

Hihi breeding program deemed a success

December 27 2005

A breeding plan aimed at bolstering New Zealand's endangered hihi has seen overwhelming success, it was reported Monday.

Officials the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary in Wellington say they have doubled the numbers of the tiny hihi, or stitchbirds, since the program began, the Dominion Post reported.

Conservation scientist Raewyn Empson said 64 birds produced 75 chicks, 53 of which have left their nests already.

Hihi were extinct on New Zealand's mainland with the last birds recorded there in 1880s, the newspaper said. The once-common species was ravaged by predators -- especially rats -- as well as deforestation that destroyed their habitat.

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Citation: Hihi breeding program deemed a success (2005, December 27) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2005-12-hihi-deemed-success.html>

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