Supplementary feeding kākāpō *- Harrison's HPC pellets*

Kākāpō are a critically endangered, taonga species of Ngāi Tahu in Aotearoa New Zealand. They are nocturnal, flightless and the heaviest parrots on the planet – believed to live as long as 60-90 years old.

Once abundant throughout Aotearoa New Zealand, numbers dropped swiftly with the arrival of humans due to hunting, introduced predators and land clearance. Conservation efforts began in 1894, but by the mid-1900s, kākāpō teetered on the edge of extinction.

Today, there are less than 250 kākāpō alive. Each is individually managed by DOC's Kākāpō Recovery Programme where supplementary feeding plays an important role in the efforts to help give this species have the best chance to thrive once more.

Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

Kākāpō Recovery

Our recovery programme was formed by DOC in 1995 with an aim to restore the mauri (life force) of kākāpō. At the time there were just 51 kākāpō alive.

Ever since, Kākāpō Recovery has managed each kākāpō individually on predator free sites through intensive monitoring, research, science, technology and breeding programmes.

Breeding behaviour

Today there are 243 kākāpō alive. We know them each by name and they each wear a smart transmitter. Whenua Hou/Codfish Island and Pukenui/Anchor Island are the two biggest kākāpō breeding islands.

Kākāpō are the only lek breeding bird in New Zealand and the only parrot in the world known to lek breed. As part of this, male kākāpō put on displays at fixed locations to attract female attention, and they don't help to raise any offspring.

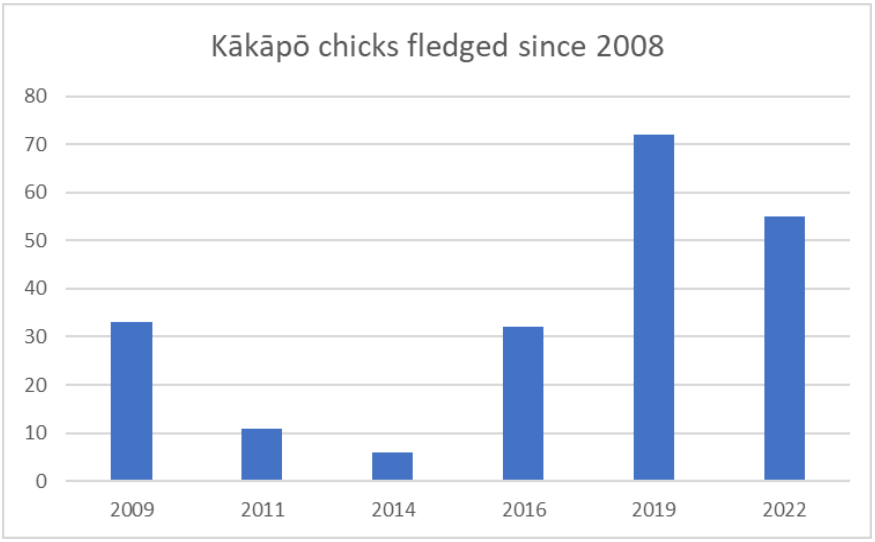
The species breed in response to the rimu mast (mass fruiting), which happens just once every 2-4 years.

Since 2008 an intensive supplementary feeding programme using Harrison's HPC pellets has been in place at the main breeding sites. It is essential for us to maximise productivity in every breeding year, and supplementary feeding is crucial to this success.

In males, supplementary feeding promotes sustained condition for booming (mating calls) and nutrition for sperm production. This helps maximise the potential for natural mating and optimise our artificial breeding programme. For females, feeding increases egg production and chick rearing ability. It can also help kākāpō mums feed their chicks if the rimu crop fails due to extreme weather events.

Feed out takes place over four months in the lead up to breeding season and continues until the chicks become independent about a year later. This mahi [work] is carried out by dozens of volunteers who live on the rugged breeding islands for two weeks at a time. In the last breeding season of 2022, 273kg of pellets were fed out on Pukenui/Anchor Island and 702kg of pellets were fed out on Whenua Hou/Codfish Island.

Pellets are offered in smart hoppers that are accessible only to target birds to ensure they are the best weight for breeding. These hoppers are replenished every three days by volunteers. The number of chicks fledged each year has been assisted by these intensive supplementary feeding efforts.



Year-round food support

The Harrison's HPC pellets are also used as part of Kākāpō Recovery work outside of breeding season. It can be provided to birds before and after transfer to new sites, assist with capture of birds with failed or lost transmitters, and to support birds with health concerns.

Our mahi and supporters

One hundred percent of the programme's operation costs are covered by supporters and partners. It's only thanks to their generosity that we can continue our mahi [work] towards a time when kākāpō can thrive once again throughout their natural ranges. Our audiences are large and engaged across the globe.

The next predicted breeding season is 2026, and it is expected to be the biggest on record.

We are happy to discuss options to work more closely with our supplies. For support opportunities or to work together to showcase collaborations with our shared audiences please contact us at kakaporecovery@doc.govt.nz.