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Kiwis are blessed before release

By Whare Akuhata

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Three kiwi got the special treatment when welcomed on to Murumurunga Marae, Te Whaiti, recently.

Ngati Whare kaumatua Kohiti Kohiti blessed the kiwi which were being moved from Maungataniwha, in the Hawke's Bay, to be released into the Whirinaki Forest.

Biodiversity ranger Sarah King said kiwi were being swapped between Whirinaki Forest Park and Maungataniwha Native Forest to "strengthen the bloodlines" of the respective kiwi popu-

"This swapping of birds and mixing of the gene pool would have happened naturally in the past through the migration of juvenile birds.

'Now that the kiwi population is small and scattered and most of the young kiwi are killed by stoats and dogs,



RELEASED: Special kiwi

outside of protected kiwi zones, there is little migration. If nothing is done, it is likely that kiwi will suffer from inbreeding."

The Department of Conservation and Ngati Whare are working with the Forest Life Force Restoration Trust to improve two kiwi restoration projects with the support of BNZ Save the Kiwi Trust.

Ms King said the move was about 25km in a straight line but the birds would be doing a lot more travelling than that before they were released back out into the wild.

Whirinaki Maungataniwha kiwi projects protect their kiwi populations by taking kiwi eggs out of wild nests and moving them to rearing facilities at Kiwi Encounter in Rotorua to save the chicks from stoat predation.

The eggs are incubated until they hatch in Rotorua. The kiwi chicks are then reared until they reach 1000g because, at this size, they can fight off stoats with their strong legs and claws, meaning they can be released back into the wild.

Mr Kohiti said it was fitting there was an exchange of kiwi because, according to Ngati Whare oral tradition, the mountain Maungataniwha was the child of Ngati Whare's sacred mountain Tuwatawata and Moerangi.

To find out more about these kiwis and other work being done in the Whirinaki Forest, logwww.facebook.com/whirinaki.treasures