

Title Threatened North Island Kokako have been discovered nesting in Auckland's Waitakere Ranges for the first time in 80 years. The discovery on Tuesday of a nest is a triumph for the Ark in the Park open sanctuary, which is a project by Forest & Bird (BirdLife in New Zealand), the Auckland Council and West Auckland iwi, Te Kawerau a Maki. "It's fantastic news. When the Ark was started in 2003, this event would only have been in our wildest dreams," said Forest & Bird North Island Conservation Manager Mark Bellingham. The nesting pair, named Maurice and Kowhai by workers and volunteers in the Ark, were transferred from Pureora Forest in the King Country in September last year. "They have been moving around as a tight pair for the last nine weeks, and Forest & Bird field staff found their nest on Tuesday," Dr Bellingham said.



Range of the Kokako.

"The female, Kowhai, is incubating eggs. We expect them to hatch in the second week of December and the chicks should be off the nest and moving around by Christmas." Pest control is carried out throughout the 2,300 hectares in the Ark and volunteers are intensifying trapping efforts around the nest. The main threat from stoats and cats is likely to come after the chicks have hatched and start making a noise. Forest & Bird staff and volunteers are now searching for other Kokako – a total of 22 have been transferred into the Ark. One other pair has been together for about a month, and the female has not been seen much in recent days, so searchers want to see if she is building a nest. The discovery of the nest follows the first transfer of six Kokako from the King Country in 2009 and this year 14 more came from the King Country and two from Tiritiri Matangi island in the Hauraki Gulf. Kokako live for up to 40 years and it is hoped this will be the first of many breeding seasons for Maurice and Kowhai and other Kokako in the park. Dr Bellingham said it is hoped the population in the Ark will start growing in a self-sustaining way in the next three or four years. The Ark in the Park sanctuary aims to restore some of the glory of the forest and wildlife in the Waitakere Ranges, west of Auckland. Possum control has allowed forest vegetation to recover and intensive control of rats, stoats and wild cats has led to work restoring some of the bird life in the forest. Among other species reintroduced are whitehead, North Island robin, and hihi (stitchbird). This has been achieved with Forest and Bird volunteers putting in more than 8,000 hours a year managing biodiversity in the Ark in the Park project area.