema are also stepping up to help protect kiwi in the Remutaka Forest Park. TJ said it all started with a suggestion from a teacher to get a gateway placement in predator control. "It was a career pathway I was looking into more and more. I saw the Remutaka Conservation Trust and decided waiting a year for a placement when I could volunteer now was a much better choice."

As one of the younger volunteers involved in trapping and conservation work, TJ says the experience has given him the opportunity to learn from older generations while helping shape his own future. "As a younger rangatahi in conservation and trapping, it's been great just to learn everything from the older generations," he says. "But also, as I get more involved, to be able to see not only a career pathway, but developing my own ideas and ways to improve what we do."



Maarten Vink and TJ checking a trap on the Impossible trap line in Camp Wainui.

Spending time in the ngahere has also had a personal impact. "The most rewarding part of trapping and conservation in general is being able to fully immerse myself in nature, which has helped me greatly reduce the stress of schooling, whilst also protecting Papatūānuku," he says. "Hearing our native birds, fauna and insects recover after realising just how fragile our ecosystem is has been amazing."

TJ believes more young people should experience conservation work firsthand. "I would encourage any young person to volunteer for the RCT," he says. "The effect being out in our ngahere has on people is astounding. All your problems are left at the forest edge and as you immerse yourself in our ngahere, you discover not only more about the land and life around you, but get time to reflect on yourself and leave with a clearer head and a refreshed brain."

🌿 "For me volunteering is quite holistic — as we protect Papatūānuku, she protects us, as tangata whenua" 🌿

Looking to the future, TJ says rangatahi will play a critical role in protecting Aotearoa's environment. "Our whenua is a part of our identity as Kiwis and currently it's under threat," he says. "As rangatahi it is important for us to be aware of, and counter these threats before we lose our unique ecosystem forever."

Despite the scale of the challenge, he remains hopeful. "There is hope all over Aotearoa with projects like RCT supporting the spread of our endangered native kiwi," he says. "We will need to **carry that torch and burn it brighter** so eventually the whole of New Zealand can see the new day of Predator Free NZ."

Phillip Waddington Honoured

Phillip Waddington has been appointed a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the 2026 Kings Birthday Honours List for services to conservation and art. For more than 30 years, he has helped protect native wildlife and habitats in the Hutt Valley, including developing predator traps now used by conservation groups throughout New Zealand.



An accomplished artist, Phill was Wellington Zoo’s inaugural Artist in Residence, He has also painted portraits of Māori women with traditional moko to help capture and preserve māoritanga and kaitiakitanga. The RCT are grateful to Phill for his decades of support and extend a heartfelt congratulations to him for this well deserved honour.

KAT - Protecting Our Kiwi

Introduced in 2009, Kiwi Avoidance Training (KAT) has become an important part of the work Remutaka Conservation Trust is doing to help keep kiwi safe. KAT gives owners a practical way to reduce the risk dogs pose to kiwi by teaching their dogs to recognise and avoid kiwi scent.

The programme is coordinated by volunteer Georgina Wedge, who does a fantastic job organising the sessions and ensuring participants have a positive experience. Feedback from attendees continues to be unanimously positive.

The first 2026 KAT session was held recently, with legendary dog whisperer Willy Marsh leading the sessions. Georgina and fellow volunteers - Melody, Kirsten, Ross, Penny, Rosemary & Retha - helped the weekend run smoothly. The weather held for the whole weekend, with early morning dew and cooler temps but plenty of warming sunshine.

 A total of 64 dogs and their owners completed the KAT training in May
This was a mix of refreshers, first-timers and PAT (Penguin Avoidance Trained) dogs 

The next KAT weekend is scheduled for November. Dog owner who enjoy exploring the outdoors can book by emailing kat@remutaka.nz



First time attendee Budleigh, trying to convince his owner that it’s not smart to go in that direction.



Willy Marsh, Alex & Dot



First timer Albie turning his back on the two kiwi in front of him & looking for an escape route through the bush to get to his owners who are beyond the scary kiwi birds.

Trap Replacement Project Turns Three

Ingrid Greenslade

The Trust is now in year three of its four-year project to replace all predator traps across the Park, with progress continuing over the past few months.

Across years one and two, 194 and 173 new traps were deployed respectively, with almost all of the old traps now collected. Once removed, traps are checked and cleaned before either being redeployed to community groups or recycled if they are no longer salvageable.

Year three has seen the construction of 235 new traps, built on April 11th by James Wright, Joanne Youthed, Matt Russell, Nicola Sanders, Mike White, Penny Evans, Bruce Richards, Alwyn Rees and Ingrid Greenslade.

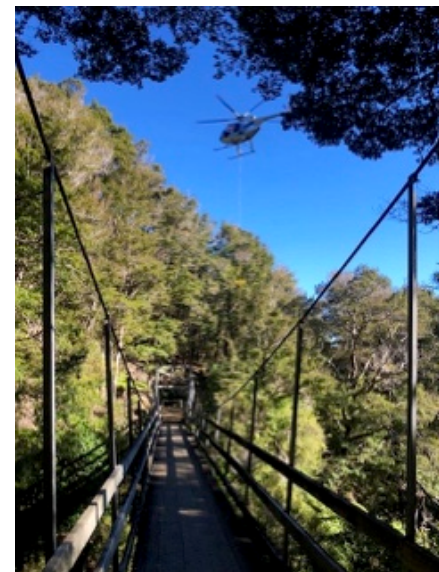
DOC led the helicopter deployment operation on Monday 18 May, with staff supporting the collection of the fadges (bundled loads of old traps). James Wright, Joanne Youthed, Mike White, Bruce Richards and Alwyn Rees also assisted with deployment on the main tracks, helping ensure public safety by temporarily closing key tracks during the operation.

You may see fadges in the bush while the deployment team continues installing the new traps over the coming months and stacking old traps ready for collection next year.

The final stage of the project will take place in 2027, when the remaining old traps will be removed from the bush, cleaned up and recycled, marking the completion of the four-year replacement programme.



James Wright atop a fadge



Heli drop at Midway Bridge



Trap build day on 11 April 2026



Sunshine and blue skies at the skid site

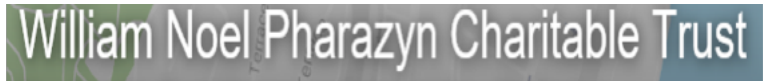
Ōrongorongo in Flood

Elodie Bardsley experienced the Ōrongorongo Valley in dramatic flood in April. The photos posted on her [instagram](#) account are incredible. The side-by-side comparisons she put together below are a dramatic illustration of the sheer volume of water barrelling down the river. Next time you visit, look for the gouge scars and downed trees along the riverbed.



Photo credits: We gratefully acknowledge the many photographers whose images have preserved the memories that allow us to reflect on and celebrate this wonderful achievement. We have not been able to credit all the images as the info has been lost in time but please contact us if you spot a photo you would like attribution for in the future.

Thank you to the following key sponsors as well as all of you who sponsor kiwi, transmitters, traps and trees for your continued annual support



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