

# New \$500,000 black stilt aviary to be built in the Mackenzie Basin

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Last updated 17:25, June 23 2017



SUPPLIED

The kaki aviary at the Isaac Conservation and Wildlife Trust in Christchurch. The Department of Conservation confirms a new aviary in Twizel will be similar to this design.

A new \$500,000 breeding aviary for the world's rarest wading bird could see up to 175 extra birds released into the wild each year.

There are just 106 black stilts (kaki) left in the wild, but it is hoped the new facility near Twizel will help bring the species back from the edge of extinction.

It was confirmed on Friday the aviary, which would cost \$500,000 to build, would be funded by The Sangreal Foundation.

STEVE ATTWOOD

A new breeding aviary for black stilt (kaki) will be built near Twizel.

The foundation is a not-for-profit organisation set up by Brian Sheth, the United States-based Global Wildlife Conservation (GWC) board chairman.

CWC chief scientist and chief executive Wes Sechrest said New Zealand was one of the most bio-diverse places on the planet, Sechrest said.

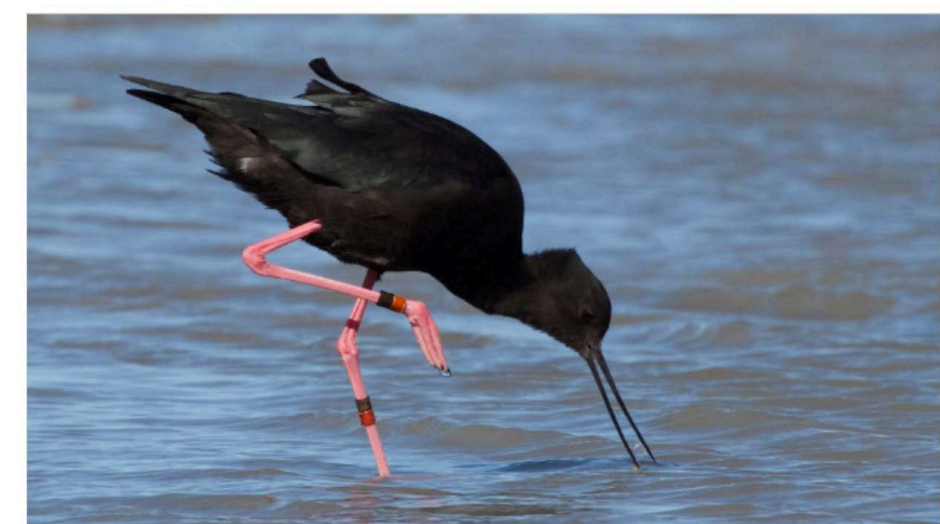
The funding would be used to build a new 10-bay aviary, Sechrest said.

This would initially boost the programme's rearing capacity by an extra 60 birds each year.

There was potential for between 150 and 175 birds to be reared after this initial "recovery stage", he said.

The new aviary would help provide a "quick start" to kaki recovery. It's techniques could be applied across the world to save other endangered species.

People often overlooked some unique plants and animals, such as the kaki, in preference to other species they considered more important, Sechrest said.



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"We have the power to wipe out some species off the planet - but we also have the power to save them."

The organisation had been working with the Department of Conservation since November, prioritising what programmes it could help with.

DOC was a world leader among government departments that worked to protect biodiversity, Sechrest said.

DOC biodiversity senior ranger Dean Nelson said there were 106 kaki in the wild - a "very low" number.

That was more than the 31 recorded in 1991 but "we're not out of the woods yet", Nelson said.

Building up the population proved "a very slow process" but the new aviary would allow more chicks to be homed before release at 9 months old, he said.

The aviary was eagerly awaited: the "big snow" of 2015 had completely eliminated one aviary and damaged another, Nelson said.

DOC aviculturist Liz Brown said there were 121 juvenile kaki in captivity at the Twizel site and the Isaac Conservation and Wildlife Trust in Christchurch.

Forest and Bird West Coast regional manager Jen Miller said the announcement was "absolutely exciting", but noted the group had been concerned about DOC's budget priorities for some time.

"It is the rarest bird and for DOC to have to go to an American conservation group is pretty bloody terrible."

Announcing the new aviary on Friday, Conservation Minister Barry said DOC's captive breeding programme was a key component in the bird's recovery.

Work on the aviary is expected to begin in July. It should be completed by the end of November.

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