

CLICK, WHEEZE & CHUCKLE

#2

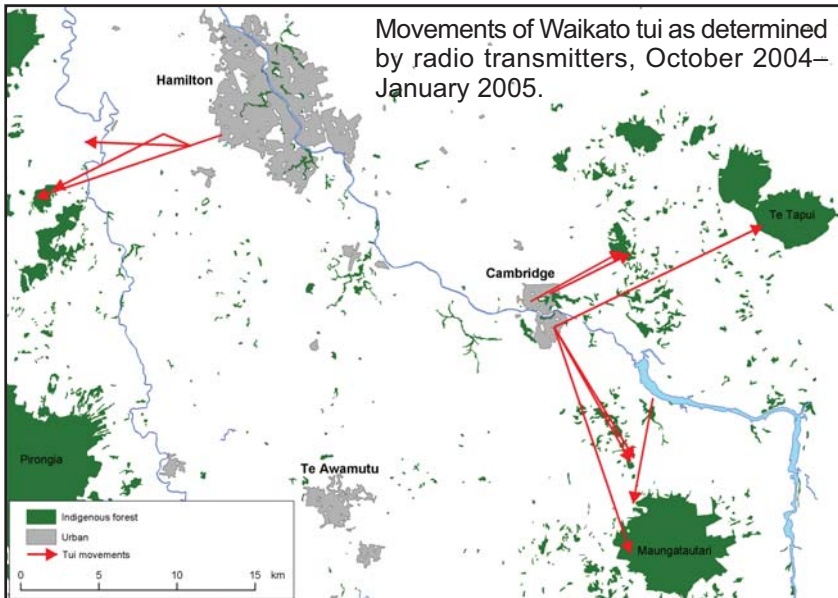


March 2005

Welcome to the second issue of 'Click, wheeze & chuckle'*. In previous years, we learned that tui appear in rural-urban areas in the Waikato from about May onwards, and then in October/November they depart again, presumably to nest. We have now colour-banded 39 Waikato tui and put small radio transmitters on 25 to find out more.

SO FAR...

From this, we have learned that most urban tui fly 10–20 km back to nearby native forest areas to nest – a Dinsdale (Hamilton) bird going to the Old Mountain Rd area, and Cambridge tui returning to various forests, including Sanatorium Hill, Te Tapui Scenic Reserve, and to Maungatutari and remnants below it.



* "The song consists of rich, fluid, melodious notes intermixed with croaks, coughs, clicks, grunts, wheezes and chuckles" (Heather & Robertson 1996).

We also learned that tui are nesting closer to Hamilton than previously known. On 21 November 2004, we found a tui nest in a Japanese cedar hedgerow in a parkland setting at Taitua Arboretum, near Dinsdale on the edge of Hamilton. Unfortunately, the only egg present had just been eaten by a ship rat.

FATE OF NESTS

Tui nests are hard to find! But we have found 11 since December 2003, some while being built and some already with older chicks. Of these, three fledged successfully but all the others failed, mainly due to predation. Time-lapse video cameras at nests showed that ship rats, possums and harriers were predators of eggs and chicks, and one adult female was killed at an unfilemed nest along with a chick, probably by a ship rat or possum, while brooding at night.



Ship rat

Tui eggshell

A single video frame showing a ship rat biffing remains of a tui egg out of a nest. Inset shows characteristic jagged edges after predation by a ship rat.





A single video frame showing a possum eating a tui egg at Sanatorium Hill. Inset shows a tui chick, regurgitation pellets and chewed feathers after a possum predation.

We think tui numbers can be hugely increased in Hamilton, Cambridge, Te Awamutu and other Waikato centres by controlling key predators (ship rats and possums) at nesting sites – mainly in nearest native forest areas – when tui are nesting (November to February). Currently, the sites that need predator control are NOT in the urban areas because tui are not yet trying to nest here. Results from such predator control should be obvious in 3 years by which time the value of all the planting of tui feed trees in so many Waikato properties will be realised. Protecting the few tui nesting attempts that are already close to the city – such as at Taitua Arboretum – will be especially useful because the young tui fledging from those nests will themselves nest near the city and eventually throughout it. Tui may raise two broods of 3–4 chicks each per season, so they have the potential to increase rapidly.

YOU CAN HELP! PLEASE CHECK YOUR TUI THIS WINTER FOR COLOUR BANDS

When tui visit your property this winter, please check whether they are wearing colour leg bands, and let us know. There are always two bands on each leg, four bands in total. We will try to get out promptly and check exactly what the colour combination is. We can then tell you where the bird was captured and perhaps where it has spent the summer.



Photo: Neil Fitzgerald

Contact us if you see a tui with colour leg bands like this one.

For more information please, contact:

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Manaaki Whenua
Landcare Research

The Tui Team at Landcare Research has also included Heather Blackwell, Eleanor Lancaster, Danny Thornburrow and Bruce Burns.