

Birds New Zealand Research Fund – Transfer of Chatham Island albatross

The Chatham Islands Taiko Trust has undertaken a major conservation project to establish a second colony of Chatham island albatross on Main Chatham. This is a commitment to a five year chick translocation project. Where if successful, the returning chicks will come back to this new site to breed, and hence start a new population. With most of the world's 22 species of albatross threatened with extinction, it is vital to develop effective conservation measures to increase their chances of survival.

This project was assisted by a Birds New Zealand Research Fund grant. This funding was towards the purchase of equipment for the chick translocations. With any project of this scale, it is important to have the right equipment, the Birds New Zealand funding was vital to help kick start the project, and ensure that prior to the project starting, we had all the correct gear to work with. In addition, this one year's funding will have lasting benefits for the entire length of the project; as all of the equipment purchased will be used for the duration of the project. This provides The Taiko Trust with the security of knowing we have the essential equipment for the entire project period.

All 50 chicks have fledged successfully, with the last chick leaving at the end of April. The 100% fledging success achieved is in part due to the Taiko Trust having the best equipment available. The Birds New Zealand Research Fund grant has meant that we had the right gear for the right job. This enabled chicks to be shifted safely, weighed and measure properly to follow development, and their food prepared, kept clean and hygienic, and feed to chicks in top condition. Basically, the best gear has ensured a safe and effective operation, which has meant the fledging of healthy chicks – which is our primary aim.

In addition, one of the objectives of the project is to refine transfer methodology for albatross species. This project aims to build on the successful Yamashina Institute of Ornithology short-tailed albatross translocation project, but has important differences designed to learn more about the methodology to move albatross chicks. The knowledge gained will assist future albatross translocations, and other threatened albatross species.

This project has generated widespread local and national interest. There have been over 400 visitors to the release site - not bad on an island with only 550 residents! Each and every visitor has been moved by their time at the colony with the birds, and we are seeing lasting impacts of this. The project is openly discussed, and many landowners have started talking to the Taiko Trust about how similar projects could be done on their land. Without a doubt this project is having the desired impacts we had hoped for. It is certainly increasing the profile of seabird conservation, and plight of threatened seabirds. In terms of advocating for better protection of seabirds, this project is unrivalled.

To follow next year's translocation and other conservation efforts in the Chathams visit www.facebook.com/chathamtaikotrust

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