Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

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Tena koe Bridget

Kiwi deaths at Pukaha

Thank you for your Official Information Act request to the Department of Conservation, dated 15 February 2019.

Your questions and our responses are listed below:

1. *How many kiwi have died at Pukaha each year since 2003?*

   It is only possible to provide this information for monitored kiwi.

YEAR	Kiwi	CAUSE OF DEATH
2018	1	Predation
2016	4	Predation
2015	9	Predation
2014	1 1	Predation Blunt trauma
2013	1 1	Coccidia Blunt trauma
2012	3 1 1 2	Predation Emaciation Egg complications Too decayed to determine
2011	3 1 1 1	Predation Drowned Blunt trauma Too decayed to determine
2010	12	Predation
2008	5	Predation
2006	1	Predation
2004	1	Predation
TOTAL	50	

   The spikes in predation in 2008, 2010 and 2015 were caused by mustelid activity in Pukaha Forest. The 943ha forest is surrounded by farmland, which is good habitat for mustelids, particularly ferrets. Ferrets will move into the forest to hunt if there is a lack of food in the surrounding farmland. The dead-birds recovered in 2010 and 2015 had injuries to the neck and head that were consistent with an attack by a ferret.

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As mentioned in previous correspondence, trapping activity has been strengthened in response to the threat by mustelids. Periodic aerial 1080 operations targeting rats also provides respite for kiwi from mustelids, as mustelids preying on carcasses of poisoned rats suffer secondary poisoning and die as a result. No kiwi have been recorded as dying from 1080 poisoning in Pukaha Forest.

2. *In June 2018 Head Kiwi Ranger at Pukaha Mt Bruce Jess Flamy stated in an email that there were 13 monitored kiwi in the Pukaha Forest and that three unmonitored kiwi were found in the kiwi call count or by the kiwi dog Rua.*
However, in your response to my OIA you stated that there are seven monitored kiwi and 20 unmonitored kiwi currently in the Pukaha Forest.

   a. *Please respond to my question in my previous OIA - have six monitored kiwi died since June 2018 or have they lost their tags?*

      There are transmitters on kiwi for two reasons. We have transmitters on some male kiwi, as the males incubate the eggs, and staff remove the eggs from some kiwi to incubate and hatch in the kiwi house nursery. This removes the risk of the eggs being predated in the nest, and the chicks are released when they can fend for themselves. Staff put transmitters on these chicks before they are released so they can check on their progress in the forest. Staff periodically use the transmitters to locate the chicks and if they are losing weight, the chicks are taken back into captivity for further rearing.

      In regard to the six kiwi in your question, staff removed transmitters from three female Operation Nest Egg kiwi once they reached their goal weight. Females do not incubate the egg, so do not need to be monitored to locate eggs for the Operation Nest Egg project. One female was predated, and two male birds lost their transmitters.

   b. *Please explain the discrepancy between Head Kiwi Ranger Jess Flamy's figure of three unmonitored kiwi and the 20 unmonitored kiwi indicated in your OIA response.*

      A call count conducted in 2018 estimated there to be approximately 20 kiwi. The Department understands that the email sent to you by Pukaha employee Ms Jess Flamy, was sent prior to the kiwi call count occurring.

3. *If your figures are correct and there are 27 kiwi in the Pukaha forest and 10 kiwi inside and given that 105 kiwi have been hatched at Pukaha and 43 kiwi have been brought in to the centre from other places since 2003 please confirm that a total of 148 kiwi have been hatched or brought into Pukaha and there are approximately 36 kiwi left - meaning that at least 111 kiwi have died there.*

   As stated in our OIA response dated 18 January 2019, the kiwi call count is not intended as a comprehensive kiwi census. It is intended to establish a general sense of population movement and location of kiwi territories.

   The department can only confirm the number of deaths that have been recorded in the table provided above.

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4. *In your response to my last OIA you indicated that a kaka had died from eating bait from a bait station in 2017. Please explain what would stop kaka at Pukaha Mt Bruce from eating 1080 baits which were aerially dropped over the Pukaha Forest in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018*Our OIA response of 18 January 2019 stated that a kaka was found to have died after interfering with a trap. It did not eat bait from a bait station.

   In planning for the aerial application of 1080 we were cognisant of the significant kaka population. We were also aware that no monitored kaka have been lost during aerial 1080 baiting and that there is a growing pool of evidence demonstrating the benefit of this style of pest control to adult kaka survival and to the recruitment of juvenile kaka into the population.

5. *In October 2018 Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage requested that DOC investigate a private kiwi programme in Hawke's Bay on why nine little spotted kiwi had died there.*

   a. *Why has there been no investigation requested by Ms Sage for a similar investigation into Pukaha Mt Bruce where over a hundred kiwi have died?*

      The Minister of Conservation did not direct the Department to undertake an investigation of kiwi deaths at Cape Sanctuary in Hawkes Bay.

      The situation at Cape Sanctuary was already under investigation by the Department. The Minister requested a report from the Department on the outcome of that investigation and subsequent steps that have been put in place with the sanctuary operator to ensure that the situation which resulted in these particular deaths would be better managed in future.

      The need for an investigation at Pukaha Forest has not been identified. The table above shows that 50 kiwi are known to have died in Pukaha Forest over a 15 year period. The reality is that kiwi are predated somewhere in New Zealand every night, and populations of kiwi across the country continue to struggle. Given the threats kiwi face across mainland New Zealand it is important to try and establish populations in areas with predator control such as Pukaha Forest, where they might have a more certain future. The learnings from set-backs and successes at Pukaha will be used to benefit other kiwi populations across the country.

   b. *Who would undertake such an investigation given that Pukaha is a DOC facility?*

      The forest restoration project is run by the Pukaha Mount Bruce Board on behalf of the Wairarapa and Tararua communities. The Department is responsible for the welfare of kiwi as described in The Wildlife Act. Part of the Department's responsibility would be to instigate and carry out such an investigation if required.

   c. *With only seven monitored kiwi and two kiwi breeding in the Pukaha Forest what will it take for DOC to stop the release of kiwi into this predator-prone area where so many kiwi have died?*

      As mentioned above, not all kiwi are monitored in Pukaha Forest, so we cannot know the exact number of kiwi in the forest. Call counts tell staff where kiwi are present, but not how many individuals.

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At present we do not consider it necessary to halt the hatching and release programme for kiwi at this site. Learning how to protect kiwi in this type of habitat with financially sustainable techniques is critical for potential reintroduction or protection of remnant populations in this sort of area.

If you wish to discuss this with the department, please contact Wairarapa Operations Manager Kathy Houkamau on 027 839 4626 or by email khoukamau@doc.govt.nz.

Naku noa, na

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