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Toutouwai/robin breeding on Mt Taranaki

Conservationists in Taranaki are celebrating after news toutouwai/North Island robin are breeding on Mt Taranaki after being extinct from the area for 112 years.

Recent monitoring in a 1000 hectare block of forest on the Mounnga that has intense rat trapping located three pairs of toutouwai with chicks in their nests. The birds are among 50 robins released into the area in April this year, and are the first species to be re-introduced by environmental project Taranaki Mounnga.

“We are ecstatic the robins have stayed and are breeding - it’s a testament to the exceptional work of the team. It’s great to get this early win and we will keep cracking on with our goal to build large and resilient bird populations,” says Taranaki Mounnga Project Manager Sean Zieltjes.

Conservation biologist Nic Gorman is confident the pairs have established a cluster that will encourage more robins into the protected block. “My gut feeling is now these birds are there, it will be an anchor so if there are more translocations the birds will stick.”

Nic Gorman worked alongside volunteers, including many from the Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust, Shell NZ and Department of Conservation (DOC) staff locating robins and feeding them mealworms to monitor initial survival after the release.

“A big thanks to all the volunteers who have put in over 280 volunteer hours helping us track these birds. Rat monitoring is indicating rat levels are very low in this area so it is encouraging that three pairs are breeding in the protected area and it bodes well for the future,” says DOC Senior Biodiversity Ranger Emily King.

Local environmentalist Hoani Eriwata was involved in the birds translocation and monitoring. He says he’s confident Mt Taranaki will allow the robins to thrive. “Life has a way to adapt. The Mounnga is an area of birth and survival,” says the Te Atiawa iwi representative.

He is encouraging locals to get involved with monitoring to locate fledglings in February next year. Information on how to get involved can be found on the Taranaki Mounnga website. ‘It’s about preserving our heritage and Mounnga that created this land,’ he says.

Members of the public can also report any robin sightings through a citizen science project set up by Taranaki Mounga. Details can be found via <http://taranakimounga.nz/get-involved/toutouwairobin-sightings/>

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