



ARE NEW ZEALAND STORM PETREL NUMBERS ON TE HAUTURU-O-TOI / LITTLE BARRIER ISLAND INCREASING?

Overview article September 2023

Using mark-recapture and flight count methods, from both captures on land and observations of banded birds at sea in 2014 and 2015 we estimated the population of NZSP on Hauturu to be approximately 1600 individuals. Though anecdotal evidence suggests this population may be increasing, accurate data are yet to be obtained and are critical for accurate conservation designations for the species. With funding from the Birds NZ Research Fund, we are aiming to provide the first solid data to assess the population trajectory of NZSP.

Unfortunately, our 2023 fieldwork was severely compromised by cyclonic events in February allowing only one week on the island (instead of two). The March trip was cancelled due to the rahui imposed by iwi (Ngāti Manuhiri) on the island after koiwi (human remains) were found after the cyclone and large seas had eroded along the back of the boulder beach. The island is co-managed by DOC and iwi there was little room to find an alternative solution. Therefore, we had no other option but to look at continuing the work this coming 2023-2024 season as the task can only be completed on Hauturu.

Our proposal is to repeat the island-based mark-recaptures on Hauturu in February and March 2024, by adhering to our established and published protocols. These will follow a short trip in December 2023 to check on the playback system, trail camera and nest boxes set up at the upper NZSP breeding sites in Parihakoakoa Valley. Also, while on Hauturu we aim to follow up on work conducted in previous seasons with the deployment of acoustic recorders in Parihakoakoa Valley to try and obtain new recordings of NZSP calls and conduct night searches at sites where NZSP calls were recorded in January 2020 and 2023. To date, NZSP appear to have a very narrow calling period (mid-January to early-February).

At present we are waiting on word from Ngāti Manuhiri whether the dates we have chosen will conflict with work they are wanting to do on the island over summer, establishing a whare adjacent to the bunkhouse.

Chris Gaskin (Project Coordinator, Northern NZ Seabird Trust) for the NZSP Working Group

