

Where to Next? Helping Our Precious Passengers Take Flight

We see Threatened Species Ambassadors from the Department of Conservation are taking a group of takahe to their new home.

NICOLA: Ok team, moving! If you see a bird, just point.

NICOLA: Today we're taking 18 takahe on a pretty epic adventure to Goulard Downs on the heaphy Track, near Nelson. We're hoping this will be the start of a new successful population in the wild, on mainland New Zealand.

NICOLA: This is the first time we've ever been able to release takehe onto mainland New Zealand so today is super exciting for the survival of this species.

The Ambassadors measure the takahe birds.

NICHOLLETTE: So male takahe should be about 2.7 (kg). That guy is 3.2 (kg), so he's going healthy.

NICHOLLETTE: I've been with some of these chicks since they were hatched, so you kind of feel a bit like mum, so you know, little bit nervous like that. They're leaving home. They're going to be wild birds.

We see a shot of the mountains with Nicola and Nichollette walking through nature.

NICOLA: I love takahe. They have such beautiful, beautiful colorings. They're kind of like a dinosaur.

NICHOLLETTE: Each of them has a name, and every one of them has got a personality.

NICOLA: Takahe are one of our success stories. They were thought to be extinct and then they were rediscovered in 1948. For the last 30 years we've been working really hard to get their numbers back.

NICHOLLETTE: We're so successful with our takahe program now that we've got too many birds.

NICOLA: We now have enough takahe that we want to find new places for them to live in the wild.

NICHOLLETTE: Air New Zealand's role in this partnership is quite unique – helping us transfer these birds from place to place, as they do with a whole range of species right round the country every year.

NICOLA: Transporting these takahe is a huge deal. First of all, they're flightless birds, so getting them up in the air is going to be an experience.

NICOLA works with an Air New Zealand staff member to check in a takahe for her flight.

AIR NEW ZEALAND STAFF: Lily the takahe – that’s awesome! Well, I hope she likes a window seat.

The takahe are boarded onto the Air New Zealand plane as a flight attendant named JAIMEE shares details about the journey.

JAIMEE: Today we are doing the takahe flight from Queenstown to Nelson, it’s very special, obviously, because the takahe is an endangered species. We are transferring them to their new home in the Heaphy Track.

NICOLA: They all get a seat on the plane, the care and attention that goes into our native wildlife when we’re transporting them around is first class.

The pilot speaks to the passengers on board.

PILOT: Ladies and gents, a warm welcome to our takahe friends who are first time flyers.

The plane takes off and heads towards the Heaphy Track.

NICOLA: Air New Zealand have a big focus on bringing native wildlife back to some of our Great walks. We probably couldn’t get a better example than takahe on the Heaphy. This is very much a shared success story.

Air New Zealand’s Head of Sustainability, LISA DANIELL is awaiting the takahe’s arrival on the Heaphy Track.

LISA: Today is really special. Air New Zealand, alongside the Department of Conservation and Iwi, alongside other partners, were actually able to reintroduce the takahe species to the Heaphy Track, where they haven’t been seen for at least a century.

A group of New Zealand natives gather to celebrate the moment and one of them, Sir Tipene O’Regan of the Ngai Tahu Kaumatua, says a traditional Maori blessing for the newly arrived takahe.

SIR TIPENE: Ma te Atua e manaaki ka taoka God shall protect these treasures.

Iwi representatives (Manawhenua ki Mohua) - Margie Little & John Ward-Holmes share their thoughts on the return of the takahe

MARGIE: For the Iwi here, I think it’s really important. It’s been a long, long time since we’ve had takahe here.

JOHN: We’ve dreamt of having this in the rohe (tribal boundaries) and finally it’s taking place.

The group releases the takahe birds into the wild

AMBASSADOR: Releasing on 1, 2, 3...

Lily the takahe squawks and runs into the wild as the group cheers her on.

MARGIE: It's wonderful that Air New Zealand has been involved. It's nice to think that they are contributing back to our wildlife and preservation of it for future generations.

LISA: It is very much a shared success story. We've been able to pull off what is a pretty extraordinary event in New Zealand's conservation history.

We see the words 'Helping our precious passengers take flight' appear on screen above the Department of Conservation and Air New Zealand logos.