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**The call of kiwi returns to the Kaitake Range**

The goal of returning kiwi to the Kaitake Range is now a reality.

Ten brown kiwi were recently released at the back of the Kaitake Range, close to Pukeiti.

This milestone has been reached thanks to Restore Kaitake’s huge community predator control efforts across the Kaitake and Oākura communities.

The kiwi were raised at the Rotokare Sanctuary, the host site for the Taranaki Kōhanga Kiwi at Rotokare. This is a joint partnership between Taranaki Kiwi Trust and Taranaki’s only pest-free sanctuary, the Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust.

“Having a safe environment free of introduced mammalian predators has been key in helping a number of threatened species, such as kiwi to thrive. We are thrilled to see the partnership reach this significant milestone, being able to support the recovery of kiwi populations across the Taranaki region,” says Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust conservation manager Fiona Gordon.

The ten kiwi were blessed and released over a number of days. One gifted the name Haimona by local hapū Ngā Mahanga a Tairi, after Simon Collins, cherished Sanctuary Manager of the Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust who died during a sudden medical event a month ago. The released kiwi are all monitored in their new home by the Taranaki Kiwi Trust.

Volunteers from the Kaitake Ranges Conservation Trust have played a critical role in bringing predator numbers on the range to a low level, making the area safer for kiwi to return.

“We are grateful to the Trust who are superheroes in this story. Their volunteers manage 18 traplines which have more than 100 ferret traps and 700 stoat traps. Our team services the remaining seven traplines and more than 200 possum traps. Collectively this work will ensure these taonga have a safe habitat so they can thrive,” says Taranaki Mounga co-project manager Sean Zieltjes.

Towards Predator-Free Taranaki has been working with landowners on farmland surrounding the range to remove mustelids (stoats, ferrets and weasels) – setting up more than 700 traps across approximately 5000 hectares. This is part of a 10-year plan to control mustelids on private land across the entire Taranaki ring plain.

Towards Predator-Free Taranaki project manager Toby Shanley says the kiwi release is an exciting milestone for all involved.

“We’ve been working alongside local landowners to ensure the kiwi are not only protected within the national park but will be safe if they venture outside the national park also.”

Dogs pose a significant risk to kiwi. No dogs are permitted on the Kaitake Range, as it is part of Egmont National Park.

“Kiwi may wander outside the park and to keep them safe we encourage neighboring landowners to take their dogs to Kiwi Aversion Training” says Department of Conservation Taranaki operations manager Gareth Hopkins.

“Releasing kiwi to Kaitake is an historic milestone and this is collaborative conservation at its best. We all need to do our part to look after these special birds.”

Department of Conservation Kiwi Aversion Training has been completed in Oākura, with more training planned in the area.

Taranaki Kiwi Trust is proud of the work already done by the local community to keep the kiwi safe and encourage locals to attend the kiwi aversion training in the future.

“Today has been many years in the making and we are thrilled that this highly engaged community are committed to keeping these precious taonga safe,” says Taranaki Kiwi Trust manager Celine Filbee.

“This is the outcome of ten years of work to establish a genetically diverse breeding population, and thousands of volunteer hours at Taranaki Kōhanga Kiwi at Rotokare, to reach our ultimate goal of having sufficient kiwi to be releasing them across the Taranaki region, returning kiwi to sites that have had their populations decimated. It is a significant achievement for the volunteers, staff and trustees of the two organisations, and we are honoured to have played one of the integral roles in this auspicious occasion.”

Kaitake Community Board chair Doug Hislop says the whole community has got right behind the protection of kiwi by trapping in their backyards, at their schools, parks and on the Kaitake Range.

“I am proud to be part of this community who care so much about their environment and restoring the Kaitake Range so these kiwi can thrive.”

**Editor’s note:** The five separate kiwi releases were attended by representatives from Ngā Mahanga a Tairi, Taranaki Iwi, Kaitake Ranges Conservation Trust, Taranaki Kiwi Trust, Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust, Taranaki Mounga Project, Department of Conservation, Kaitake Community Board, Taranaki Regional Council, Oākura and Kaitake community champions, as well as students and teachers from Oākura, Ōmata and Coastal Taranaki Schools.

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