

RISING — to the — CHALLENGE

Stories from the Covid-19 crisis

ROTOROA ISLAND: CONTINUING ITS LEGACY OF RESTORATION POST COVID 19

Rotoroa Island, a predator free wildlife sanctuary and conservation park in Auckland's Hauraki Gulf, has a new opportunity to continue its legacy of restoration when New Zealand adjusts to the post Covid-19 era.

The Island, which is part of NEXT's environmental portfolio, is currently closed under Level three lockdown protocol, but is hoping to reopen to the public when New Zealand moves to level two.

"Rotoroa Island's history has been all about restoration and when New Zealand is ready we will welcome people to the sanctuary, as a way of recovering from the stress and disruption of the pandemic crisis," says Rotoroa Island Trust Chair Andrew Poole. "It is just an hour from Auckland but it feels like a different world."

"The island served as a rehabilitation centre for people recovering from alcohol and drug addiction for nearly 100 years under its owners the Salvation Army," he says. "Over the past ten years or so it has been restored as a sanctuary for endangered species under the Rotoroa Island Trust lease. It is a safe haven for some of our rarest birds like kiwi, tieke and takahē."

"As we navigate the unknown territory post Covid-19, the Island will provide an opportunity for New Zealanders to release some of the strain, reconnect with nature, enjoy a stay in our accommodation or visit for the day. With restricted international travel there will be an opportunity to discover more of our own backyard, and we will welcome people to enjoy the unique experience we offer."

While the island has been closed in the lockdown, caretakers Glen and Milly Lucas and their eight-year-old son Ollie have continued to live there in their own bubble – taking isolation to a whole new level. They have only left the island to get essential supplies from neighbouring Waiheke Island. Their main jobs have been discouraging boaties wanting to land, checking there are no unwanted rodents, weed control and maintenance – as well as monitoring the endangered birds.



Rotoroa Island ecologist Jo Ritchie is looking forward to welcoming more kiwi – and kiwis to the sanctuary in the post Covid-19 era.

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a weigh in. If the kiwi has reached around 1.2kg we know they are healthy and they have a greater chance of fending off a stoat, its main predator,” says Jo.

“That’s when they graduate from our creche and return to the Coromandel or onto a kohanga site, a predator free location with a permanent breeding population of kiwi.”

“When the time is right, we will reschedule the muster, but in the meantime, we know this precious group of kiwi is in very safe hands.”

Jo says it is fortunate that it is not currently the breeding season for kiwi, so she is hopeful the planned chick releases scheduled for later in the year will not be affected.

Two or three new tākahe are due to arrive on Rotoroa Island around August this year as the sanctuary is part of the Department of Conservation’s Takahē Recovery Programme.

“We are really looking forward to the rest of the year,” she says. “Welcoming the new kiwi and tākahe arrivals and the people of Aotearoa New Zealand – we can all rehabilitate together. Our sanctuary will take on a whole new meaning in the post Covid-19 era.”

Rotoroa Island ecologist Jo Ritchie says because it is a wildlife sanctuary the birdlife is used to the tranquility of lockdown, with little human interaction, but there have been some adjustments.

“Being part of Operation Nest Egg, Rotoroa Island was due to conduct a kiwi muster,” she says. “But Kiwis for Kiwi delayed that until it can be safely carried out.”

Under Operation Nest Egg, kiwi eggs are taken from the Coromandel, incubated in captivity and transported as chicks to Rotoroa Island, which acts as a creche until the young kiwi is strong enough to protect itself against predators.

“The chicks arrive at the island at around 200 grams in weight, and when we undertake musters a condition check is done which includes

Rotoroa Island – just an hour away from Auckland – will continue its legacy or restoration in the post Covid-19 era.



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