



OIA 20-E-0231 Percy - docCM 6318312

23 June 2020

Bridget Percy

fyi-request-12651-9544af07@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Bridget

Thank you for your Official Information Act request to the Minister of Conservation, dated 19 April 2020. Your request was referred to the Department of Conservation for answering. You have requested information about kaka and kiwi numbers at Pūkaha.

On 1 May 2020 we extended your request to 1 July 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 emergency on the Department's operations and the need to consult.

Your questions regarding a rabbit infestation and agreements with private charities are not requests for official information held by the Department, and as such will not be addressed via the Official Information Act. The Department will respond to these questions separately.

Your questions and our responses are listed below.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) will be published on the Department's website.

Kaka numbers

Despite Reg Kemper's estimate from Pukaha staff that there are 150 kaka at Pukaha Mt Bruce, visitors before the Covid-19 lock-down were still reporting just a handful of kaka at the 3pm feed and Pukaha staff were telling the public that there were many more male than female kaka in the Pukaha Forest as the females 'fight to the death to protect their young'.

Low kaka numbers visiting the feed stations was expected during the mast year. An abundance of natural food in the forest meant they did not need to access the supplementary feed stations in the afternoons. This has also been observed during previous mast years. The kaka most commonly seen at the feeds at this time are juveniles before dispersal. The comment highlighted during the talk is from a national study which indicates there are more male kaka than females in general due to the predation of females on the nest. At Pukaha, a fairly even mix is observed during the feeds as they are non-nesting birds, however at the start of the breeding season there is a higher number of males seen due to females sitting on nests, and males gathering food for them.

1. *How many (monitored or unmonitored) female kaka have died protecting their nests from predators at Pukaha Mt Bruce and how many juvenile kaka have died due to losing their mothers in this way?*

No artificial nest boxes have had predation attacks. Every viable nest box was monitored and chicks observed through to fledging. There have been no deaths that we are aware of.

2. *Why, when their absence is so apparent, are kaka not being monitored again and why are DOC and Pukaha staff still refusing to complete a 'kaka census'?*

As they do appear abundant in the reserve, not just focusing on those at the kaka feed, a reserve wide study is not deemed necessary to calculate exact population size. As kaka can fly long distances during the day, an exact number would be impossible to obtain. Staff observe the banded birds which frequent the feeds, as well as dawn/dusk fly overs. This is when kaka can be seen flying back into the reserve. Birds which have been banded are recorded. One example is 'Blue' who was banded in 2017 and not seen again until 2019, indicating there is a 'winter territory' the birds have found away from the public area and, after the mast year, this is not surprising.

3. *In an OIA dated 4 April, 2019 Reg Kemper stated that no monitored kaka had been lost during aerial 1080 baiting however in an earlier OIA dated 27 November 2018 he had stated that kaka at Pukaha are no longer monitored. Please explain how DOC and Pukaha Mt Bruce staff are being held accountable for kaka numbers (and deaths) if all monitoring tags have been removed.*

For clarity, kaka that have been monitored at Pukaha in the past were fitted with transponders and then radio-tracked by staff for purposes described to you in OIA 18-E-1033 on 18 January 2019. This intensive monitoring of individuals is intrusive to the birds, expensive and no longer necessary.

Birds that are hatched in captivity or nest boxes have leg bands fitted. No bands have been removed from any of these birds.

Kaka which hatch in the wild do not have leg bands.

4. *Are more 1080 drops planned for the Pukaha Forest and if so, what will stop the remaining kaka from eating the baits dropped in their habitat?*

Aerial 1080 operations are used periodically when rat numbers threaten breeding success of native birds in the forest. It is expected that rat numbers will reach a level where an aerial poison operation is necessary before the end of 2020, however a rat monitor has not been completed. The operation will not be confirmed until rat monitoring has been completed.

Research at Lake Paringa in South Westland shows that aerial 1080 operations benefit kaka populations. The research recorded the survival and breeding of South Island kaka from 2010 to 2015 after a 1080 operation. Areas with and without 1080 treatment were compared. In these five years, three percent of adult kaka in the treated area died (none from 1080) while 20 percent of adult kaka in the untreated area died. In the treated areas 55 percent of kaka nests produced one or more chick up to a year after the 1080 operation but less than two percent of nests produced chicks in the untreated area.

I have included links to further reference information regarding 1080 operations on the Department's website below.

For kea: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/tiakina-nga-manu/tiakina-nga-manu-monitoring-results/kea/>

For kiwi: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/tiakina-nga-manu/tiakina-nga-manu-monitoring-results/kiwi-monitoring/>

Kiwi numbers

1. *Please confirm the current number of kiwi (monitored and unmonitored) at Pukaha Mt Bruce (in the Pukaha Forest, in enclosures and in the kiwi house).*

There is one monitored and an unknown number unmonitored kiwi in the reserve. There are 12 kiwi in enclosures. Nine of these are chicks from different projects. There is one kiwi in the kiwi house.

2. *Please confirm the total number of kiwi released into the Pukaha Forest each year since 2003.*

The information for numbers of kiwi released into Pukaha Forest from 2003 to 2018 was provided to you in OIA18-E-0926 on 26 November 2018, <https://fyi.org.nz/request/9011-kiwi-numbers-at-pukaha-mt-bruce#incoming-30189>.

Four kiwi were released in 2019.

3. *Please indicate how many (monitored or unmonitored) kiwi have died in the Pukaha Forest in the past 18 months.*

Eight kiwi have died from predation – two in 2019 and six in 2020.

4. *Please confirm that despite media reports of a 'bumper kiwi breeding season' at Pukaha that only three eggs have been brought in from an enclosure (and none from the Pukaha Forest) to hatch this season (despite approximately 152 kiwi being brought into, or bred at, Pukaha since 2003; approximately 120 kiwi having been released into the Pukaha forest in that time; and bearing in mind that no kiwi bred at Pukaha have ever been translocated from Pukaha to other areas of New Zealand).*

The three eggs came from the one captive pair. Known breeding pairs in the forest were left to naturally incubate and raise their chicks. They were monitored with nest cameras until they left the burrows.

5. *Please confirm that the three kiwi eggs brought in from the enclosure to hatch this season (MtB107, MtB 108 and MtB 109) are all off-spring of Manawa and Mapuna which would mean that Pukaha just has one breeding pair at present.*

Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai

Wairarapa District Office, 220 South Road, Masterton | PO Box 191, Masterton 5840
www.doc.govt.nz

Yes, the eggs are from Mapuna and Manawa, which is the only captive held pair. This is not an indication of the number of wild breeding pairs.

6. *Are the two female kiwi which laid eggs in the Pukaha Forest last year dead, or are Pukaha Mt Bruce unable to confirm that as they weren't monitored?*

The females are not monitored.

7. *Please explain why the Pukaha Mt Bruce Facebook page is reporting that they have hatched 24 eggs without clarifying that only 3 of those eggs (TBC) were from Pukaha and the rest of them were brought in from other areas (such as Maungatautari) to be hatched.*

The Facebook page is maintained by the Pukaha Board and staff it employs and can be seen by the public. It is not information held by the Department, therefore we cannot provide it to you.

8. *In an OIA dated 18 January, 2019 DOC stated that the Pukaha Mt Bruce Board's ultimate goal is to prevent 100% of adult kiwi deaths. Please explain how this success will be measured when adult kiwi are not monitored.*

Goals are often aspirational and describe what complete success would look like. We acknowledge that every kiwi in the project area cannot be monitored all their life. Transmitters are intrusive for the bird, expensive and time-consuming to monitor. However, that does not mean the project should not aspire to prevent 100 percent of adult kiwi deaths.

9. *Was a kiwi call count done in 2019? If so, what were the results?*

There was no kiwi call count in 2019.

10. *Is a kiwi call count planned for 2020 and if so when will this take place?*

Acoustic recorders will be placed around the reserve to record kiwi calls over winter this year.

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

Yours sincerely



Hayden Barrett
Acting Director Operations, Lower North Island

Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai

Wairarapa District Office, 220 South Road, Masterton | PO Box 191, Masterton 5840
www.doc.govt.nz