

BIRD CALL

December 2018 Issue 44



oroikonui
ecosanctuary

What's New at Orokonui

November has been a truly appalling month weather-wise with the total rainfall for Dunedin breaking the previous record set in 1951 – and then some at Orokonui! - where it feels as if we've been living in the rain and clouds for many months. Fortunately, the birds seem to love the rain, so there's still plenty to see and hear for visitors to Orokonui, even in very inclement weather!

Aside from the impacts on staff morale, the unusual weather has meant that our Operations Team have been under significant pressure responding to numerous flood events. This involves keeping a close eye on the system of culverts at Orokonui, and when the rain is particularly heavy, removing debris from the grates to allow the free flow of water. If this is not done, the build-up of water could cause the predator-resistant fence to breach, which would be catastrophic for the many rare and threatened species living in the predator-free environment at Orokonui. The work of clearing culverts is carried on around the clock, and Murphy's Law has had the team out of bed in the middle of the night on many occasions over the years - so thanks to Elton, Kelly and Geoff, and their volunteer assistants for the extraordinary efforts over the last month!

Amanda Symon - General Manager



Ranger Kelly clearing weed and debris from one of the ecosanctuary's many culverts

Conservation Matters

The unfortunate loss of both of our takahē chicks during an extreme weather event caused a lot of discussion in the media recently, so we feel that it's important to clarify a number of issues. The hatching of our chicks coincided with a period of extremely heavy rain in which, unbeknownst to us, the chicks left the nest. Orokonui staff received some criticism in the media for not 'rescuing' the chicks. Takahē are a protected species, and Orokonui is subject to DoC and Iwi guidelines in how we care for them. What we can and can't do is explicitly set out for us and is based on years of experience from a variety of species recovery programmes.



Paku and chicks in their cozy tussock nest earlier in the month

For takahē, DOC has a non-intervention policy where possible – especially around nests and young chicks, and particularly during poor weather. This isn't because they don't want us to interfere with the course of nature, it's because this is the safest approach, proven over decades of bird management. Disturbing family groups during poor weather almost certainly leads to the birds leaving their dry shelter, can cause abandonment, and even put valuable adult birds at risk. Very young chicks are extremely difficult to locate, and often require an especially trained dog as they bury themselves deep into tussock or scrub. Takahē are hardy birds, and generally good parents, but often they need to learn parenting skills through experience. Our resident pair, Quammen and Paku, will hopefully learn from this loss and any future chicks of theirs will benefit from this. The proof of how well DoC now manages takahē is obvious to see: as of September 2018, there were 376 takahē in the world – the highest number in more than 80 years!

Elton Smith - Conservation Manager



Forest of Knowledge

Over the last month Orokonui has seen an influx of students from many schools, most of which have travelled from outside Dunedin to visit us. These students however have not been arriving in the morning like most that take part in our education program - they come at night . . . They're participating in our Nature By Night sleepovers which feature an amazing walk through the ecosanctuary by torchlight! This is a truly magical experience where student's eyes are opened to a whole new nocturnal world: they see invertebrates they didn't know were there, they hear noises they have never heard before, and they experience a place like no other. Most exciting for the children is just being in the same place as one of New Zealand's rarest species of kiwi. Although they are rarely seen, it is common to hear them calling just after dark in the ecosanctuary - a very unusual noise not heard before and one that leaves the children buzzing afterwards. This program is an incredible addition to the education repertoire at Orokonui as it provides children with a truly memorable once in a lifetime experience, that they remember long after they've left Orokonui!

Taylor Davies-Colley - Orokonui Educator



Tamariki exploring the ecosanctuary at night

Volunteers' Voices



Staff from Oceana Gold and Emerson's Brewery (generous sponsors of Orokonui) enjoy a very special opportunity to witness the arrival of two Tokoeka kiwi chicks.

One of the main highlights of the last month for us has been welcoming more young kiwi to the creche! We now have 5 birds in residence, and we can proudly say they are all doing well thanks in part to our team of volunteer kiwi feeders!

We had a bit of an issue at first with Tiare, aka the dirt eater, but things have improved and Tiare is now the biggest bird of the bunch. After Tiare came Charlie and K-T. They have been eating well and we have now progressed to the next step of opening their pens up to the wild. They are still on supplementary feed which they come back to every night as they get used to their freedom and the foraging this enables.

In the last week we have welcomed two new chicks, named Birddog and Oceania. Both these chicks have been known to eat a bit of dirt although one more than the other. We have put extra mats down and they have been a wee bit erratic on food consumption but overall so far so good. We are in the process of remove all their mats and if they eat well then later this week their pens can be opened, and they will begin to forage!

Alice Macklow - Volunteer Coordinator

Wishlist

Unwanted sheets of white adhesive labels - for the cafe



Open Daily 9.30am-4.30pm for Guided Tours and Self Guided Walks
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