

Media release

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New home for our unique skink

Te Kakahu/Chalky Island skink have been introduced to a new island home in Dusky Sound, Fiordland to improve the species' security.

The Te Kakahu skink is a point endemic, known only from one small area, approximately 100m² on Chalky Island in Chalky Inlet, Fiordland. It was first discovered in 2002 by members of the Kākāpō Recovery Team and was formally described in 2011. The Te Kakahu skink is one of six distinct species in the *Oligosoma inconspicuum* or cryptic skink species complex, and is classified as nationally critical in the Department of Conservation Threat Classification System, the highest ranking possible under the New Zealand Threat Classification System. Because the total skink population occupies such a small area, DOC Biodiversity Ranger Bex Jackson says the skink are high priority for conservation management.

“Chalky Island is predator free, but a possible predator incursion or fire would pose a severe risk to the entire Te Kakahu skink species.”

“The national lizard Technical Advisory Group advised the best option for increasing the skink's security would be to create a backup population on another predator free island,” says Bex Jackson.

The project, sponsored by the Mohua Charitable Trust and the Ron and Edna Greenwood Environmental Trust, undertaken in partnership with Te Runanga o Ōraka Aparima and the Department of Conservation (DOC), is the culmination of ongoing monitoring of the species, sponsored by New Zealand clothing company Chalky Digits via the Fiordland Conservation Trust.

After undertaking habitat surveys a release site was chosen on predator free Anchor Island. Currently home to a wide variety of endangered native species including mohua, tieke/saddleback, kiwipukupuku/little spotted kiwi and kākāpō, Anchor Island is not known to have any other skink species present.

Last week, 99 Te Kakahu skink were translocated from Chalky Island to their new home. A population assessment undertaken by DOC in 2016 indicated that a healthy population exists to support a harvest of skinks for translocation to another predator free site.

Nigel Babbage from the Mohua Charitable Trust says that follow-up monitoring of the skink will be carried out on Anchor Island in two months' time:

“Each skink was photographed, and individuals can be identified from the unique scale pattern on their back and sides.”

“Monitoring will allow the team to see if the translocation has been successful, and to chart the growth of the new population. This will be an invaluable source of information for future skink translocations and our knowledge of this little-known species.”

“We would like to thank all our sponsors and supporters of this important project”.