

Outline of a proposal to transfer North Island Robins from Waitotara Valley, Wanganui to East Harbour Regional Park, Wellington

<p>1. Translocation title:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal for transfer of North Island Robin (<i>Petroica australis longipes</i>) from the Waitotara Valley, Wanganui to East Harbour Regional Park, Wellington before May 2008.
<p>2. What we want to do:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To catch up to 20 pairs of robins, using clap traps, in the Waitotara Valley, Wanganui and release them on a 350ha 'mainland island' in the Butterfly Creek area, East Harbour Regional Park, Wellington. • Assistance to be sought from key associates such as DOC, Greater Wellington Regional Council, Ornithological Society of NZ and Forest & Bird.
<p>3. What we want to achieve:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By re-introducing robins to East Harbour Regional Park it is hoped that a self-sustaining population will become established, returning the species to part of its former range (on the mainland). • In establishing a viable population will further increase the species survival and possibly provide a source for future robin transfers elsewhere.
<p>4. Translocation is necessary to achieve the desired outcome:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Island Robin were once common in most wooded parts of the country, but are strongly affected by high predator numbers. Robins are now found naturally on the mainland only in isolated patches some distance from Wellington. • Robins have been successfully reintroduced to a number of predator-free offshore islands, and mainland areas where predators have been intensively controlled such as Bushy Park Reserve, Waitakere Ranges. In the Wellington Conservancy successful transfers have been made from Kapiti Island to Mana Island, Somes Island, and the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary where a predator-proof fence provides a 'mainland island'. • It is unlikely that North Island Robin will re-establish naturally within the East Harbour Regional Park.
<p>5. Context:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This transfer further advances MIRO's ecological goals and objectives for the East Harbour Regional Park: "to protect and restore the natural ecosystems within East Harbour Regional Park for future generations through the continued elimination of pests, and the reintroduction of native species of plants and animals that were present in the past but now lost". MIRO, a community group of volunteers, established in 1998 initially to control possums within the Park, and since 2003 have also been involved in rat control. MIRO works in partnership with the managers of the Park, Greater Wellington Regional Council, who have provided the predator control resources on the mainland island since 2005. Extensive possum trapping throughout the Park is already producing positive effects on the vegetation as evidenced by monitoring counts of birds, insects, flowering and fruiting surveys done by MIRO and GW. • After consultation with various members of DOC and GW it was decided that the North Island Robin was the most suitable bird for reintroduction in terms of habitat; availability of wild source population; ease of transfer and introduction; and visibility to the public generating awareness to the wider MIRO project.

- The success of this transfer will be useful in determining the possible transfer of other species to the mainland island at a future date. At this stage no further transfers are planned.

6. Presence of the species in the East Harbour Regional Park previously:

- North Island Robins no longer exist at the release location, but would have been present in this area previously, being within its former range.
- It is generally assumed the North Island Robin was extirpated by introduced mammalian predators, particularly rats and stoats. An intensive programme of predator control has been underway by Greater Wellington Regional Council for the past 2 years over a 350ha 'mainland island' centred on Butterfly Creek. Bait stations, using 0.05g per kg of bromadiolone, have been placed at 100m intervals in lines 150m apart forming a grid over the mainland island. Rodent and mustelid numbers are monitored by tracking tunnel methods with ink papers every 3 months by Greater Wellington and MIRO volunteers. Some measure of control is achieved over the remainder of the 1300ha Northern Forest block by MIRO volunteers using bait stations spread throughout the Park at roughly 200m intervals on most walking tracks. Greater Wellington and MIRO are committed to continuing long term predator control.

7. Suitability of the release location for the needs of the species being moved:

- The Northern Forest Block of East Harbour Regional Park is on the eastern side of Wellington Harbour, and comprises 1300ha of native vegetation. Open beech, kamahi and northern rata is found on ridges and drier sites. Conifer and broadleaf, especially rimu, miro, matai and kahikatea, pukatea and nikau palms occur in damp gullies and valleys.
- The North Island Robin will be released in the Butterfly Creek catchment in the centre of the 'mainland island', an area of 350ha where intensive predator control has been underway since 2005 in the middle of the Park. This will be done only when rat tracking shows that numbers are reduced to an acceptable level.
- Modelling studies (Armstrong and Ewen 2001) have shown robin populations would be able to survive in an area of only 2.5ha of suitable habitat, and so 350ha will provide sufficient habitat size for a self sustaining population.
- Robin diet consists of invertebrates, supplemented with small fruits in summer and autumn. Monitoring studies have shown there is a plentiful supply of invertebrates and many fruiting plants.

8. Long term ecological impact of the translocation:

- There are no other Australasian robins (Eopasaltriidae) present, and tomtit (*Petroica macrocephala toitoi*) numbers are low in the Park.
- North Island Robins were once a natural component of the ecosystem where they are being introduced. Any impact on other species or the ecosystem is therefore likely to restore the system closer to its former state.
- Blackbirds (*Turdus merula*) and thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) are present and could potentially compete for the same food as robins, but food is considered plentiful and therefore these non-native birds are not considered to pose a threat.
- The NZ falcon is seen seldomly and may take the occasional robin but this is a natural process and little can be done to prevent it, so is considered within an acceptable level.
- The reintroduction of robins would not restrict any future translocations, though none are planned at this stage.

9. Captive holding or breeding:

- Captured robins will be held in individual cardboard or wooden transfer boxes of approximate dimensions 325mm x 450mm x 410mm. Each box will be equipped with small branches for perches, a small amount of dry leaf litter on the bottom, a small dish of water on the floor, and food such as mealworms (*Tenebrio molitor*), whiteworms (*Enchaettraeus albidus*), or waxmoth larvae (*Galleria mellonella*). The birds will be transported in these boxes to the East Harbour Regional Park by road, and then by foot. Robins will likely be held overnight, and hard released directly from their transport boxes the next morning in several locations within the Butterfly Creek area.

10. Availability of the species for translocation:

- Within the Wellington Conservancy there are already four populations of robins, Kapiti Island, Mana Island, Somes Island and Karori Wildlife Sanctuary. Reasonable numbers exist on Kapiti and at Karori Wildlife Sanctuary. However, the preferred source needs to be distinct from those already in the Wellington Conservancy, which originated from Kapiti Island, thereby introducing a new gene pool to the area. Sourcing robins from a mainland site where predators are likely to be present will ensure birds are “predator wise” and therefore have some ability to cope with the low levels of predator numbers at the release site.
- It is anticipated that the robins will come from DOC land in the Waitotara Valley, Wanganui where birds are relatively abundant and therefore will be minimal disturbance to the population. Robins are able to breed quickly and have proved able to recover from previous removals eg Kapiti Island. Birds will be collected from a number of sites to minimise local depletions. Wanganui is within 3 hours of Wellington and therefore close enough that birds can be released quickly after capture. Alternatives that could be considered are Bushy Park Reserve, or Pureora Forest where predator control work is being done.
- It is likely that more than one transfer will be required to establish the species. There is a risk of dispersal of some birds from the area leaving a small population. It is possible that several releases over consecutive years will be required to achieve a successful outcome. Results of the initial transfer will be assessed to determine whether or not more will be necessary, and if so, what changes are required for future transfers.