



GBI Environmental News

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



Kaka

Biosecurity

Booming Bitterns

Mission 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.



Kaka chick in hollow tree nest site. At this stage flightless and vulnerable to predators.

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Editorial...

by John Ogden

Barrier residents are facing increased costs for basics such as transport, communications, housing, food and education. The resident population is currently shrinking in numbers and getting older and effectively poorer. Simultaneously, as coastal property values escalate, some asset-rich residents are subdividing properties and selling to off island owners. Many of the latter have valuable expertise and experience to offer this community, but they are often dismissed as outsiders (or worse) with little to contribute to Island life. Meanwhile both the Department of Conservation, and the City Council are busy with new management plans, which are so over-arching and detailed that few ratepayers, whether on- or off-island, have the time to really understand them. In these circumstances it is little wonder that some residents are crying "enough is enough" and resisting change of any sort.

The Great Barrier Island Charitable Trust (GBICT) has proposed a new future for Great Barrier Island: a future in which the bush and its native birds, lizards and insects could thrive. Many other Island examples demonstrate that this could happen if we could get rid of rats, feral cats and rabbits. Such an Island would have new employment opportunities, in biosecurity maintenance, outdoor education, nature tourism, and the infra-

structure needed to support a revitalised economy. However, recent events on the Island, especially the Community Board meeting of November 16th, have demonstrated strong resistance to the GBICT's proposal to investigate World Heritage status for Great Barrier.

I'd like to clarify why the trustees decided to investigate World Heritage Status (WHS) for Great Barrier, and why we are now sorry that we did so. Many of you who voted to support our rat eradication campaign may not feel the same way about this subject. Thinking ahead towards the economic framework of a rat and feral cat free island, we wondered if WHS would re-vitalise the economy by putting the Island "on the world map" for nature tourism, consequently getting more government support for infrastructure and services. We found that the process to achieve WH status is formal and lengthy. To begin with a site, such as Great Barrier, must be suggested for consideration, then recommended by a nominee such as Auckland City. This cannot happen without support from the community. If such support is obtained, then the Department of Conservation must prepare public discussion documents and receive submissions. This process may take years, before a recommendation is made to Cabinet. (For example, in 2005 six NZ sites were recommended and a final decision on nomination on 2 or 3 of these is still to be made). The final nominations are then put to the International World Heritage Committee, which next meets in 2007, to choose a few

sites from all those nominated from around the World.

We now regret our decision to present our ideas to the Environment, Heritage and Urban Form (EHUF) sub-committee of council. Our action was interpreted by some as an attempt to circumvent the Community Board. It wasn't - it was simply taking advantage of an opportunity to bring GBI to the notice of council. I guess it achieved that! We didn't claim to represent the community or the Board. The result was that the EHUF committee passed a resolution to "investigate the feasibility of nominating Great Barrier Island as a world heritage site". This action was unanticipated - the Trust did not propose it. The resolution is merely a tentative first step to provide some information - it hardly constitutes a threat to life as we know it on Great Barrier. However, we recognise that our process was wrong here: the Community Board should have seen the presentation first. Perhaps it is worth saying that we are all busy people trying to do what we can when we can.

Two of our trustees were, to put it mildly, given a hard time at the Community Board meeting. Liz Westbrook, while presenting a tabled apology to the Board for a perceived breach of protocol by the Trust, was subjected to verbal abuse. Tony Bouzaid was accused of "conflict of interest", because he is also chairperson of the Community Board. Certainly Tony was put in a difficult position when strong opposition was voiced against the GBIC Trust, and this must have made it more difficult to control

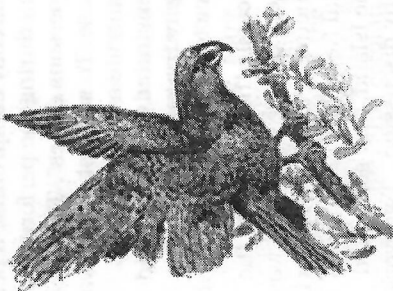
the unruly public gathering. However, a conflict of interest arises when a decision is required on a matter where "a financial or other interest that could directly or indirectly compromise a person occurs during the performance of that persons duties". This was not the case. To suggest that it was is to denigrate a man who has demonstrated dedication and integrity throughout his long service to the Island community.

Despite the sour note, the trustees believe that 2006 was a productive year. The GBI Environmental News has been widely read on the Island, and generated healthy discussion. Two world experts gave lectures on rodent eradication. We organised three community trips to Tiritiri Matangi Island (c. 70 people in total), where the benefits of rat eradication and habitat restoration to wildlife (and tourism) are obvious. We had well-attended (65-80) open days at current pest eradication/restoration projects on Great Barrier, and commenced a community-based programme of Island-wide bird monitoring (22 participants). As a spin-off from our on-going research we deposited literature on rat-eradication and the use of poisons in the Library. Last, but not least, trustees have written numerous letters to the Barrier Bulletin!

In other words, the GBICT has been active in engaging the community to think about pest eradication, conservation and nature-based tourism as a sustainable economic benefit for future development on Great Barrier.

Kakas – a precious taonga

by Liz Westbrooke



E koekoe te tui

The tui sings

E ketekete te kaka

The kaka chatters

E kuku te keneru

The pigeon coos

KRAAAK! Kraaak! Kraaak!
They fly over our place almost every night in the summer at around 7pm. Like a motorcycle gang, but dressed in olive brown rather than black leather, they zoom up the valley from the seacoast straight through the gap between us and Little Windy Hill. Then on down to Tryphena I guess. We usually see about five at once, however other residents up here have seen as many as eleven.

They look and sound tough with their screeching but are actually increasingly vulnerable.

Last year kaka were upgraded to Status 2 - Nationally Endangered. That rating has put them up there with brown teal and chevron skinks. There is only one higher score and that is Critically Endangered, a status reserved for birds like the kakapo, dangerously close to extinction for half a century.

So we are very lucky to have them here! I know it doesn't feel like that when they attack our fruit trees (but more on that later).

Kakas are practically extinct as a breeding bird on the mainland existing only where there are 'mainland islands' with targeted predator programmes (or fences) such as Mt Bruce, Pureora Forest and the Karori Sanctuary. Indeed both Mt Bruce and Karori are captive breeding kaka in their endeavours to re-establish a wild kaka population. It has taken ten years of effort at Mt Bruce to get the kaka numbers up to around 75.

I found no research available focused on Great Barrier kaka and why they remain viable here. But it appears that the absence of stoats (and possibly Norway rats) allows nesting females and chicks to survive better in their deep hollow-tree nest sites. Recent nationwide research found that possums too feast on both eggs and chicks and will even kill adult females. So the absence of



Kaka (Nestor meridionalis) - feeding on ripe figs in a Port FitzRoy garden. They feed on fruits, nectar and berries as well as insects and grubs.

possums on Great Barrier Island is also a positive factor. Of course we still have the problem of feral cats and rats.

Young kaka are practically flightless for several days after they leave the nest though they

can climb quite well. Kaka lay their eggs through spring and early summer and these take 24 to 26 days to incubate. The female does all the sitting on eggs and is fed every hour and a half by the

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So what can you do to help this highly endangered bird survive?

- keep your dogs on a leash especially in any bush areas where there may be fledglings on the ground or nests low down;
- net your fruit trees – but this must be sturdy and may only work if made of wire to stop the birds eating their way through;
- some other suggestions for your garden are to use bird scaring devices such as raptor kites, hazing tape or streamers or playing recorded alarm calls – so try these out – or simply accept that a portion of your fruit is going to a good cause;
- get your pet cat spayed or neutered to ensure there is no

likelihood you unwittingly add to the feral cat population;

- keep a diary of your observations of these fascinating birds;
- leave your pets at home if you are a holiday maker, or keep them very well managed on the island;
- be very careful if you are visiting or returning to the island not to bring any unwanted 'visitors' (possums, stoats, ferrets, Norway rats) with you or your luggage, car, freight or boat;
- Kaka breed most successfully after a good season of Kahikatea or Rimu seed production so if you are planting something new, consider one of these native trees.

BIOSECURITY

It's a big word, but what does it mean? Jude Gilbert looks at the real picture.

The issue of what biosecurity or quarantine provisions would come into being following a rat and feral cat eradication on Great Barrier have to be carefully considered. What has to be remembered is that this Island would become an 'open sanctuary' - a place where people come and go all the time. **Biosecurity measures must therefore be practical and not unduly inconvenience people or freight movement.**

Some examples of how this works in practice elsewhere: **Tawharanui Regional Park** Practical and minimising inconvenience to visitors is how biosecurity measures work at Tawharanui Regional Park. This 588ha park has 160,000 visitors a year and is bounded by a 2.5 km pest proof fence. Visitors gain access through the fence by way of an electronically operated gate. Tawharanui has a large well-used camping facility (280 person capacity) and people are simply asked when they make their camp booking to ensure their gear is pest free. Over summer months campers are also provided with a mouse trap for their camp site as mice are still present on the park. On arrival in the park (over summer) visitors are given a pamphlet about the pest free status of the park and can attend talks by the rangers. The park holds 1200 sheep and c. 250 cattle and stock trucks move freely in and out of the park. While it has a pest proof fence right across the peninsula,

pests can, and do, enter through the beach ends. Much monitoring, baiting, and trapping is done inside and outside the fence to ensure invaders are identified and caught. Although Great Barrier will not have a predator fence the principles of practical biosecurity measures still apply.

Existing biosecurity measures:

A good place to start when looking at what 'quarantine' GBIs would need is to look at what already exists for keeping us Norway rat, possum, hedgehog, and mustelid free. The Auckland Regional Council, under the Auckland Regional Pest Management Strategy has a mandate for managing Biosecurity risks on the island. All houses coming to the island are inspected for unwanted 'passengers' and smaller buildings such as sheds are to be included in the near future. The Hauraki Gulf Controlled Area includes Barrier for restricted access for possums, mustelids (stoats, ferrets, weasels), deer, wallabies and feral goats. Both the carrier and the owner of any of these species stand to cop a hefty fine if they are caught bringing these animals into this restricted area. The ARC reinforced the law about this by prosecuting the boaties who brought pet ferrets to the Island some years back.

Biosecurity measures are already underway at Tryphena, Whangaparapara, and Fitzroy wharf environs, supported by the



ULVA ISLAND in the Patterson Inlet of Stewart Island (Rakiura)

was visited by the pupils and parents of Okiwi School (seen at left) on their recent school field trip to the South Island. Ulva Island is a rat-free open sanctuary which historically was settled and populated with

introduced species (including rats) before being eradicated in 1997. It is now home to many rare and endangered species like this Stewart Island Robin (Toutouwai) at left. On average one rat per year enters the sanctuary which is only 700m from the main island but all so far have been eliminated by strategically placed bait stations.



Auckland Regional Council, Department of Conservation, and the Auckland City Council. The ARC contracts the WHRBC Trust to carry out monthly monitoring for Norway rats and stoats at Tryphena and Whangaparapara wharves while Department of Conservation maintains stoat traps in the Port Fitzroy wharf environs. As another partner in this Biosecurity programme Auckland City provides bait stations which are deployed and maintained by Twomey and Warick around the rubbish bins at all three wharves. The objective of this programme is to hopefully identify if a Norway rat or mustelid has arrived - their paw prints may show in the ten moni-

toring tunnels at each area - and to dispatch any such invader with the baits provided in the area. This programme provides part time work for a local and additional work for the local rubbish contracting business.

Practically speaking, **biosecurity has to be realistic and cost effective.** Because of the size of the Island only the pathways of highest risk can be focussed on - currently highest risk areas for invasion are the Island's three main wharves which is where current biosecurity measures are targeted. If rats and feral cats were removed from the Island, this current biosecurity programme

area would most likely be extended to other entry points, like the Okupu wharf and the wharf at Orama, as it is the freight and vehicle carrying boats that pose the most likelihood of harbouring an invasive species. There have been some meetings with Sealink to discuss this – currently the company has a private contractor that maintains rat bait on their vessels and the Auckland Regional Council assists with pest control around their yard environs. It would only take the addition of rat and/or mustelid sniffing dogs to check all cargo and vehicles on the Auckland side (including Fullers) to improve detection. Not unlike what happens at Auckland airport with the beagles sniffing bags and cargo. Pest-specific sniffer dogs are already used in New Zealand.

Private boats also pose a risk, albeit a relatively low one, of harbouring an invader. It's very obvious when you have a rat on board a boat. Of the large number of private boats that visit each year, a relatively small number actually dock, most people come in by small craft to the wharf areas. An unnoticed rat or mustelid in such craft is unlikely and directions for reporting such an incursion would be publicised. Large numbers of private boats land on the beach at Tiritiri Matangi every year, but they have never had a rat jump ship there.

The Auckland Regional Council

and Department of Conservation are working together on ideas and options for appropriate signage to the Hauraki Gulf islands emphasising their unique environments that need to be kept free of unwanted pests. It advertises in local boating magazines and the like, giving the same message.

It is considered that a pest incursion by air poses a pretty low risk, however monitoring and baiting provisions could also be established around the two airports. The cost of extending biosecurity-measures for Barrier should not be expensive and DOC, Auckland Regional Council, and Auckland City would be looking at ways they can plan for these costs in the long term.

Rats being rats we must assume that there will be incursions – it's how we provide for that event that is important. A single rat or two does not mean that the whole island would need to be eradicated again. Even if a breeding population re-established it would certainly be detected, and could be dealt with before it spread over the whole island. The current Open sanctuaries like Tawharanui and Tiri provide well thought-out plans for dealing with these events and there is current research being carried out at Auckland University and Landcare Research on the behaviour of rats when they first arrive in an environment free of rats. So far there is early evidence that ship rats, our most likely invader

“A single rat or two does not mean that the whole island would need to be eradicated again.”

following an eradication, stay close to the place where they land for a number of days. Practically this means that ensuring that monitoring and control measures are established in places where rodents are most likely to come ashore will likely be most effective. Monitoring and control measures do not need to be in extensive grids throughout the island nor does every property owner need to be involved. Identifying and having measures around the areas of highest risk as stated above is likely to be all that is required.

All mainland areas and Islands that are pest-free face the risk of re-invasion. Ulva Island, off

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Kakas – a precious taonga

male (great room service!). The nestlings take about another 10 weeks before they fledge and these 'babies' are not fully independent from the adults for a further 5 months. Quite a parenting effort!

If like us you have regular kaka visitors, then you are very likely seeing the same birds over and over – adult kaka generally have a relatively small home range. They do go on excursions however and movements of over 30 km have been recorded for newly fledged birds which take a while to settle. Recent bird counts carried out by the Trust on Great Barrier found kaka distributed throughout the island – they were seen in pasture, estuary, kanuka/manuka, lowland bush and montane bush eco-systems.

Stewart Island, has had three rat incursions because they can swim to it from the main island. All incursions have been spotted through monitoring and the rats dealt with.

No rat free island out of swimming range has been re-invaded to date.

The main aim of future biosecurity measures will be for them to be as effective as possible with minimum inconvenience to locals and visitors. Surely, a few moments waiting while a cheeky trained dog sniffs your gear is not too much to ask – not when the benefit to the Island's environment would be so huge.

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- www.terrature.org/parrots
- www.mtbruce.org.nz
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- www.iucnredlist.org/search/details.php/14728/summ

The Second Gt. Barrier Bird Count

Bittern – on their last legs

Spotless Crane – definitely spotted

Marsh Crakes – try again

Seventeen people took part in the second 5-minute bird count day in four parts of Great Barrier Island on 30/9/06. The group also searched for bittern, spotless and marsh crake, using recordings of their calls as 'lures'. This activity, taking place at dusk and dawn, is reported below.

The late afternoon / evening bittern survey was to try to discover if resident/nesting bittern are present on GBI. Four groups listened for "booming" at locations around Kaitoke swamp and a further group from DoC listened at two locations in the Okiwi/Whangapoua swamp area. Two large brown birds spotted entering a ditch in Kaitoke Swamp by Don Armitage and Bert Vowden caused a scramble for the binoculars! They were almost certainly bittern. A boom heard by Fenella Christian near the Golf Course was also probably bittern. So, a few are still about.

There are reports of bittern booming in recent years from the Police Station Swamp (where a bittern was seen in 2003 by Sandra Anderson), and from the Kaitoke estuary - Wiltshire Lane area, where a young bird was found dead in c. 2003. Cait Devey reported that bittern were calling

in the wetland off the road beside Kaitoke estuary in 2004. Des Casey reported that Dave Harland had seen one on Speck's farm at Windy Hill this year. Since the bird-count Amanda Yates and Emma Hunt have seen "a large brown shag-like bird" on the Kaitoke creek.

Bittern was formerly much commoner on Great Barrier (Bell 1976; Ogle 1981). In 1980 it was seen or heard in March-April at five locations: Kaitoke swamp, Whangapoua Estuary, Motairehe, Oruawharua Bay and near Okiwi airstrip. It was present at Awana before the coastal swamps were drained and converted into pasture (M. Curreen). I know of no records from the northern part of the island since 1980, although at that time it was almost certainly breeding in the Whangapoua swamp and at Motairehe.

Currently bitterns appears to be vagrants, with the last likely breeding in 2004 at Kaitoke. If anyone out there has further information about bitterns on GBI, please get in touch!

At dawn on October 1st groups were located at four locations around Kaitoke swamp and played recorded calls of spotless and marsh crakes (lures) on a motley



Bittern - a master of camouflage in a diminishing habitat.

Photo: DoC

selection of old tape-decks. The DoC-led group did the same in the Whangapoua area. Spotless crane responded positively to taped calls at three locations around Kaitoke swamp. At one site there was vigorous "churring" from two or three birds, and one came out of the reeds to inspect the tape recorder (and Emma Hunt) so identification was absolutely positive. Spotless crane was first recorded at Kaitoke swamp by Colin Ogle in 1980 and later by Anderson & Ogden (2003). The former also recorded it at Whangapoua, but noted its diminishing habitat due to swamp drainage there. No responses to our lures were obtained in the Whangapoua area (Halema Jamieson). Marsh crake has not yet been positively identified on Great Barrier Island, and no definitive evidence was discovered this time either.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES

The Report of the Second GBICT Bird Count can be obtained by communicating with the Trust or John Ogden directly.