

North Island kokako – an update

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The North Island kokako (*Callaeas wilsoni*) is a ca 220g endemic New Zealand bird that declined greatly on the New Zealand mainland throughout the 20th century due primarily to predation by ship rats, brushtail possums and other introduced pest mammals. It is currently classified 'endangered' by Birdlife International (2000) and 'recovering' by Robertson et al. 2013 using the New Zealand 2008 Threat Classification System (Townsend et al. 2008). It persists in 22 populations totalling ca 1,570 pairs (at July 2016), from ca 390 pairs in 1999. Twelve populations, including three on offshore islands, have been established or supplemented by translocation of birds from healthy, recovering populations. Maintenance and growth of all populations still depends primarily on sustained pest mammal management to limit predation and maximise food supply. Maximising the retention of genetic diversity requires additional effort to: 1) grow populations rapidly rather than slowly; 2) increase pest control areas to 2,000+ ha, or connect adjacent populations, to ensure a large final population size; 3) have adequate genetic founders (40) at all translocated populations, and 4) avoid over-harvest from source populations. All populations are now ranked for management priority; in situ relic populations with most genetic founders rank highest, and small translocated populations rank lowest. The key goal of a new 8-year plan – the third for the taxon – is to double the size to 3,000 pairs and improve genetic security of original and translocated populations by 2025, by increasing the scale and effectiveness of pest control, and by reconnecting adjacent subpopulations with vegetated corridors. The Kokako Specialist Group (KSG), NZ Department of Conservation, community groups, iwi and other stakeholders will work together to maintain kokako in healthy functioning ecosystems, and to evaluate opportunities to establish new populations by translocation.