

KERERU NEWS No. 48 (12 May 2005)

More news about kereru. I'm keen to receive articles/comments/etc for the next issue due to be emailed in July.

1. Release of Bubs - May Evans

Russell & I of Otatara, near Invercargill, have for several years rehabilitated nestling and injured kereru. We have a 1.5 acre property, half of which is covered by native bush, an ideal situation for native birds. In June 2002, a downy kereru chick came into our care after several days of very strong winds (note: late autumn - winter nesting). It was handed to DOC Southland, who in turn passed it on to us. This bird, named Bubs, was hand-fed and later put into a small aviary outside where she did well. Yes, DNA from a feather sample was used to determine her sex. She landed on Russell in the aviary when it suited her, sometimes feeding out of his hand and "hooing" when either Russell or I came in sight.

In early 2004, a new flight 5 metres long, 4 wide and 4 high was completed to give the birds a bit more flying before release and initially 'Bubs' went in there too. This is not a large flight by some standards but for private people it is quite big and the birds certainly get a bit more flying backwards and forwards than in other smaller ones on the property. Bubs initially showed the other birds where the food was situated but later became a bit bossy towards them and so was reluctantly put back into a smaller aviary on her own.

Eventually after much consultation and consideration with the DOC kereru-and-tui team it was decided to fit Bubs with a small tailed-mounted transmitter and release her after a few weeks of checking to see that the transmitter didn't cause her any problems. She also has a jess on each leg for ease of identification. With much trepidation, on Easter Saturday 2005, we opened her aviary door and told her to fly out! Well she thought we were mad obviously and 'hoo'd' a few times at us. Finally Russell took the net into the aviary and she must have thought "I'm not having that", and took off out the door into the neighbour's trees.

With the telemetry gear loaned from DOC, Russell checked her situation that night, again the next morning and thereafter for the few days of Easter that we were at home. She arrived after the morning feeding at the aviaries was completed and ate from her usual dish or out of Russell's hand. The weather was kind for several days and after some heavy rain about the third night 'out' there she was safe and sound in her tree - a tall rimu not far from her old aviary, just on the edge of our bush.

During the first week out she was away from our section for only one night apparently, and that was just a few properties away. As a result we didn't bother using the telemetry gear as she flew out of the bush to us for a feed every morning and evening, and sometimes even at lunchtimes! She's taken to coming down on top of a child's swing which is quite a handy height for feeding, or into a spreading elm, although if necessary she will eat out of her dish on a specially-placed platform near her old aviary.

Our biggest worry is cats. Our own are kept in at night and are not allowed out until the sun is well up, and so far Bubs seems to keep a wary eye out for any movement around her while she is down low feeding. The rest of the time she's up high in the trees or honing her flying skills. We know there have been other kereru 'let go' in the past that have eventually brought back their fledglings so that's what we're hoping for in the future, plus of course to keep our own girl safe from predators.

Two more rehab birds were released on 15 April. They came from a few kilometres away in Otatara. Unfortunately, both of them and Bubs were nowhere to be seen the following day. It was not until a fortnight later that Bubs was found by DOC staff, via her transmitter, about a block away feeding on kahikatea fruit that was abundant at the time. She came down low to calls and looked fine. A couple days later she was back 'home' and keen for two food handouts through the

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day. Hopefully she is now better acquainted with where home is, and will turn up when she is in need of extra food.

2. Roger - Ralph Powlesland, Les Moran & Kiri Pullen

Just a quick up-date on the activities of Roger since the article in the previous Kereru News. Unfortunately we are not now getting locations of his whereabouts at the 3-day intervals expected. We're not sure why, but it may have to do with the duty cycle of the transmitter (5 hours on, 72 hours off) causing passivation! This is the build up of salt crystals on the anode of lithium cells while they are turned off which then causes them to struggle to deliver current. Anyway, since 22 March, when he was in the Hokonui Hills near Gore, he has returned to Stewart Island, with a stopover a few kilometres north of Bluff. This time on Stewart Island he was situated near Newton Beach, not far from where he has spent most of his time on the island near Port William. However, within a week had flown all the way back to the Hokonui Hills (100+ km). Nine days later he was in a native bush patch near Myross Bush, Invercargill, and on 5 May when we last got a location he was back near Port William, Stewart Island! One amazing bird, but how different are his movements from those of many other Southland kereru?

3. Pidge - Pete Barrow on Little Barrier

You may remember mention of Pidge from Little Barrier Island in a previous Kereru News. It was hand-raised by the caretakers on the island, Mike & Alex Dobbins, after it ended up on the ground as a partly-developed nestling in March 1983. It was released, but returned to the ranger's house almost daily for a feed of water-soaked bread or a banana for many years. Unfortunately, it has not been seen since Cyclone Ivy in February 2004 visited the island. Assuming it did die during the cyclone, then it lived for 21 years.

4. Kereru ends up in the drink - Ralph Powlesland

I was doing some work in Pukekura Park, New Plymouth on 6 May when a kereru landed close by in a coprosma growing over a pond. Because they take their time about doing anything I continued with what I was doing but with regular checks to see what the bird was up to. Eventually it became evident that it wanted a drink but with vegetation around the edge of the pond access wasn't going to be easy. It tried walking down branches to the water surface but these seemed too thin to support it. I heard a flap and looked back expecting to see it hanging on to a branch just above the water, but instead there it was in the water with its wings slightly spread. There was no instant flurry of action to get out of the water, and I was beginning to think I'd have to wade in and rescue it! However, it eventually launched itself directly off the water and flew away.