



October 2010 Mohua Translocation Chalky Island to Eglinton Valley

Graeme Elliott
May 2011

Mohua (or yellowheads) (*Mohoua ochrocephala*) are small forest birds found in the South Island of New Zealand. They were once common, but since the introduction of stoats and rats in the 1800s they have disappeared from most of the South Island. They have been introduced to five predator-free islands as an insurance against their extinction.



Graeme E, Maki and Liam

Up until the 1980s, the Eglinton Valley in eastern Fiordland was one of the Mohua's strongholds, but by 2010 only 18 birds were known to live in the valley.

The Eglinton Valley now has a comprehensive programme of rat and stoat control but the mohua population is so small that recovery to historic levels will take a long time. The road through the Eglinton Valley is one of New Zealand's main tourist routes and it is one of the best places to see native forest birds. For these reasons the Mohua Recovery Group decided to transfer some mohua from the thriving Chalky Island population in western Fiordland back into the Eglinton Valley to speed the recovery of the population there.

On 21 October a party of 10 flew by helicopter to Chalky Island where they camped overnight. At first light on 22 October they started catching mohua in mist nets using recorded calls to attract birds into nets. 69 mohua were caught and at 2pm they were flown 170km by helicopter for immediate release in the Eglinton Valley at Kiosk Creek. A party of about 30 locals had gathered to witness the release.

All the birds released appeared in good condition, and all flew straight up into the trees.

Mohua were closely monitored in the Eglinton Valley after release. Although 57 of the released birds were re-sighted, they dispersed widely so that by March only 34 birds were still known to be in the valley. The released birds quickly paired-up and nested. Twenty-four paired and nested with other released birds, and five paired and nested with birds already in the valley. A total of 62 new mohua fledged during the summer of 2010-2011, and 39 of them were produced by pairs comprising at least one released bird. By March 2011 the mohua

population in the Eglinton Valley comprised 18 existing residents, at least 34 released birds and 62 fledglings – a total of 114 birds.

The transfer has been a resounding success.

We would like to sincerely thank the **Birdlife International Community Conservation Fund** for their generous donation towards the translocation of the Mohua. The effective use of helicopters in the translocation minimised the duration the birds were held captive and thus resulted in a zero mortality rate for this translocation.

