



# FIORDLAND COASTAL NEWSLETTER

October 2007



**Kia ora from the Biodiversity Team at DOC, Te Anau.** In this issue we bring you updates from biodiversity projects underway on the Fiordland Coast, including collaborative work with Eco Tours and Fiordland Lobster Company, an update on the replacement for the Deas Cove Hut and information about new biosecurity initiatives underway to further protect Fiordland's internationally renowned pest-free islands.

As many of you prepare for a summer of boating on the coast we hope you find these updates informative. This newsletter is now available on-line at [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz). For further information please contact the Department of Conservation, Te Anau Area Office, phone 03-249-0200.

## Mohua/Yellowhead and Kakarui/South Island Robin Reintroduced to Pigeon Island, Dusky Sound

**Andrew (Max) Smart**

In winter 2005, stoats were eradicated from Pigeon Island in a joint project with the Fiordland Lobster Company and the Department of Conservation. New tracks were flagged and cut across the island, followed by an intensive trapping programme. To reduce the likelihood of stoats swimming across to Pigeon Island a trap line was also established on the adjacent coast of Resolution Island and on surrounding stepping-stone islands. Over the intervening two years only one stoat was trapped on Pigeon Island, with twenty caught along the Resolution Island trap line.

Following the success of this project, the Fiordland Lobster Company again teamed up with DOC staff to re-introduce two native bird species (mohua and kakarui) to Pigeon Island. These birds are able to persist on the mainland in areas with low stoat numbers, so it was considered appropriate to re-introduce them at this time.

The trip took place in July and included Fiordland Lobster Company board members David Hogg and John Steffens, Chris Laidlaw and Lynn Freeman from National Radio, and Department of Conservation staff from Te Anau. Kim Hollows from Fiordland Helicopters also assisted with the transfer, which was much appreciated.

To catch mohua, mist-nets (very fine mesh nets) were suspended across small sections of bush canopy on Anchor and Breaksea Islands. Areas known to be suitable habitat for mohua were targeted. Pre-recorded mohua calls were played through a speaker system to attract the birds into the mist-nets.

Kakarui were captured using meal worms to lure them onto the ground. Small hand nets were then used to catch the birds and transfer them into specially designed transfer boxes.

Twenty-nine mohua and 31 kakarui were transferred to Pigeon Island. Each bird was marked with a coloured band to assist with future monitoring. Next February we will assess whether the new populations have bred or not by recording banded and unbanded birds. Any unbanded birds seen will be offspring from this summer.

The release of these threatened species onto Pigeon Island builds on the solid relationship established between the Fiordland Lobster Company and the Department of Conservation. Thanks again to all involved.

The long-term aim is to restore both Pigeon and Resolution Islands to pest-free status, resembling something akin to what Richard Henry would have encountered in the 1800s prior to the arrival of stoats.



Above – Banded mohua ready for release.

Right – Releasing mohua onto Pigeon Island – pictured, left to right, Kim Hollows (Fiordland Helicopters), Megan Willans (DOC), David Hogg (FLC), Chris Laidlaw (RNZ), Mark Peychers (Southern Winds Skipper and FLC). *Photos: Jackson Laidlaw*



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A large scale trapping effort aimed at eradicating stoats from Resolution Island will commence in winter 2008 and after that time consideration will be given to introducing less stoat-tolerant species such as tieke/South Island saddleback onto Pigeon Island.

The Radio New Zealand Programme about the work happening on the Fiordland Coast is due to air in the second week of October on Chris Laidlaw's Sunday Morning Show.

## From the Didymo Files

### Martin Gennet

The latest sampling for the invasive freshwater algae didymo from waterways around Fiordland has confirmed that many areas are still didymo-free. These results are encouraging as the establishment of didymo throughout the rivers of western Fiordland is the last thing any of us want. It is important to remember however, that we are dealing with a moving target. As we continue to sample rivers regularly their didymo status can change.

Water samples recently taken from the tail race in Deep Cove showed the presence of didymo. This finding was not unexpected due to the presence of the algae in Lake Manapouri. While we need to be conscious that didymo could be present in any river, particular care needs to be taken around the tail race.

Salt water does kill didymo cells, however normal sea water takes four hours to kill cells. The diluted freshwater layer present in the fiords will take even longer. The reduced effectiveness of the saltwater in the fiords should be taken into account when working or playing near the tail race outlet. Anyone in this situation should apply the same cleaning protocols as if they have been in a contaminated river or lake before moving to another freshwater system – Check, Clean, and Dry!

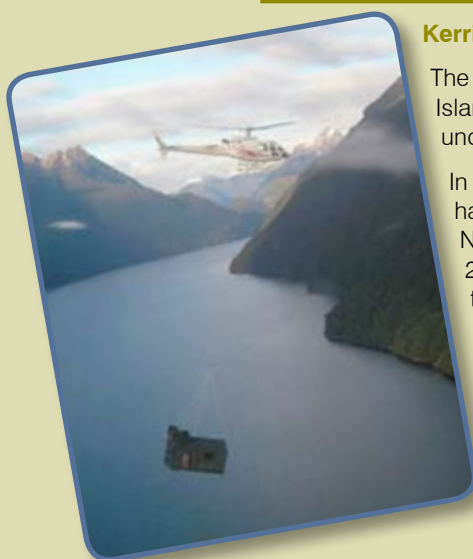
## Track Work Commences on Resolution Island

### Kerri-Anne Edge

The establishment of a 230 kilometre network of trap lines has commenced on Resolution Island (21,000 ha) in Dusky Sound. This programme follows in the footsteps of similar work undertaken on Secretary Island to remove stoats and deer.

In early September a team of four contractors began route finding and marking. This work has now been completed over almost half the island, with track cutting due to commence in November. The intention is to have all of the track work completed by late summer, so that 2700 stoat trap tunnels can be laid on the island and adjacent mainland in preparation for trapping stoats in July and August 2008.

In order to support this work 13 relocatable bivvies have been constructed and are in the process of being transported to Resolution Island. Don Hawinkels of Te Anau was awarded the tender and many local suppliers were engaged in the project. The use of steel framing in building these bivvies has resulted in a significant weight reduction when compared to the older style bivvies with wooden framing. Each bivvy alone weighs 690 kilograms. Southern Lakes Helicopters were able to fly both a bivvy and an attachable annex in one load to the island.



Two-bunk bivvy and adjoining annex being flown to Resolution Island by pilot Richard Hayes, Southern Lakes Helicopters.  
Photo: Andy Wards

## Deas Cove Hut Replacement

### Warren Biggs

As many of you know the old hut at Deas Cove in Thompson Sound was removed last year. The hut was only 10 metres away from a huge landslip that came down following the 2003 earthquake. The likelihood that the hut would be destroyed (along with its occupants) if an earthquake similar to that of 2003 occurred again, reactivating the landslip or triggering further slips, meant that the hut needed to be closed and subsequently removed.

Consideration has been given to several sites in Thompson Sound to build a replacement hut, however the anchorage at Deas Cove was deemed the most suitable. A new site, not threatened by large scale earth movements, has been selected. The new Deas Cove Hut will be located approximately 100 metres closer to Thompson Sound, on a rocky knoll about 10 metres above sea level. It should be noted that this site was endorsed as being safe by Royden Thomson, a renowned Fiordland geologist.

The hut will have 10 bunks, a roof water supply, a containment toilet and two covered decks. We are hoping it will be open to the public by late November.

## Tawaki/Fiordland Crested Penguin Monitoring Re-commences

**Erina Loe**

In an earlier newsletter we brought you a story about tawaki monitoring that is currently being undertaken on the coast. It is now the breeding season for Fiordland's very own penguin. In August, DOC rangers from Te Anau braved the sandflies, rough seas, persistent drizzle and rampant seasickness to wallow around in penguin poo, undertaking this year's tawaki census.



Tawaki at Martins Bay.  
Photo Erina Loe

Tawaki have been reclassified from "gradual decline" to "nationally endangered", due to a conservative population estimate of less than 5000 adult birds.

Tawaki population monitoring began on the Fiordland coast in 1994 at three locations: Martins Bay, and East and West Shelter Islands in Doubtful Sound/Patea. Two additional populations were added to the programme in 1995 and 1996 – Breaksea Island and Whenua Hou Nature Reserve on Codfish Island. These predator-free islands were chosen to provide a comparison between populations with no predators and the existing monitoring sites where different threats are present – weka exist on both Shelter Islands, but are absent at Martins Bay where stoats, possums and rats are present.

Tawaki population monitoring is also carried out by DOC staff in Haast at Jackson's Head, Monro and Murphy's Beach. This monitoring has been ongoing annually since 1990.

The sites on the Fiordland coast are visited twice yearly over a three year period – in August to count the number of nests (or nesting attempts), and October to count chicks. Counts are timed to coincide with the Whenua Hou and Haast Tawaki Monitoring Programmes.

Depending on the results from the 2006-2008 census, monitoring efforts will be suspended for five years from 2009 and recommence in 2014. Although nesting attempts at the Fiordland sites seem to be down on last season, it is important to look at the success rates for breeding over the three year census period before drawing any conclusions about the current status of the Fiordland population.

## Doubtful Sound Bottlenose Dolphin Threat Management Discussion Paper

**Carrie Williams**

Over the last few months a threat management discussion paper for the Doubtful Sound population of bottlenose dolphins has been developed in conjunction with various stakeholder groups. This paper was put out for public consultation in July. Feedback from 60 individuals and groups has been received by DOC, which is a great response. Submissions are now closed and a panel of experts is currently analysing the feedback, along with the existing information about this population of bottlenose dolphins. The panel consists of people with knowledge of the Fiordland area, expertise in the Resource Management Act and marine mammal scientists. Their task is to put forward management recommendations. It is anticipated that these recommendations will be presented to those that have provided feedback at a meeting at the beginning of November.

## Southern Right Whale Sightings

**Kath Blakemore**

Southern right whale.  
Photo: Erin Green



A group of students from Southland Boys High School received an added bonus to their environmental education camp at Deep Cove recently. A southern right whale and its calf had travelled approximately 30km from the open coast to Deep Cove, where the group sighted them. The whales reportedly spent an hour milling around in front of the Deep Cove Hostel, and around three hours in total in the area. They were later sighted part way along the fiord, travelling west towards the open coast.

This sighting adds to numerous other sightings of southern right whales that have been made in the southern Fiordland area over the last few months, including many sightings from Preservation and Chalky Inlets. Some large groups have been observed in these southern fiords, including a sighting of an estimated 15 individuals in one group which were making enough noise to keep the folk at Kisbee Lodge awake at night.

DOC is very keen to hear of sightings of any whale species. If you do come across a whale while on the water, please remember the rules for operating your boat safely around marine mammals and maintain the required minimum distance of 50 metres away from them. For more information or to report a sighting, please contact Kath Blakemore, Te Anau Area Office, 03 249 0200, [kblakemore@doc.govt.nz](mailto:kblakemore@doc.govt.nz).



## Cleddau Fan Restoration

### Beth Masser

Queenstown based tourism company Eco Tours, is sponsoring a new project aimed at the ecological restoration of coastal forest on the Cleddau delta at Milford. This 40ha area is surrounded by water, apart from a broad neck that abounds the back of the Milford staff accommodation area and airstrip.

The aim of the project is to reduce stoats, possums and rats to sufficiently low densities to allow for a rebound in the numbers of native species. A combination of traps, targeted at stoats and possums, and poison bait stations for rats will be used. Weka, kiwi, miromiro/tomtit, titipounamu/ rifleman, kererū/NZ wood pigeon, korimako/bellbird, kākā and a couple of species of sea bird are expected to benefit from this work. It may also be possible to reintroduce other species back into the area over time.

This exciting development is expected to further build on the conservation gains being observed around Milford, due to the community stoat trapping that has run for the past three years along the Milford Road corridor.

For further information please contact Gerard Hill, [ghill@doc.govt.nz](mailto:ghill@doc.govt.nz)

## Conservation Volunteers Trip to Secretary Island

### Kerri-Anne Edge

DOC ranger, Ian Thorne recently led a small group of conservation volunteers out to Secretary Island to undertake maintenance work on the 120 km track network. The tracks (a basic cut route through the bush) were established over the summer of 2004-2005 to support the stoat and deer eradication programmes that are currently underway on the island.

To date 419 deer have been shot on the island. Preliminary results from dental ageing work indicate that the population is generally younger and in poorer condition than mainland populations of red deer. Ground and aerial work has recommenced for the season, with the first ground teams heading out to the island in October. By April 2008 we intend to have all of the 17 remote monitored deer pens up and running and a number of key sites established for setting up the self-attaching radio transmitter collars. Tools like these will be increasingly important as the number of deer left on the island becomes very low.

The next coastal stoat trapping trip is planned for November and will include Secretary Island as well as Bauza, Anchor, Te Kakahu, the Passage Islands, and numerous stepping-stone islands. Following last summer's stoat plague on the mainland, most of the islands remain stoat-free, with relatively small numbers caught last summer on Secretary Island.

Conservation volunteers Maggie Oakley, Bronwyn Judge and Ken Davidson outside the North Ridge Bivvy, Secretary Island. *Photo: Ian Thorne*



## New Biosecurity Initiatives Being Developed for the Coast

### Murray Willans

As we highlighted in our Christmas newsletter late last year, Fiordland has a number of pest-free islands which are of international significance. Moreover, a huge investment has been made over the last 20 years to restore some of Fiordland's islands to a pest- or predator-free state. To this end we are always seeking to improve our standards for island biosecurity and ensure these special places remain pest-free.

One such initiative has been a recent push to advance the departmental guidelines for quarantine management associated with commercial operations. This work includes developing a Biosecurity Plan Template that concessionaires can develop to suit their own operations along the coast. We are also encouraging recreational users to pick up on similar quarantine measures through developing their own quarantine measures. An advocacy poster for island biosecurity, aimed at both commercial and recreational users, is currently being printed and will be available shortly.

The department's own vessel, MV Southern Winds, has to operate under its own biosecurity plan as part of a national best practice policy on island biosecurity. We are continually updating this plan to reflect the changing nature of work along the coast. A number of commercial operators have also taken the initiative to develop their own quarantine plan based on the template that is now available.

We hope to send you a generic biosecurity plan and quarantine brochure with our next newsletter due out before Christmas. In the meantime if you would like more information please contact Murray Willans: [mwillans@doc.govt.nz](mailto:mwillans@doc.govt.nz).