

Mōhua moved to Fiordland super site

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DOC ranger Hannah Edmonds releases a mōhua onto Resolution Island this week. Photo: Barry Harcourt

Twenty two mōhua (or yellowhead), were successfully moved from the Catlins Conservation Area in Otago to Resolution Island in Fiordland this week.

The transfer is part of an exciting project to create a super site for mōhua on the 20,000 ha Resolution Island in Dusky Sound and follows a successful transfer of 60 mōhua to the island, from Landsborough Valley in October 2011. This island will provide habitat for a large, genetically robust population which will help further secure the species. Mōhua are one of our rarest songbirds and have recently been voted by New Zealanders as bird of the year, in the Forest and Bird's annual poll.

Supported by the Mōhua Charitable Trust, this translocation supports the Trusts wider aim, to restore mōhua and other native bird populations back to the numbers once found in New Zealand's native forests. Trustee Nigel Babbage says 'the project to re-introduce mōhua to Resolution Island is exciting and special. The island has potential to support the largest population of mōhua in New Zealand for generations and be a source to reintroduce mōhua to other sites in the future'

The transfer has been undertaken in partnership with Otago and Southland iwi, Te Runanga o Awarua, and Te Runanga o Oraka Aparima, who share a strong relationship with the Catlins Conservation Area. The Catlins Forest holds one of the largest remaining populations of mōhua in New Zealand. Predator control is ongoing at this site and the mōhua population, which is estimated to be in the low thousands, will easily support a transfer of 22 individuals.

Resolution Island is the largest island in Fiordland. The island's potential as a nature reserve was first recognised by Richard Henry in the 1800s when he transferred over 500 native birds there to save them

being eaten by the rats and stoats that were devastating the mainland's wildlife. Unfortunately by 1900, stoats had invaded the island and destroyed Richard Henry's conservation dreams.

In 2008, the Department of Conservation (DOC) picked up Richard Henry's mantle and began an ambitious trapping project to remove stoats from the island. There are very few stoats remaining on Resolution Island and no signs of recent breeding, but monitoring and trapping for stoats will be ongoing to ensure any stoats or rats arriving on the island are caught.

Mōhua were present on Resolution Island during Richard Henry's time, but had become locally extinct. They are the first native species to be reintroduced to the island since Richard Henry's tragedy over 120 years ago.

The 22 mōhua were caught in the Catlins Forest in one day by a catching team of 20 people, including DOC staff, volunteers, Te Runanga o Awarua from Otago and members of the Mōhua Charitable Trust. No mōhua were taken from areas of high public use in the Catlins Forest. The birds were flown by helicopter to Resolution Island the same day, where they were blessed by Te Runanga o Awarua, welcomed by local iwi, Te Runanga o Oraka Aparima and released.

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