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Increase in Native birds proof of predator control programme

A small resident population of kereru / native pigeon in Tiromoana Bush has more than doubled in size over the past four years.

That's the pleasing finding from the most recent round of bird monitoring. The kereru are one of many native birds thriving in Tiromoana Bush, a 407-hectare regenerating native lowland forest located in Waipara in Hurunui District.

The monitoring shows increased sightings of kereru (up 110% from monitoring in 2019), korimako / bellbird (up 70%), tauhou / silvereve (up 50%), piwakawaka / fantail (up 30%) and kōtare / kingfisher (up 20%). Other native species, previously rarely seen, such as pīpīwharau / shining cuckoo were sighted in Tiromoana Bush during the monitoring.

Transwaste Canterbury Ltd (Transwaste) who owns the adjacent landfill in Kate Valley owns Tiromoana Bush and is funding an ambitious restoration project that includes tree planting and creating wetlands, pest control and monitoring. Transwaste Chair Mr. Gill Cox says bird monitoring is important to understand whether the regenerating native bush is providing a suitable habitat for native birds.

'Our vision for Tiromoana Bush was to enable native flora and fauna to thrive in a regenerating native forest', says Gill Cox. 'In particular we set the goals of expanding the existing bellbird population and enabling kereru to become established. This most recent monitoring indicates we're well on our way to achieving these goals, and providing a suitable habitat for many other native birds to flourish.'

Forest bird monitoring commenced at Tiromoana Bush during October 2005 and was undertaken each October until 2009, providing five consecutive years of monitoring. The second phase of monitoring was conducted each October from 2017-2019.

Monitoring at Tiromoana Bush in 2018 indicated moderate to high numbers of small mammals known to prey on native fauna, such as mice, rats, mustelids (weasels, stoats and ferrets) cats, hedgehogs and possums. The decision was made to commence an active predator control programme in October 2019 focusing on these pests. This predator control programme is based on a network of 200 paired DOC200 and Timms traps spread through the bush. The traps are serviced monthly, and animals killed are recorded.

Over 2.5 years this resulted in the killing of 226 mice, 394 ship rats, 282 weasels, 68 stoats, 17 ferrets, 96 cats, 312 hedgehogs and 183 possums. Mustelid and possum kills have declined with time, indicating suppression of these species. With these positive results, the bird monitoring programme was resumed.

'The predator control programme has proved its worth with these encouraging native bird numbers', says Gill Cox. 'The monitoring is very valuable because it allows us to assess whether our approach to restoration planting and pest control is enabling more native birds to live in the bush.'

The monitoring revealed an increase in the resident population of pūweto / spotless crane and koitareke / marsh crane at the Kate Pond wetlands. These wetlands were created by the construction of a weir across the Kate Stream which prevented the valley floor from drying out each summer, as it had previously. The wetlands support a variety of plant species that provide food sources for birds and waterfowl.

After the bird monitoring programme ended, a ngirungiru / tomtit and kārearea / falcon were recorded onsite during predator control works. Gill Cox says these are exciting recordings.

'Tomtit have been recorded on several occasions in the past, but Falcon have not been heard at the site during previous bird surveys', says Gill Cox. 'While it's too early to say whether falcon might become established in Tiromoana Bush, it proves the bush is providing suitable habitat or food sources for them. Perhaps in future surveys we'll confirm if these birds are making Tiromoana Bush their home.'