

Auckland Conservancy wins Joey Award

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Control and protection of the same species are an unusual juggling act for DOC, and does not happen without controversy. So it was when the Department of Environment and Heritage in South Australia requested wallabies from Kawau Island for eventual release into Innes National Park.

In 2003 and 2004, 85 adult tammar (and seven joeys) flew Qantas, at Australia's expense, for initial placement in Monarto Zoological Park, 70km east of Adelaide. Questions were asked: what about DOC's time and technical expertise spent catching and shifting wallabies?

"When I got on that first plane to Australia to help set up the programme, I was thinking about a threatened species and not a pest," says Jan Coates, Auckland Conservancy's TSM. "And internationally we have got some responsibilities - it's the way you learn to work together with another country."

Rolien Elliot, Warkworth Area manager, says that the wallabies were caught without ceremony - they were put into sacks and then transferred into traveling boxes. "When they arrived in Australia they were treated like a long-lost treasure, the kakapo of South Australia."

The certificate of appreciation recognises the Department's "significant contributions to the Mainland SA tammar wallaby recovery project".

Wallabies of several species were among the bizarre fauna that Governor George Grey installed on Kawau in the 1870s to grace his stately home and grounds. The zebras died, the gnus are gone, as are many of the birds, including the ravens, Cape doves and cassowaries. But the deer, kangaroos, wallabies, possums and monkeys did so well they became pests.

Today four species of wallaby remain on Kawau and they are still a pest, preventing regeneration of the kanuka-dominated forest on the island. Sadly, they haven't proved as hardy in their natural habitat. Three died in transit. Of 10 released into Innes National Park in November 2004 four were later killed by foxes, possibly a single fox that had avoided poisoned baits, one was hit by a car, and a further wallaby died of unknown causes.

Of a second release of 36 wallabies in June 2005 only six remain, the others having succumbed to starvation, hypothermia or fox predation. A third release of 50 animals (not all of them Kawau animals) is planned for spring 2006, by expanding predator control and timing the release to optimise food availability.



The good news is that there are plenty more wallabies if the Aussies need them, and while they're at it, they could take some possums as well.

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