



# GBI Environmental News

The publication of the Great Barrier Island Charitable Trust, whose trustees are:  
John Ogden (Chair), Tony Bouzaid, Jude Gilbert, David Speir, Liz Westbrooke, Jo Ritchie  
Fenella Christian (Secretary)



**Chevron  
or  
Ornate  
Skink  
Can you  
tell?**



## **The Gulf of Seabirds • Mohunga Don Woodcock's Eye on the Past**

**Vision Statement:** Our vision is to protect native species through the eradication of rats and feral cats, to re-introduce species lost to the Island, and to work towards building an ecology-based economic framework for Great Barrier Island.



The New Zealand storm petrel, *pealeornis maoriana*, photographed near the Mokohinau Islands of the Hauraki Gulf by Dr Brent Stevenson. Photo source: Dept. of Conservation

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## BIODIVERSITY INFORMATION WANTED.....

The Great Barrier Island Charitable Trust is collecting together information about the biodiversity of Great Barrier Island to produce a "State of the Environment" report that can be accessed by the community. We want to collect together data, information and research on the birds, plants, lizards, insects and fish etc. to get a better idea of just what is here and how that is changing over time.

We will be working with the Community and DoC to get together information about the history of the environment, including changes in land use, farming, fishing etc. Some of this is already published, but many details are scattered amongst members of the public, particularly GBI residents.

If you have any information that you think would be useful e.g. wildlife observations, information in old diaries, photos or a story down on paper, please contact:

Fenella Christian 09 4290 414 • Liz Westbrook 09 3786 356  
Or email to [gbitrust@xtra.co.nz](mailto:gbitrust@xtra.co.nz)

### COVER PHOTOS

You probably won't ever meet them together, quite possibly not at all as there have been less than 50 recorded sightings of the chevron skink, a species endemic to the Barrier. The lower photo of the chevron skink, *oligosoma homalonotum* by Tony Whitaker clearly shows the distinctive 'moko' like markings under the jaw. In fact the adult chevron is distinctly larger than the ornate skink, *cyclodina ornata* which is identified by a pinkish colour under the belly, as the markings and tones of colour on the backs of both can vary significantly. Richard Parrish's shot of the ornate skink shows quite similar markings to the chevron. Halema Jamieson at DoC HQ is interested in any sightings of these and other lizards — talk to her on 4290 044.

And on the subject of covers we wrongly named Geoff Moon's cover photo in the Winter edition — the bird is the spotless crake. On page 10 the trapped rat was a Norwegian rat and not a shiprat, although both species are present on Stewart Island.

## Boxing Day Kaka Count...

Forms available  
from your local  
store.

Make your  
recovery day  
meaningful.

## A Reflection – My Time on Great Barrier

BY DON WOODCOCK

I arrived at Port Fitzroy on the Mt Cook Grumman Widgeon in April 1971 and was met at the Port Fitzroy Landing by John Leith – Officer In Charge at the N.Z. Forest Service HQ.

My long lasting recollection was the smell of ginger at the headquarters. About 300m<sup>2</sup> of rampant ginger, all in flower, was growing about the OIC residence.

Much time during the next 15 years was spent on maintaining and upgrading the Island roading network with an interesting and able bunch of workers. We also started upgrading and increasing the number of walking tracks in the central part of Great Barrier.

Perhaps the most interesting and rewarding work was the preparation and planting of native seedlings in areas reverting from farming around Port Fitzroy, Karaka Bay, Whangaparapara and in areas approaching Claris.

Between 1976 and 1986 we planted on average 20,000 seedlings annually. Seed was collected locally, sent to the NZ Forest nursery at Sweetwater, Awanui, Northland and returned after 2-3 years as 30-40cm healthy seedlings. I recall lots of opposition to this work because we were going out to produce a productive native forest. My response was that when the trees matured in 100-120 years the choices would be made then. In the mean time the planting would improve the forest diversity in areas where these trees grew originally but now had

DON WOODCOCK is one of the old school. His face is familiar to all here in the North — where for many years he was Manager for DoC. His personal recollections are a valuable insight into the conservation efforts of bygone years, which are easily overlooked. The transition of the Forest Service into the Conservation Department has had huge implications for the Barrier, and will continue to do so into the future. The results — whether you look at the stands of planted kauri in the Kiwiriki, the impressive trackwork around Mount Hirakimata, the eradication of feral goats... these works and others speak for themselves of the dedication and hard work of Don and other conservation pioneers of Great Barrier Island.

very little local source for natural seeding.

In 1985 the goat eradication programme started in Te Paparahi, the north of the Island. The Lands and Survey assisted through funding and the Forest Service provided the goat hunters. This programme in my view has to date been the biggest and most rewarding for conservation on the Island.

Big things happened in the late 1980s. The restructuring of many government departments, the demise of some and the formation

of new. This was later followed by local government restructuring. Great Barrier Island did not go unscathed. The vast crown lands previously managed by the NZ Forest Service and Lands and

Survey were re-allocated in 1987. Most went to the new Department of Conservation and leaseholds went to the new State Owned Enterprise, Landcorp. The Great Barrier Island County Council was replaced by Auckland City Council.

In 1986 we moved from Okiwi to Port Fitzroy to take up my new role with the Forest Service. By then we had a growing under-

standing of pests, both plants and animals. The first thing I did as an after work chore was tackle the ginger. It took 2 years but eventually I had totally eradicated one area above the house through pulling and burning but succumbed to the use of herbicides to manage the other bigger area below the house. Even now the odd plant will show but most of the area now has a good covering of native vegetation.

In 1987 the goat eradication programme in the north was in full swing. Already the change to the forest floor up to 1.5m was incredible. A mixture of seedlings were showing everywhere and many trees, particularly kohekohe, were coppicing. This programme was initially planned only for the Te Paparahi block with controls and monitoring set up between Whangapoua and Motairche. After

some convincing the programme was extended to include all feral goats throughout the Island. So a full 22 years later we have unofficially, a feral goat-free Island.

In 1993 we were fortunate enough to purchase almost 11 acres of prime land at Okiwi from Owen Cooper. Previously farmed for milking cows and then dry stocked, it was bare land gently contoured towards the north with two small creeks running through parts of it. Immediately I set about fencing and planting.

Nearly 6000 native seedlings later, raised in my own nursery I had completed my plan of planting creek edges, damp areas and boundaries to create an extension of natural corridors and provide shelter and windbreaks. The benefits now include: improved bird and animal habitat, increased birdlife, cleaner stream water, greater variety of colour on the property and the simple joy of watching the incremental growth each year. With benefits come disadvantages. These are few but have long term impacts. The rabbits were very happy with the extra cover that the plantings provided so proceeded to multiply and occupy a space that was supposed to produce replacement plants through the natural process from the many seedlings planted. The only species that they don't eat are kanuka and totara. Unless rabbit numbers are dramatically reduced all our regenerating areas will look the same, a real loss of

**"Between 1976 and 1986 we planted on average 20,000 native seedlings annually."**

diversity. Rats beat the rabbits. I have observed them at night eating fruit and seeds from a number of species. So there we have a double whammy, the seeds the rats don't eat if given the chance to germinate are devoured by the rabbits as soon as they rise above the ground. I have also had to put netting around many trees to prevent ringbarking by rabbits. They don't stop there though, digging down to and eating tree roots is another means of getting sustenance.

I do believe the future for the Island is bright. There is a growth of understanding for the special things that are unique to the Island and the ways of improving things to increase this uniqueness. A number of people have led the charge to reverse the 'take and don't care' trend to make things safer and healthier so that serious consideration can be given to bringing back a number of species that have not been seen or heard by most of the current generation.

I was fortunate to play a part in the relocation of the two last known kokako from Te Paparahi in 1994. They were moved to a safe environment at Hauturu where there is every opportunity for them to breed with resident birds there. The plan is that one day when all threats are removed or managed their offspring will be brought back.

Planning for these events has to be thorough and do take time. Every body that has an interest needs to be part of the process. Only then will any completed works be called a success. My

## Report to ASB Trust

HERE IS A LIST of the extras the GBICT has achieved in the last 6 months as part of our vision.

- Completed a Summary of Economic Results Report
- Up-skilled 3 trustees via Community Partnership, Strategic Planning, and Marketing & promotion workshops
- 2 trustees attended the "Rats, Humans and Islands Conference" in Hawaii where we presented a paper and large poster on our work
- 1 Trustee attended the "Conser-Vision Conference"
- Did written and oral submissions to the ARC on its Regional Pest Management Strategy (RPMS)
- Did submissions to the Auckland City District Plan
- Discussion with the ARC on the Biosecurity Management Planning for Great Barrier Island
- Meeting with Annie Perkins - Social Scientist, on community consultation
- 2 meetings so far with the new DoC Area manager for Great Barrier Island Jacqui Dyer
- 2 meetings with Department of Conservation sub committee
- Visit from Brent Bevan of Stewart Island to compare experiences of another rural island community project
- One trustee is on Auckland Conservation Board and as a result has received and read the DoC Off shore and Outlying Island Strategy and also information about the National Biodiversity Priorities for Private land.

# The Gulf of Seabirds

BY JO RITCHIE

The Hauraki Gulf is a seabird mecca. I don't know how many times I have been out sailing and come across a 'boil up'. It's like kids at a lolly scramble. The water is seething with fish frantically trying to weave themselves into a tighter and tighter ball against a massive aerial assault and occasionally large mouths from below in the form of Brydes whales and common and bottlenose dolphins.

The aerial assault is a combination of a ballet and a rugby scrum. The sleek bullet shaped bodies of gannets with their wings tightly folded against their bodies' streak in from great heights, a flash of yellow as the sun hits their heads and a splash as they hit the water and then pop up with a shining silver victim. The gulls are probably the scrum

contenders as they are constantly scrapping and nicking in to steal fish. Petrels and terns are more delicate in their meal gathering tactics.

Seabirds are birds that have adapted to life in the marine environment. In general, seabirds live longer, breed later and have fewer young than other birds do, but they invest a great deal of time in their young. Most species nest in colonies, which can vary in size from a few dozen birds to millions.

Many species are famous for undertaking long annual migrations, crossing the equator or circumnavigating the Earth in some cases. They feed both at the ocean's surface and below it, and even feed on each other. Seabirds can be highly pelagic (living on the open ocean), coastal, or in some



Adult gannet and chicks at the Mahuku rookery - note the porous looking soil.

Photos: Halema Jamieson DoC.

cases spend a part of the year away from the sea entirely.

Shorebirds are often inter-changed with seabirds. Shorebirds however prefer to do their thing close to land. It's the difference between having webbed landing and paddling pads as opposed to longer, slimmer waders.

Shorebirds occupy wetlands and inshore coastal environments such as beaches, rock pools and estuaries. The majority of species eat small invertebrates picked out of mud or exposed soil. Different lengths of bills enable different species to feed in the same habitat, particularly on the coast,

without direct competition for food. Many waders have sensitive nerve endings at the end of their bills which enable them to detect prey items hidden in mud or soft soil. Some larger species, particularly those adapted to drier habitats will take larger prey including insects and small reptiles. Some of our better known

shorebirds are the NZ dotterel and the variable oystercatcher but they also include that wonderful sentinel, the grey heron which you often see standing statue like

with its lemon yellow legs in the water and then all of a sudden it impales a struggling silver victim on the end of its elegant beak.

Some species like shags (alias cormorants), are in between the two. Although they are classified as seabirds, they spend a lot of time inshore in large, noisy colonies often in cliff edge pohutukawa on which they snow down droppings. Their nests are nothing to be proud of - resembling little more than a ramshackle collection of twigs, flotsam and jetsam precariously piled together on a branch.

The Hauraki Gulf has some very special seabirds. Petrels comprise the largest number of

species feeding in the waters of the gulf and breeding on the islands.

They range from the delicate storm petrels or Mother Carey's chickens, to the great albatrosses and the more common shearwaters, prions and mollymawks. At least a dozen of these species breed on the islands. Breeding colonies are often large. This not only makes for a very noisy neighbourhood but a very crowded one. On islands where the ground is soft the birds make tunnel like burrows turning the surface of many small islands into giant spongy honeycombs. If you have ever wondered why there are not many trees on islands like the Grey group out from Port Fitzroy, this is partly because of the poor soil but also because of the way seabirds and their burrows have undermined the ground and made it unstable for many large trees to anchor their roots.

The islands of the Hauraki Gulf are petrel strongholds. Cooks and Black petrels only breed on Little Barrier and Great Barrier. Two and a half million Buller's shearwaters nest at the Poor Knights, the grey faced petrel breeds on most islands (you may know these birds if you have stayed a night on Tiritiri Island) and the sooty shearwater has small colonies on the Aldermen, Hen and Chicken, Poor Knights and Mercury Islands.

A number of petrel species spend time in the Kaipara Harbour as well as the Hauraki Gulf. Some enjoy endless summers, migrating overseas during our winter months. Flesh footed, Buller's and sooty shearwaters fly regularly to the North Pacific and have been recorded off the Californian coast

with the Buller's traveling as far as South America – wouldn't it be nice to have free air miles and a zero carbon footprint!

Many of you will have heard the distinctive calls of petrels. Groaning or yelling sounds with some cat like (yup cat like!) meows are made by the larger species of petrel and the shearwaters. Rapidly repeated ti-ti-ti or kek-kek notes

are given by

Cooks and Pycroft's petrels. Hence the Maori name Titi. The diving petrel makes wailing and cooing calls but perhaps the most distinctive caller is the fluttering shearwater which has a rapid, repetitive cry best

described as a wild laugh.

The best time to hear the birds is in summer during the breeding season. Returning birds begin to assemble offshore at dusk and as darkness falls they move to land and descend to greet their waiting mates in the burrows. The noise is usually greatest on dark or misty nights when the birds need to call to make contact with their mates.

I have this theory (thoroughly untested of course!) that they also use their calls to echo locate as they fly up valleys on their way to places like HIRAKAMATA – Mt Hobson. Their landing tactics are

not pretty as they often crash down through the foliage. One of the most remarkable facts is that some petrels are occasional breeders and have extended overseas tours at least a few years and then they return to nest within a few metres of where they were born.

There is still much to learn about seabirds even in the Hauraki Gulf

where it seems sometimes that every man and his dog are out fishing. The NZ storm petrel was presumed extinct for 150 years until 2003 when a sighting was made by a group of ornithologists off the Whitianga coast.

Seabirds are affected by human use of the oceans. Marine debris is attractive to many species as nesting material. I have seen gannet nests off the coast of Muriwai Beach on Auckland's west coast that were comprised entirely of plastic and strapping from bait boxes. I have also removed many 6 pack can holders from around bird's necks and at Tawharanui seen the

terrible sight of a dead shag suspended in a tree with fishing line around its neck – a terrible way to die. Picking up rubbish particularly plastic and fishing line around our coast is such a

simple thing to do and it does make a difference. Disposing of rubbish responsibly when boating or fishing is a simple way to help.

However the biggest threats to seabirds that nest in the Hauraki Gulf are introduced pests namely cats and rats. Kiore predation of Cook's petrel chicks resulted in a 90% failure rate of Cook's petrel on Little Barrier Island between 1996-2003. Following their eradication from Codfish Island Cook's petrel achieved 80% breeding success in a 4 year period – the same trend is being repeated at Little Barrier now that kiore have been eradicated.

The Department of Conservation has pioneered techniques to eradicate rodents from islands with 100% success rates in most cases. It is important to the survival of seabird ecosystems that DoC is supported in these endeavours. Seabird colonies and the rich guano in turn support many unique species of native plants found nowhere else. Our only dinosaur the tuatara often shares lodgings with nesting petrels as do many species of lizards and large invertebrates.

We can all help protect the seabird islands of the Gulf by treading gently. Enjoy small islands from a distance. Resist the urge to go ashore, some are nature reserves and many are privately owned. Don't take the dog ashore for a walk, check your boat for rats regularly and think carefully before you run a shore line from your boat to a tree – rats run these very easily. And above all take time to enjoy the many seabirds that call the Hauraki Gulf home.



New Zealand storm petrel – a low profile but still definitely present.  
Photo: Brent Stevenson

# Rat Attack Workshop

BY FENELLA CHRISTIAN

On the Sunday of Labour Weekend the Great Barrier Island Charitable Trust held a "Rat Attack" workshop for the Great Barrier Island community. There was a turnout of 25 people all interested in learning about the best ways to catch rats, and the reasons why it is important for us to try and catch them. I went as someone who thought she knew plenty about rats, especially considering the number of workshops I have attended over the last few years in my role as secretary for the Great Barrier Island Charitable Trust. I was very surprised to discover there was still more for me to learn.

After a welcome speech and short overview of the work of the GBI Trust John Ogdan handed over to Jude Gilbert from Windy Hill/Rosalie Bay Catchment Trust who started the day with a talk entitled "Humans create rat heaven - what attracts rats to your property and where is best to manage them." The slide of a rat trap in the top of the compost bin under the lid was pretty impressive. All the places rats like were talked about and we can be assured of finding rats anywhere - rock walls being the first thing to come to my mind. At lunch time Jude also demonstrated a range of rat traps and bait stations that are available to the public to use.

Jo Ritchie spoke on "It's hell in

the Bush" - bush rats - what damage do they do? Of all the predators in the bush (cats, dogs, stoats, possums, ferrets) rats have by far the biggest single impact on plant and animal life. There is the obvious damage i.e. gnawing through pipes and cables, getting into pantries, eating chook food, clothes, putty, soap etc... but Jo told us of the damage done to the bush. Rats have a huge impact on the bush, feeding on all the seeds and fruits of trees to the detriment of our native bush. They decimate the small animals and the insects. She spoke of the distances they swim and that there is no place a Ship rat can't get to. Thank goodness we don't have Norwegian rats here. She said that some rats live only in the trees, and I recalled seeing rats running across the top of the Kanuka one day at dusk at our place.

After a lovely lunch provided by the local Department of Conservation office we heard Matt Maitland speak on the moral and ethical issues around the killing of cats and rats. Did you know that they have to die within 3 mins otherwise it is deemed cruel and is against the law. Traps and Baits are therefore required to kill rats quickly. I might add here that Matt showed a rather disturbing video of mice cannibalizing an Albatross in some Islands near Antarctica. Mice can



GBICT Chairman John Ogdan opens the Rat Attack workshop.

rabbit numbers when this is done.

As well as the managed area they have a control area where there is no trapping or baiting happening.

They have found that there is a big difference between the

unmanaged and the managed area with regards to some of the species. In a survey of the unmanaged area they only found one weta, whereas in the managed area they have weta motels that have good numbers there most of the time.

My mind boggled when I considered trying to use the same methods for the whole of Great Barrier Island and it became clear that we need to find other ways to manage rats if we are to do it at all. There has to be other ways to do it and we could probably lead the world if we can find the way.

There was great feedback from the participants in the open discussion part of the programme. In the discussion at the end of the day someone suggested that we might be able to do a bait drop in the bush areas and perhaps look at putting poisons in bait stations or use traps around dwellings or water Catchment areas.

A concern that someone

become a problem when rats are removed and there is plenty of research going on at the moment to find ways to deal with mice.

Jude spoke about the Pest project at Windy Hill Rosalie Bay area. This project started by Jude trapping only around her house. Now the area covered by this project is approx 450 hr and it takes in a number of properties in the Windy Hill Rosalie Bay Area. Originally they started using traps only because there were issues for them around the use of poisons. However because they were unable to get the numbers below a certain percentage they decided to pulse with baits. The results were phenomenal with some areas showing no rats after a bait pulse. Four workers walk the perimeter twice a week and there are 3000+ traps and a huge area of trapping lines to manage. In the summer they close up the cat traps as a way to control the rabbits and there has been a noticeable difference in

mentioned is the amounts of baits we are all constantly putting into the soil while we try and reduce the rat numbers, and that the poisons we buy are toxic and accumulative. I wonder what quantities the local hardware store is selling through a year?

There was a clear message that a rat eradication has never been done on an inhabited island the size of Great Barrier Island and that as a community we need to be innovative and lateral in our thinking to find a way. What a challenge!

Kevin Parsons from the Windy Hill team took a number of people around the traps that he had set up at Mulberry Grove School the week before so they could see the types of places to put traps to be more effective.

Each participant was given a fantastic pack with an enclosed, lockable bait station, a rat trap, cover and spike to hold it in place and information about rats and rat eradication around the home.

A big thank you to all the people who attended and thank you to Windy Hill Rosalie Bay Catchment Trust, Department of Conservation, Mulberry Grove School, Auckland Regional Council, Jo Ritchie, Matt Maitland, Jude Gilbert, Stonewall Store and anyone else I might have forgotten. The Trust has decided they will repeat the workshop in other areas if people are interested

For more information please don't hesitate to contact the Great Barrier Island Charitable Trust at 09 4290414.

## Sustainable Environment Award to GBICT



Trustee Liz Westbrooke accepts the award from ARC's Bill Burrill and Cathy Klouwens.

IN AUGUST THIS YEAR, the Great Barrier Island Charitable Trust won the Highly Commended placing in the ARC's Sustainable Environment awards. This was achieved in the Rural Communities category and was for its rat and feral cat eradication project.

Groups, individuals and organisations who are doing their bit for the environment were encouraged to apply. ARC Chair, Mike Lee, said that the ARC works with many environmental care groups who look after our streams, beaches and land, in all kinds of ways.

Environmental pioneer Jack Harper took away the Supreme Winner award for a lifetime of work on the Awhitu Peninsula.

Sustainable Environment Awards project leader Cathy Klouwens says the awards recognise and celebrate outstanding individual and group environmental achievement.

"We received a very high calibre of applications from across the Auckland region. Our judges had a very difficult job deciding on the winners," she says.

## Mohunga Peninsular Restoration Group

BY JO O'REILLY

### Background

Mohunga Peninsular makes up the northern side of Port Abercrombie. It is over 600 ha of rugged predominantly bush and scrub covered land. All homes on the peninsular are located along the waterfront and access is only by boat. Beyond the houses the land rises steeply to a main ridgeline.

For many years various Mohunga Residents have been carrying out predator control around their houses. Native planting and weed control has also been undertaken. During 2003 some of these people began to discuss possibilities for extending their initiatives over a wider area and in 2004 the Department of Conservation Biodiversity Advice funds enabled the contracting of an expert to study and report on the biodiversity of the peninsular. It was recognized the peninsular has a variety of different, important habitats and species including native reptiles, fish, birds and invertebrates. In 2005 The Mohunga Peninsular Restoration Group Incorporated was registered and consists of residents and landowners from the peninsular. They are working towards the following objectives:

- To preserve the native flora and fauna on Mohunga Peninsular.
- To enhance the various habitats to enable the existing indigenous populations to increase and to allow introduction of species that have been decimated or eliminated.

- To encourage similar projects on other areas of Aotearoa.

The Mohunga Peninsular Restoration Project brings together a diverse range of people to work towards a common goal and fosters a community spirit. It offers an opportunity to become actively involved in conservation and provides employment opportunities for local people.

The location of Mohunga Peninsular means that work done on it to protect biodiversity has significant direct wider implications. It is the nearest land to Hauturu (Little Barrier Island), the publicly owned (DOC administered) Nature Reserve. Species such as bell bird arrive from Hauturu to Mohunga but to date no breeding has been recorded on Great Barrier Island. It lies adjacent to Kaikoura Island which is currently being managed by a trust with a vision to



Mohunga landscape—steep, rugged and isolated. Photo by Jo O'Reilly - Envirokauti

eradicate all introduced mammals from it. It is also close to Glenfern Sanctuary, another private restoration project with a vision to eradicate mammalian pests. Between Glenfern Sanctuary and Mohunga Peninsula lies the Great Barrier Outdoor Pursuits Centre whose students have the opportunity to get involved in these projects. Each of these projects is significant in itself but if all these restoration projects proceed, it will provide a significant and diverse area for protection of a wide range of rare, declining and or threatened New Zealand flora and fauna.

The group has contracted Envirokiwi Ltd, a local (Okwi) contracting and consulting company to manage the progression of the project.

Biz Bell of Wildlife International is currently undertaking species monitoring including birds, bats, frogs and lizards. Biz's work focuses in particular on sea bird monitoring and protection, and eradication of mammalian pests from islands. Members of the Group are hosting Biz and volunteering with field work and boat transport around the peninsula. So far Biz has found Black petrel, Cooks petrel and grey faced petrel nesting on the peninsula—great news! Biz has also provided the group with information and insights on some of the options for managing mammalian pests. Plans for the coming months

include reopening a ridgeline track along the length of the Peninsular from Orama out to Nagle Cove and a buffer/access route at the base of the peninsular to the coasts. A 4X4 vehicle will be purchased to allow easier access and transport of management tools.

#### Predator Control

As well as the rodent bait stations that individuals are maintaining around their properties, the group service bait stations around the Port

Abercrombie shoreline area. These are currently being serviced once a month. Tracking tunnel lines to monitor rat activity are located over the peninsular.

Cat traps have been established along the top ridge track of the peninsular and are operated predominantly over the winter months because of a potential risk to black petrels that may be in the area over that time.

To maintain pests at low enough numbers to help species recovery and reintroduce species once living here it is recognized that a predator proof fence is the most efficient long term option. A proposed fenceline has been identified with both ends at defensible sites on the coastline. Approximately 2km of fenceline could protect approximately 600ha of land. However other options can also be effective at achieving the objectives of the Group and these are also being considered.



Grey-faced petrel chick in rocky cave. Photo: Jo O'Reilly-Envirokiwi

## 'Extinct' seabird sighting stirs up a storm

WHEN THE NZ Storm Petrel was first sighted by Dr Brent Stevenson and Saw Saville off the Whitianga Coast in January 2003 the news of the re-appearance of a seabird, unsighted for 150 years and thought extinct, set the birding world on fire.

Recently a team including Department of Conservation staff and scientists, funded jointly by DOC and a grant from National Geographic's Committee for Research and Exploration, caught three birds during October and early November this year.

None of the captured birds showed signs of breeding, so the birds were released without attaching transmitters, said Dr Stephenson. The transmitters are used to track the birds with the aim of discovering which island they are breeding on.

DOC officer Karen Baird said it was thought the petrels might be breeding on islands where rodents had been eradicated such as the Mokohinau islands.

"One of the theories is that the birds survived in very low numbers on an island where rats were present and once the rats were removed the birds have been quietly building up in numbers until they began to be noticed several years ago."

Last year three storm petrels were caught and fitted with minute radio transmitters, weighing just one gram. However, extensive searches by plane around

islands in the Hauraki Gulf failed to reveal any of the birds on land. The photos, measurements and DNA samples from these birds enabled them to be confirmed as the long lost New Zealand storm petrel, said Ms Baird.

The New Zealand storm-petrel is about 20 cm long and is black and white with black streaks on the belly. It lives and feeds at sea, only returning to land to breed.

Boaties are asked to keep an eye out for this small black and white bird. Phone sightings to the 24 hour free DOC hotline - 0800 DOCHOT (362468) - or send photos and details to 'NZ storm petrel sightings', Department of Conservation, PO Box 474, Warkworth. A fact sheet is available from DOC Warkworth.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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