



'Hillbilly' the kiwi rescued

A little kiwi called 'Hillbilly' is happily scuttling around Motuora Island, thanks to the efforts of a group of Te Awamutu women.

Noelene Jolley, Noelene Phillips and Bev Hill were joined by Ngaire Skelton of Pukekohe for a visit to Motuora Island in the Hauraki Gulf.

The group travelled there at the end of June as part of a Department of Conservation volunteer programme.

The predator-free island is a nursery for kiwi chicks that are hatched at Auckland Zoo from Northland eggs.

Once they are large enough to fend for themselves in the wild the kiwis are returned to Northland.

Bev Hill says initially the kiwi were recaptured for their return by using transmitters, but this proved unsuitable so 'kiwi dogs' are now used.

"Using these dogs means there is no control over which chicks will be caught, which also means some kiwi remain on the island long enough to breed.

"The kiwi from the nursery are banded or microchipped, so it was very exciting when a dog retrieved the first island

born kiwi."

The kiwi population on the island is currently around 50-60.

The five day trip by the Te Awamutu group focused on helping with the programme, but there was also a little 'time off' to take in the sights of the island.

On their morning off the group headed to the northern end of the island at low tide to explore.

"Part way through our walk it was quite breezy, so I stopped by a nice flat rock to rest my backpack, so that I could get a beanie out.

"To my amazement when I looked down I could see a kiwi sleeping under a large rock.

"I called out to the other three to tell them what I had found and was given a quick reply by Noelene Jolley.

"She said don't be silly Hillbilly, you are hallucinating!"

But eventually the others came to have a look and sure enough there was a little kiwi huddled under the rock.

"Ngaire was able to reach under and carefully pull it out."

This is when the women discovered the kiwi was bleeding.

"So we put it into a backpack and headed back,

to take it to the Island Manager, Andrea Ravenscroft.

"Andrea put it in an aviary at the nursery for the night."

The following day they decided the kiwi needed a name and after various suggestions Noelene Phillips felt it should be named after Mrs Hill, as she found it and her nickname is 'Hillbilly'.

RECOVERY AT ZOO

Hillbilly was taken to Auckland Zoo's centre for conservation and was put under the care of senior veterinarian for conservation and research, Richard Jakob-Hoff.

"He explained to us that Hillbilly was likely male and island born, as he had no electronic chip.

"He weighed 1.612kg and appeared in good condition, although there was some blood on his left side.

"However, he was unusually quiet, for a normally feisty bird.

"So he was given a shot of pain relief and antibiotics, then tube fed with a liquid mixture, before having blood tests and an x-ray."

Over the next couple of weeks Hillbilly was tube fed and it turned out the blood on his side was from an

injury to his beak that prevented him from feeding naturally.

Mr Jakob-Hoff said it was unlikely Hillbilly would have survived if Mrs Hill and her companions hadn't found him.

During his stay at the zoo Hillbilly became a star attraction during an interview on Radio Live.

After being nurtured back to health over a three week period Hillbilly was returned to Motuora Island

When he left the island he was passive and quiet.

"But it was a different story when he returned - he was wriggling his head, snapping his beak and fighting against the humans who were trying to help him."

Because Hillbilly's main injury was to his beak, it has left him with a small bend on the end of it.

Zoo staff don't believe this will prevent him from feeding and won't cause any further pain.

Mrs Hill says this is probably the last she will hear about Hillbilly as he wanders Motuora Island.

"Hopefully he will find a mate, tend to their egg and tell his grand-chicks about how he ended up with a 'funny' shaped beak."



HILLBILLY the injured kiwi as he was found huddled under a rock.



RESCUE TEAM (from left): Motuora Island manager Andrea Ravenscroft with Bev Hill, Noelene Phillips, Noelene Jolley (all Te Awamutu) and Ngaire Skelton (Pukekohe).



Sick Hillbilly back at home

By DELWYN DICKEY

A young kiwi is lucky to be alive after being found on Motuora Island by volunteers with a beak injury which made eating too painful.

Four women were on the island for five days as part of the Conservation Department's volunteer programme, when they came across the bird huddled under a large rock near a cliff base.

Too weak to resist, the bird was taken back to the island's camp in a backpack.

Next day, members of the Motuora Restoration Society, which administers the island along with DOC, took the bird on a water taxi to the mainland for the drive to Auckland Zoo.

Sporting the nickname of its finder Bev Hill, Hillbilly was given antibiotics, pain relief and a top-up through a feeding tube, followed by x-rays and blood tests.

Three weeks later a transformed Hillbilly was released back on Motuora Island.

Predator-free Motuora Island was used as a nursery for kiwi chicks hatched at the zoo from eggs taken from the wild



Rescue pack: Volunteer Ngairé Skelton carted the injured bird back to camp in her backpack.

in Northland for 10 years.

Staying there for a year to grow big enough to survive attack by mainland pests like stoats, the birds were then sent to the Northland wilds.

But not all the birds could be found, and Hill-

billy, without a band or micro chip, is one of a growing number of birds born on the island. About 50 to 60 North Island brown kiwi now call the island home.

The island has a camping ground in summer for families keen on night-time kiwi spotting.



A wayfaring kiwi's adventure

By Kevin Hawkins

For more than 10 years, Motuora Island has been used as a nursery for kiwi chicks hatched at the Auckland Zoo from eggs taken from the wild in Northland.

The scheme involves hatching the eggs, sending the chicks to predator-free Motuora until they are large enough to fend for themselves in the wild, then returning them to where their eggs came from.

Initially, recapturing the kiwi for repatriation to Northland was done by placing transmitters on the kiwi, but this proved unsuitable so a move was made to recapturing them with special "kiwi dogs". Using these dogs meant there was no control over which chicks would be caught so some avoided being recaptured. This resulted in some kiwi remaining on the island long enough to breed; it was very exciting when one year a dog retrieved an island born bird (it had no band or micro chip ID). It is estimated Motuora now has a population of 50 or 60 kiwi.

At the end of June, four women on a Department of Conservation five-day Volunteer Programme on the island found a kiwi cowering under a rock on the beach below the cliffs. This was quite by chance, as Bev Hill happened to sit down next to the rock the kiwi was under. They were able to pick it up and carry it back to the nursery in a backpack. The ladies nicknamed the kiwi Hillbilly after Bev (whose nickname is Hillbilly).

Hillbilly spent the night in the island aviary and the next day was transported to the zoo's Centre for Conservation Management, under the care of senior veterinarian – conservation & research, Richard Jakob-Hoff. Richard explained Hillbilly was most likely male and was island born. He weighed 1.612kg and appeared in good condition although there was some blood on his left hind side and he was unusually quiet for a normally feisty bird.

He was given a shot of pain relief and antibiotics, and tube fed with a supplement/liquid mixture. The next day he was scheduled for blood tests and x-ray. Over the next couple

of weeks Hillbilly was tube-fed as it turned out the blood on his side had come from an injury to his beak that prevented him from feeding naturally (probing the ground with his beak for worms). It is unlikely Hillbilly would have survived if hadn't been found.

Three weeks after being taken to the zoo, Hillbilly returned to Motuora, no longer the passive bird he was when sent to the zoo. He was wriggling his head to try and get away, snapping his slightly bent beak, pushing and pulling; he had some fight back in him and had had enough of humans "helping" him. This is probably the last we will see or hear of Hillbilly as he takes up his liberty on Motuora; hopefully to find a mate, tend to her egg (as kiwi males do) and tell his grand-chicks about how he came to have a "funny" beak and his adventures as a juvenile bird.



Hillbilly was found by chance, sheltering at the bottom of a cliff.