

Report 03.173  
Date 31 March 2003  
File PK/08/01/05

Committee Landcare  
Author Philippa Crisp, Principal Advisor, Planning and Policy

## Karori Sanctuary request to take native birds from Greater Wellington land

### 1. Purpose

To ask the Committee to consider granting permission to the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary Trust (the Trust) to take tomtits from the Akatarawa Forest as part of the Trust's proposal to re-establish a breeding population of tomtits in the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary (the Sanctuary).

### 2. Background

The Trust has a goal to restore the full range of plants, birds and animals representative of the Wellington Peninsula area within the Sanctuary. As part of this goal, they propose to establish self-sustaining populations of whiteheads, bellbirds and tomtits in the Sanctuary. These species were once abundant on the peninsula but are no longer present because of the removal of their habitat and the introduction of pests and predators. Bellbirds and tomtits are widely distributed north of the Hutt Valley, while whiteheads are found in the large tracts of native forest in the Tararua and Rimutaka Ranges. Kapiti Island also has healthy populations of bellbirds and whiteheads.

The Department of Conservation (DOC) is responsible for approving permits for the transfer of native birds under the Wildlife Act 1953. The Trust was granted a permit by DOC in 2001 to translocate whiteheads, bellbirds and tomtits. The permit allows the Trust to take 30 birds per annum per species from Kapiti Island and 30 birds per annum per species from the mainland over three years.

Trust staff requested permission to transfer birds from mainland sites because they were concerned that the Kapiti Island birds may be predator naïve if they flew outside the Sanctuary boundary. As the permit restricts the mainland island captures to 10 birds per site, three capture sites were selected by the Trust.

In 2002 the sanctuary received permission from Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) as the landowner, to take birds from two sites in the Akatarawa Forest, and from one site on DOC land. A copy of the Permit is attached as **Attachment 1**.

A total of 16 tomtits were taken from Council land: 11 males and 5 females. Two bellbirds and three whiteheads were also transferred. The birds were banded, taken directly to the sanctuary and released the same day. The Trust has recently requested permission to take a further 20 tomtits from Council land.

### **3. Considerations**

In assessing the Trusts request a number of factors need to be considered. A key question is what are the net biodiversity benefits of the transfer?

DOC consider that the objectives of Karori Sanctuary will ultimately improve biodiversity in the region. The return of whiteheads, bellbirds and tomtits to the Wellington Peninsula, an area from which they have been lost, is of benefit to biodiversity. Hence, if the transfer programme is successful then the net biodiversity benefits are considerable.

The second key question is, how likely is it that the transfer programme will be successful? While birds have been released in the Sanctuary they may not stay there. It is possible that they could be forced out; through competition (intra or inter specific) or leave for some other reason. If many of the birds leave the sanctuary then the net biodiversity benefits will be lower or possibly even negative (e.g. if all the transferred birds died).

In order to make a judgement on the likely survival of birds transferred from Council land to the Sanctuary we requested that the Trust monitor the birds following the transfer. The Trust's monitoring report suggests that at this stage it is too early to tell whether the tomtit transfers have been successful. While the transferred birds were all banded, the report does not mention any confirmed sightings of transferred tomtits (although it does note that several "unidentified" tomtits have been sighted).

The lack of confirmed sightings of transferred tomtits may be either due to biological and seasonal factors (the birds are quite secretive) or because the transfer was unsuccessful and the birds have either left the sanctuary or died.

After assessing the evidence the Trust considers that it is desirable to transfer more tomtits as soon as possible to increase the likelihood of successfully establishing a population in the Sanctuary, in the presence of an expanding New Zealand robin population. Apparently robins compete with tomtits for habitat and the Trust want to get a tomtit population established before the robins take up all the available habitat.

### **4. Conclusions**

At this stage there is little evidence to suggest whether the transfer programme has been successful. Accordingly we are recommending a conservative approach to the Trust's request.

As the DOC permit has one more year to run we would suggest that approval be given for this year only. That will allow the Trust to complete their monitoring and provide a fuller assessment of the success of the programme prior to any future requests.

In assessing the location of the capture sites, we do not consider that it is prudent to take tomtits from the same site as last year, as that population has already been impacted by previous programme captures. We suggest that Karori Sanctuary use sites adjacent to the Puketiro pine forest in the Akatarawa Forest. The Department of Conservation site is also an alternative site to use for captures.

As for conditions of approval we would suggest that they be of a similar nature to last year (see appendix one). As those conditions largely relate to monitoring and health and safety, the detail will be determined by the Ranger as normal.

## 5. Communication

We will make contact with the staff at Karori Sanctuary direct. As part of the approval we will also investigate whether the Sanctuary can acknowledge the role of GWRC in assisting the transfer programme.

## 6. Recommendations

*That the Committee:*

1. *receive the report.*
2. *note the contents of the report.*
3. *agree to the request by Karori Sanctuary to capture and transfer up to 20 tomtits from the Puketiro pine forest area in the Akatarawa Forest.*
4. *note that the Akatarawa/Pakuratahi Ranger will determine the monitoring, reporting, and access conditions in accordance with Council policies on use of the Akatarawa Forest.*

Report prepared by:

**Philippa Crisp**  
Principal Advisor, Planning  
and Policy

Report approved by:

  
**Murray Waititi**  
Manager, Parks and Forests

Report approved by:

**Rob Forlong**  
Divisional Manager, Landcare

**Attachment 1:** Permit – Bird capture Akatarawa Forest Block