

## Pakahā/fluttering shearwaters on Kokomohua/Long Island

[Birds New Zealand](#) Marlborough has been undertaking a key local project, establishing a study colony for pakahā/fluttering shearwaters (*Puffinus gavia*) on Kokomohua/Long Island with the support from the Birds New Zealand Research Fund, the [Department of Conservation \(DOC\)](#), Iwi, and [Wildlife Management International Ltd \(WMIL\)](#). This project also works alongside [Health Post Nature Trust](#) who are undertaking a five-year translocation project of pakahā from Kokomohua to Wharariki Ecosanctuary near Onetahua/Farewell Spit.

A team of Birds New Zealand Marlborough members spent a day on Kokomohua in November 2023. Kokomohua or Long Island is an aptly named long and thin island, full to the brim of wildlife. From the marine reserve with kina, pāua and rawaru/blue cod, to the top of the island where kiwi pukupuku/little spotted kiwi (*Apteryx owenii*) roam and kārearea/New Zealand falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) soar overhead, Kokomohua is a magical spot. Pakahā have a well-established colony on the tip of the island. These birds have been transferred to other islands around Te Taihū-o-te-Waka/Marlborough and Te Upoko o te Ika a Maui/Wellington as well as Onetahua in Mohua/Golden Bay since pakahā were first transferred to Te Pakeka/Maud Island in 1991.

The pakahā colony on Kokomohua is located on steep and fragile terrain. Significant slips have impacted this already fragile study site. With financial support from the Birds New Zealand Research Fund, Birds New Zealand Marlborough are establishing a long-term study to assess its long-term viability for future pakahā translocations and implement a robust monitoring programme. Annual monitoring on the artificial burrows has allowed occupancy, breeding status, and adult and juvenile survival data to be collected. As the Kokomohua colony likely to be used as a source for future translocations of pakahā, it is imperative that the population is monitored long-term. This project will also have a training focus allowing Birds New Zealand youth members and Iwi to gain valuable seabird banding and monitoring experience, and thereby create opportunities to transfer these skills to other projects across Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as experience these wonderful places and gain hands on experience with these taonga species.

After quarantine in Waitohi/Picton, and a quick detour to Oruawairua/Blumine to count kawai pāteketeke/king shags (*Leucocarbo carunculatus*), the team arrived at Kokomohua to check all the artificial burrows, repair any damaged burrows and band any adults present in the burrows. It was a fabulous Sounds day, with blue skies and flat seas. The team split up and checked as many burrows as possible, replacing damaged burrows as they went. Several burrows had to be completely removed and replaced with new structures. New numbered tags were added to each of the artificial burrows. Over 50 burrows had evidence of breeding with adults on eggs or small chicks. Unbanded adults were banded (Figure 1) and the breeding status of occupied burrows was recorded (Figure 2). All banding and handling of the pakahā was done under the appropriate wildlife permit and by licensed banders under the New Zealand National Banding Scheme.

Kokomohua was full of wildlife, with tieke/saddleback (*Philesturnus carunculatus*) and korimako/bellbird (*Anthornis melanura*) calling amongst the taupata and karakeke. Even tuatara and tītī/sooty shearwater (*Ardenna grisea*) were found in some of the artificial burrows. Kārearea were seen and heard flying over the colony and matuku moana/reef heron (*Egretta sacra*) were seen in the bay. The team collected all of these valuable bird observations into eBird checklists as part of the final year of the Birds [New Zealand Bird Atlas project](#).

The second trip in January 2024 was undertaken by Health Post Nature Trust to collect chicks for transfer to the Wharariki Ecosanctuary near Onetahua. During this trip, 128 chicks were banded, and 92 were transferred to the ecosanctuary. All of these chicks successfully fledged from the new colony area.

Birds New Zealand Marlborough will continue to monitor the Kokomohua pakahā colony as

well as replace broken or damaged artificial burrows as required as part of this long-term study and look forward to updating Birds New Zealand as well as publishing aspects of the research in *Notornis* in due time.



**Figure 1:** Pakahā/fluttering shearwater adult being banded as part of the long-term monitoring project on Kokomohua/Long Island, November 2023. Credit: K. Miskimmin, WMIL.



**Figure 2:** Pakahā/fluttering shearwater chick inside one of the artificial burrows on Kokomohua/Long Island, November 2023. Credit: K. Miskimmin, WMIL.