

## **Bushy Park Sanctuary thanks Air Chathams**

Bushy Park Sanctuary is a mature predator fenced sanctuary just 25km north of Whanganui. It is home for many native wildlife, including reintroduced toutouwai (north island robin), tīeke (saddleback), and hihi (stitchbird). This week they needed to get a specially trained rodent dog into Bushy Park to check for rodents, as they suspected there was one which may have come in recently with a vehicle. They hadn't yet been able to trap it, though poison had been taken from the back-up bait stations near the buildings. The Sanctuary Manager Mandy Brooke says this week she contacted the Conservation Dogs Programme national co-ordinators for these specialist dogs, and she was put in touch with the nearest available certified dog handler. Although Bushy Park already uses mustelid, cat and rodent dogs for an annual full forest check, this was an additional check at a busy time of year for such contractors.

Leona Plaisier is a Wildlife Protection Services contractor working with her rodent dogs from the Marlborough Sounds over the past 10 years. She had been working on Rangitoto Island with her dogs, Bail and Odin, this week and was available in Auckland only for a couple of days. Mandy contacted Air Chathams straight away, and was able to book flights easily for the next evening. Air Chathams was also willing to provide some sponsorship for getting the two rodent dogs and their handler Leona to Whanganui.

Leona spent all day Thursday at Bushy Park with her two dogs, who are both border terrier/ fox terrier crossed. The dogs clearly love working, and were excited to find a few areas with mice, though they found no evidence of rats. At the end of the day, after a good day's work checking for rodents at Bushy Park, Leona and her dogs boarded the flight back to Auckland.

As Sanctuary Manager, Mandy explained that although Bushy Park has an effective predator fence, and the forest is maintained predator free, it is an acknowledged risk that any visiting vehicle could unknowingly carry a rat or a mouse to the parking areas. Fortunately Bushy Park has an additional low "rodent fence" to reduce the risk of any hitchhiking mice or rats from getting from the drive and buildings area into the main forest. Currently there are mice throughout the forest, and together with help from volunteers, numbers are being kept at reasonably low levels. However, there is zero tolerance for rats anywhere within the sanctuary, so regular monitoring, and this extra check with the rodent dog was important to establish that the area was rat free. All of the many volunteers and support organisations will be pleased that this check has been completed, and that Bushy Park has the all clear for those areas which were prioritised for checking. Bushy Park is grateful for the support of the Conservation Dogs Programme and Air Chathams in helping Bushy Park remain rat free.