

Date: 31 October 2019

New Zealand's rarest bird, the tara iti/New Zealand fairy tern, has produced the first egg of the breeding season.

With fewer than 40 birds, the tara iti/fairy tern is critically endangered and despite intensive management has teetered on the brink of extinction since the 1970s.

"Mr and Mrs Red, as they are affectionately known due to the red identification bands on their legs, have produced the first egg for the season. The nest is in a relatively safe location away from potential high tides and Mr and Mrs Red are proven 'good' parents, having raised and fledged chicks in the past years," says DOC Fairy Tern Team Ranger Ayla Wiles.

"We are hopeful this nest – and more nests to come – will be successful, and the chicks will fledge sometime in the new year."

Tara iti/fairy terns nest on shell and sandbanks just above high tide, which leaves them vulnerable to predators, disturbance by people, 4WD vehicles and dogs. They are also at risk from stormy weather and very high tides.

"The parents take turns sitting on the egg for about an hour at a time and will do this 24/7 until the chick hatches," says Wiles.

A dedicated team of six fairy tern DOC rangers and numerous community volunteers have been busy since September trapping for predators near nesting sites, fencing off nesting sites and preventing nesting birds from being disturbed by humans. These rangers and volunteers will continue to monitor the birds and nests during the breeding season.

Once widespread around the North Island and on the eastern South Island, the New Zealand fairy tern now breeds at only four main nesting sites, found at Papakanui Spit, Pakiri Beach and Waipu and Mangawhai sandspits.

DOC works closely with Patuharakeke, Ngāti Whāuta o Kaipara, Ngāti Manuhiri and Te Uri O Hau, Te Arai and Mangawhai Shorebirds Trust, The NZ Fairy Tern Charitable Trust, About Tern, Birds NZ, Armourguard and the Waipu Trapping Group to help protect the New Zealand fairy tern.

Voting for the Forest and Bird, Bird of the Year Competition is open, with the tara iti/ fairy tern in the running once again. To show your support for them, or any other native bird visit <https://www.birdoftheyear.org.nz>