



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



Fiordland
Conservation Trust

Winery toasts success at the birthplace of New Zealand conservation

12 October, 2011

A southern winery is leading the way in growing support for conservation through business. Peregrine Wines recently toasted the success of their fourth conservation initiative through the Fiordland Conservation Trust and the Department of Conservation with the transfer of 60 mohua/ yellow-head back to Resolution Island, the birthplace of New Zealand conservation.

Peregrine Winery based in Gibbston, Central Otago raised funds for the transfer through the sales of their successful avian branded wines including the Peregrine and Saddleback branded wines. “It seemed the right time to find another very significant project involving these rare birds that we could become involved in”, said Peregrine’s Marketing Director Greg Hay. Through a partnership with the Fiordland Conservation Trust, Peregrine got involved with the transfer “not only from a funding perspective but also as active participants in the capture and release of these vibrant little songbirds” said Mr Hay. Previous projects from the sales of the Peregrine wines have included transfers of saddleback from Breaksea Island to Chalky Island, Breaksea to Bauza Island in Doubtful Sound as well as the transfer of saddleback from Ulva Island to the recently established Orokinui sanctuary in Otago.

The transfer marks a momentous step in conservation being the first time that native wildlife has been returned to the birthplace of New Zealand conservation. Resolution Island was declared New Zealand’s first Nature Reserve in 1891 and in the years following caretaker Richard Henry moved hundreds of kiwi and kakapo to the safety of the island, away from the stoats and rats that were devastating the mainland’s wildlife. But with the invasion of stoats to Resolution Island in the early 1900s, Richard Henry abandoned his conservation dreams.

An ambitious trapping project undertaken by the Department of Conservation over the past three years is helping to restore Resolution Island (20,860 ha) to its former stoat-free status. With a breeding population of stoats no longer present, it is now safe to return endangered or threatened species, such as mohua, to Fiordland’s largest island sanctuary. Due to the size of Resolution Island, it will be able to sustain a mohua population of thousands, making it the largest protected site for mohua in New Zealand.

“This is a significant occasion for all involved, due to the history of Resolution Island and the phenomenal task to get the island back to being safe to reintroduce endangered species”, Roger McNaughton, Fiordland Conservation Trust Chairman. “This is an example of how the combined efforts of different organisations can make substantial gains to conservation. Peregrines Wines investment and participation in the mohua transfer is an incredible contribution”.

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The mohua were transferred from the Landsborough Valley, near Haast, where numbers have been recovering well since stoat, possum and rat control was established in the valley in 2000 by the Department of Conservation. There are now estimated to be at least a thousand mohua in the valley so transferring 60 to Resolution Island will not affect the Landsborough population.

Mohua are particularly vulnerable to rats and stoats, especially in years of heavy beech flowering as the seeds provide an abundance of food for rats and stoats causing them to reach plague proportions. Large flocks of mohua were once seen throughout the beech forests of the South Island but today only a few remain in small pockets of mainland, or on predator-free islands. Transferring mohua back to Fiordland's largest island sanctuary will help to secure the future of the species.

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For more information on the mōhua transfer please contact Department of Conservation- Jo Whitehead (03) 249 0200 or email: jowhitehead@doc.govt.nz. For more information on Peregrine Wines and the Fiordland Conservation Trust contact Fiordland Conservation Trust Manager Rachel Cockburn on 0274952954.

Additional Information:

Peregrine Wines and Fiordland Conservation Trust: Peregrine Winery, named after the New Zealand endemic falcon or Karearea in Maori, has been involved in avian conservation in New Zealand for the past decade. It has been one of the major sponsors of the Wingspan trust of New Zealand, based in Rotorua for the past 10 years, a world class facility that is focused on the captive breeding and rehabilitation from injury of NZ's raptors.

More recently Peregrine has taken a long term position alongside the Department of Conservation in Te Anau and the Fiordland Conservation Trust, to help fund targeted avian projects in Southern areas of New Zealand. To date this support has involved the transfer of tieke / South Island saddleback from successfully established populations on predator-free islands, to newly established safe havens on islands.

Established in 2007, FCT has worked with many different individuals and businesses to bring about some outstanding conservation projects in Southland. Several businesses have on-going relationships with FCT; the encounters with some of New Zealand's threatened species and amazing wilderness environments experienced by these people is having a real positive impact on their willingness to support future projects.

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Mountain Helicopters: A local helicopter company in South Westland are donating one hour's worth of flying time to the Landsborough Valley for this transfer. Mountain Helicopters has also helped DOC with flights to the Landsborough Valley for ongoing work maintaining stoat trap lines.

Mohua conservation: Mohua/ yellowhead are a small brightly coloured songbird, distinctive by their bright yellow head and melodic calls. Mohua were once widespread throughout the beech forests of the South Island forming large flocks but are now rated nationally vulnerable. In the 1980s it was recognised that mohua had disappeared from 75% of their former range and that declines were continuing. Mohua are particularly vulnerable to predation by stoats and rats in years of high predator numbers. Recent management has shown that mohua populations can be maintained in mainland sites, such as the Landsborough Valley, using appropriate predator control. However a longer term solution for improving the security of möhua has proven to be translocations to predator-free islands where populations flourish in the absence of predators.

Logistics: A catching team of twelve people including Peregrine Wines representatives, local iwi and Department of Conservation staff camped in the valley for several days last week prior to the transfer. The mohua were caught in mist-nets rigged between trees and flown the same day by helicopter to Resolution Island, in Dusky Sound, Fiordland. Birds were banded so that the success of the transfer can be measured once unbanded birds are sighted.

Resolution Island: In 1891 Resolution Island in Dusky Sound, Fiordland, became New Zealand's first Nature Reserve and the birthplace for New Zealand conservation. Richard Henry was appointed as caretaker, and during the next 12 years he transferred over 500 native birds (mostly kiwi and kakapo) to the safety of the island – away from the rats and stoats that were devastating the mainland's wildlife. Unfortunately by 1900 stoats had invaded Resolution Island destroying Richard Henry's conservation dreams.

Over 110 years later the Department of Conservation is restoring Resolution Island to its former stoat-free status. In 2008 the Department began a programme to rid the island of stoats and deer. Stoats were removed using 2466 kill traps placed around the island and on the nearby mainland that are checked and baited three times a year. There are thought to very few stoats left on Resolution Island with no indication of breeding during the 2010/11 summer. Stoat traps will continue to be baited and checked into the future to ensure any potential stoats (or rats) arriving on the island are caught. Deer numbers have been reduced significantly using both ground and aerial hunting with the eradication programme in its third year of knock-down. Mice remain as the only introduced animal not yet to be controlled on Resolution Island. Rats and possums have never been present.

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Resolution Island (20,860 ha) is the largest island in Fiordland and has the potential to support significant populations of threatened species, including a substantial population of mohua, helping to safeguard this species from extinction.

Landsborough Valley: The mōhua were transferred from the Landsborough Valley in South Westland because the population has been recovering well from predator management and the Landsborough mohua have not yet been safeguarded on any offshore islands. The Department of Conservation began predator control in the Landsborough Valley in 2000. The mōhua in the valley have been monitored since 1998 and have recorded a steady increase in numbers.

Tangata whenua: Mohua are a taonga species for Maori. Te Runanga o Makaawhio from South Westland support this transfer and were present during the catching of the mōhua in the Landsborough Valley and their subsequent release. Te Runanga o Oraka Aparima from Southland also support the transfer and welcomed the mōhua to their new home on Resolution Island.