

PRESS CUTTING



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weeklyPEOPLE
 THEY'RE YOUR STORIES

The Northland logger and his girlfriend Kyra (left) released three chicks.

The bushman says he's proud to be a Kiwi bloke doing his bit for our national bird.

Gathering one of the two eggs at night.

Hemi WINGS IT!

A FORESTRY WORKER IS ON A HIGH AFTER MEETING KIWI

Hovering high above New Zealand's native bush with three kiwi chicks at your feet isn't an average day for Northland forestry worker Hemi Murray. Usually the bushman is on the ground logging trees, so taking to the sky in a helicopter to release the birds into the wild was an overwhelming experience.

"I held three kiwi chicks before releasing them into the forest and also collected two eggs to be incubated for safe hatching to do my part to save the kiwi population," the 27-year-old tells. "This is a cause so close to my heart. I'm proud to be a Kiwi bloke helping to protect our national bird."

Hemi's unique opportunity came about after he made an impulsive phone call to food company Tasti to suggest new

flavours for a range of snack bars. Then they spent nine months trying to find him.

"My mate saw an article in my local paper and online posts asking 'Where's Hemi?' and told me to call in. They even set up a 'Chur Hemi Fund' raising \$500 to thank me for my ideas."

Hemi came up with the idea of his "Tumeke" MegaNuts bars with its Kiwiana concept during an afternoon tea break.

"I said to my workmates 'let's suggest Kiwi flavours' and thought I might get a free box of bars," he recalls. But he got so much more than that.

The company supports the Maungataniwha Kiwi Project in Hawke's Bay, which is part of The Forest Lifeforce Restoration Trust, and decided to fly Hemi to collect kiwi eggs and release chicks into the wild.

Hemi and girlfriend Kyra (28) collected eight-week-old chicks from Kiwi Encounter Rainbow Springs in Rotorua where eggs are incubated. From there, they were flown to a safe "creche"

called Cape Sanctuary at Cape Kidnappers where they will remain until large enough to be released into the forest and fight off their main predator, the stoat.

"Kyra and I felt like we had three children," jokes Hemi, who was smitten with the chicks.

"I've always wanted to be a DOC ranger or work with animals – it's been life-changing to be a part of this."

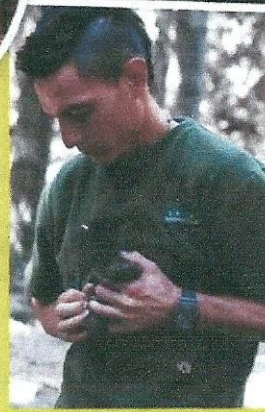
The couple also released a mature kiwi into Maungataniwha forest before collecting two eggs to deliver to Operation Egg Nest HQ the next day.

Hemi was delighted to learn that one of the hatched chicks was named Tumeke and the other will be called Hemi.

"It was awesome," he says. "It's given me confidence, as I'm usually a shy person."

Hemi has a few more foodie ideas brewing too. "They're secret," he laughs. "But I've also suggested kiwifruit and Pineapple Lump bars!"

Linda Shackelford



SAVE OUR KIWI

October is Save Kiwi Month – and with 70,000 in the wild you can help increase their numbers by visiting kiwisforkiwi.org. Kiwi Encounter Rainbow Springs started in 1996 and raises 130 chicks each year, with almost 200 to date going to The Forest Lifeforce Restoration Trust. Peak hatching season is October to March and half of the kiwis reared at The Cape Sanctuary are released into the wild for the Maungataniwha Kiwi Project. If kiwis were to breed naturally, only five percent would survive without predator control and Operation Nest Egg. For more information, visit forestlifeforce.org.nz

PHOTOS: STEPHANE CRAIG; MICHAEL TOHILL