Puketī Robins

by Sue Gibbison

Overview

In an article that combines recount, report, and explanation, readers learn about the methods used to return North Island robins (toutouwai) to Puketī Forest. Volunteers continue to observe the birds to ensure they are breeding in their new environment.

The article is complex, with a lot of information conveyed in different time periods. Some students may need support to understand the overall process and order of events involved in re-establishing toutouwai in Puketī Forest. The events are recounted out of sequence and are separated by sections that provide background information and explanations.

This article provides an opportunity to discuss the key competency of "participating and contributing". There is also a strong technological focus in the sections that explain, in words and photographs, how different kinds of traps work.

Texts related by theme "Seeds for the Birds" SJ 2.4.07 | "The Bittern" SJ 3.1.09 | "Flight of the Albatross" SJ 3.2.09

Text characteristics from the year 5 reading standard

abstract ideas, in greater numbers than in texts at earlier levels, accompanied by concrete examples in the text that help support the students' understanding

illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs that clarify or extend the text and may require some interpretation.

a significant amount of vocabulary that is unfamiliar to the students (including academic and content-specific words and phrases), which is generally explained in the text by words or illustrations

Y.B. and P.W. are North Island robins (toutouwai). Over a hundred years ago, there were plenty of toutouwai in Northland's forests. But the arrival of predators, such as stoats, rats, and possums, made the forest a dangerous place for birds. In Puketī Forest, numbers dropped steadily until there were no toutouwai left. The birds needed help.

Rat

Possum

Stoat

Right: A bait station containing poison
Below: Traps to kill stoats and possums, using eggs as bait

Trapping the predators

The first step towards bringing toutouwai back to Puketī Forest was to get rid of the predators. Stoats, possums, and rats were eating the eggs and young chicks and destroying the birds' forest habitat.

In 2003, hundreds of traps were set in the forest. Within six years, more than seven hundred stoats, a thousand possums, and ten thousand rats had been caught. Now the forest was ready for the birds to come back.

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First, catch your toutouwai ...

Toutouwai were alive and well in other parts of the country, including Mangatutu in the Pureora State Forest. In 2009, a group of volunteers travelled to Mangatutu to bring back enough toutouwai to start a new breeding colony in Puketī.

At the edge of the forest in Mangatutu, they played a recording of the robins' song. Then they waited and listened. At last, a small, dark bird came fluttering down from the branches. One of the volunteers threw mealworms to the toutouwai while another hid near the clap trap.

The toutouwai followed the trail of mealworms closer and closer to the trap. The last few mealworms landed right under the centre of the net. The bird hopped in under the trap and pecked up the mealworms.

CLAP! The frame dropped around him, trapping him gently in the soft net.

Mealworms

HOW A CLAP TRAP WORKS

The purpose of this kind of trap is not to kill predators but to catch a living creature without harming it.

A clap trap is made from a square of fine netting with a light frame around it.

A long, rubber tube leads from the base of the trap to a person hiding nearby. When a bird has been lured into the centre of the trap with food, the watching person blows into the tube. The air inflates a tiny pair of bellows. This triggers the trap, the frame falls to the ground, and the bird is trapped in the netting.

A clap trap

sentences that vary in length and structure (for example, sentences that begin in different ways and different kinds of complex sentences with a number of subordinate clauses)

some ideas and information that are conveyed indirectly and require students to infer by drawing on several related pieces of information in the text

some information that is irrelevant to the identified purpose for reading (that is, some competing information), which students need to identify and reject as they integrate pieces of information in order to answer questions

Reading standard: by the end of year 5

Possible curriculum contexts

SCIENCE (Living World)

LEVEL 3 – Ecology: Explain how living things are suited to their particular habitat and how they respond to environmental changes, both natural and human-induced.

ENGLISH (Reading)

LEVEL 3 – Purposes and Audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

ENGLISH (Writing)

LEVEL 3 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.

Possible reading purposes

- To find out about efforts to protect a native bird
- To identify and explore the impact of predators on native birds
- To find out how children can help with conservation work.

Possible writing purposes

- To describe a local conservation project
- To describe how and why a local habitat has changed over time
- To report on community projects that are of interest to the students.

See Instructional focus – Reading for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

See Instructional focus – Writing for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar and/or specialist words, including "flits", "perches", "cocks", "darts", "mealworm", "beakful", "flicker", "mate", "leftovers", "larvae", "pests", "toutouwai", "predators", "bait station", "habitat", "volunteers", "breeding colony", "clap trap", "untangled", "farewell ceremony", "Ngāti Rereahu", "hatched"
- The use of expressions that may be unfamiliar or that could have both figurative and literal meanings, including "dance in the air", "numbers dropped steadily", "flying luxury-class"
- The use of initials to identify birds (for example, "Y.B." for a bird with a yellow and blue band on its leg).

Possible supporting strategies

Identify any words or phrases your students will need support with. Brainstorm the topic of forest birds before reading and begin a word map about birds. (See ESOL Online at http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Teacher-needs/Pedagogy/Vocabulary). You could use headings, such as Movement, Eating habits, Habitat, Features, and Predators. The students could add to the word map as they read. Help students prioritise words to learn.

Support students to make connections with other contexts in which they may have met some of the words, for example, texts that describe birds' movements or eating habits.

If necessary, discuss the literal and/or figurative meanings of expressions such as "dance in the air", "numbers dropped steadily".

The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Knowledge about endangered species and methods used to conserve them
- An understanding of the reasons for conservation
- Knowledge of New Zealand forests and birds
- Knowledge of people volunteering.

Possible supporting strategies

Provide opportunities for students to explore some of the background knowledge, facts, and information they need to understand the text. For example, review previous class or school field trips to study the habitats of native species. Or review visual texts, such as posters, photo articles, or video clips of conservation work, to build knowledge of what conservationists do.

Support students to connect volunteer work with what they know about assisting in school, family, marae, or community projects.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Mixed text types, including an explanation as part of a recount
- Use of a map and photographs (some with captions) that support the text
- Use of a footnote to describe mealworms
- Changes in tense between parts of the recount (present and past tenses) and the explanation (present tense)
- A variety of past verb forms in the second part of the recount
- Variety of sentence structures, including the use of passive tense, and simple, compound, and complex sentences.

Possible supporting strategies

Support the students to identify the order of events in the second part of the recount and to recognise the insertion of the explanation. You could record the events using a timeline, for example, in the form of a table with two columns. The first column records the actions and the second records the time markers.

Check the students' understanding of the ways in which tense is used to indicate time sequence, including the use of the present tense in an explanation.

Instructional focus – Reading

Science (Living World, level 3 – Ecology: Explain how living things are suited to their particular habitat and how they respond to environmental changes, both natural and human-induced.)

Text excerpts from "Puketī Robins"

"It's Y.B.," whispers Nada.

"How do you know?" asks James.

Nada points to the coloured bands on the bird's left leg. The top band is yellow and the bottom one is blue. "Yellow and blue," she says. "Y.B."

Stoats, possums, and rats were eating the eggs and young chicks and destroying the birds' forest habitat.

In 2003, hundreds of traps were set in the forest. Within six years, more than seven hundred stoats, a thousand possums, and ten thousand rats had been caught. Now the forest was ready for the birds to come back.

In 2009, a group of volunteers travelled to Mangatutu to bring back enough toutouwai to start a new breeding colony in Puketī.

Bands were placed on his legs. On his right leg, the red band showed that he was caught in 2009, and the metal band held his individual number. The coloured bands on his left leg would make him easy to identify at a glance. One yellow band and one blue – Y.B.

Students
(what they might do)

*Students use the text, the photograph, and their knowledge of bird conservation work to **infer** that the bird has been banded so that it can be tracked.*

*Students **ask questions** about removing predators. They use the text and the captioned photographs to help them answer these questions.*

*Students use the heading and link information between the two paragraphs to **identify the main idea** that many predators had been caught. They **ask questions** about how the birds will come back, and they search for answers as they read on.*

*Students **ask questions** and **make connections** within the text to understand the significance of the volunteers' work. For example, they use the earlier information about reduced bird numbers to help them understand the importance of establishing a "breeding colony".*

By integrating the information in this section with that on page 8, students are able to work out that Y.B. is the same bird mentioned earlier.

Teacher
(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

PROMPT students to use information from the text and from their own experience to make inferences while they are reading.

- Why do you think the bird has bands on its legs? What information and knowledge of your own helped you to make this inference?

- I wonder how Nada knew the bird's name. How do you think she knew that this is how the birds are identified? How could you check that your inference is correct?

ASK QUESTIONS to support students to identify the main idea.

- What factors in the birds' habitat were reducing their numbers?

- Do you think they were able to catch every single predator? Why do you think that? What might this mean?

- What is the most important (main) idea in this paragraph?

MODEL the use of clues to identify information. You could use your timeline table, not only to clarify the sequence of events, but also to help the students identify, record, and keep track of the main ideas. Model the use of clues to identify the main event and the time and record it in the table. Have students read the next paragraph or section and record the main events and the time markers. Give them time to discuss the answers with a partner. Then share the answers as a class.

PROMPT the students to notice that the recount incorporates an overarching problem and solution. You could choose to use a graphic organiser to record these. It's beneficial to allow opportunities for students who share a language other than English to work together and to explore the topic and ideas in their language.

ASK QUESTIONS that support students to ask their own questions and to make connections within the text.

- Why did the volunteers go to Manatutu? What word signals this purpose? What is "to" in this sentence short for? Use any other examples to help you identify the purpose of something.

- What questions do you have about the events that took place in 2009?

PROMPT the students to make connections within the text and with their own knowledge.

- Does this confirm your inferences about the naming of the birds? What additional information in this passage helps you to do this?

- What does "at a glance" mean? Why would it be useful to identify a bird quickly?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- I noticed that using the timeline helped you to clarify the sequence of the recount.

- You reread some parts as you came across connections within the text. That's an excellent way to check and confirm your understanding.

METACOGNITION

PROMPT the students to develop their awareness of the strategies they have used as they read and responded to the text.

- How important was your own knowledge of conservation programmes for helping you to understand this article? Show me a place where you were able to make a personal connection.

- This is a complex text. Did you find any parts hard to follow? What did you do then?

Reading standard: by the end of year 5

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English (Level 3 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.)

Science (Living World, level 3 – Ecology: Explain how living things are suited to their particular habitat and how they respond to environmental changes, both natural and human-induced.)

Text excerpts from "Puketī Robins"	Examples of text characteristics	Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)
It's cool and shady in the forest and very quiet. "Tweet-tweet-tweet." A tiny, dark bird flits through the trees and perches on a ponga trunk.	**DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE** *Use of description to help to set the scene. The contrast of "Tweet …" after "quiet" focuses attention on the bird. Descriptive verbs and adjectives help the reader to visualise the bird's movements.*	**PROMPT** the students to ask questions of each other as they form their intentions for writing. They can use an agreed set of questions, for example: • What is your purpose for writing? • Who is your audience? • How will you structure your writing? Why? • What sort of language will you use and why?
But the arrival of predators, such as stoats, rats, and possums, made the forest a dangerous place for birds. Numbers dropped steadily until there were no toutouwai left in Puketī Forest. The birds needed help.	**USING SUPPORTING DETAILS** *Details help the reader to understand a problem. In this example, the details precede the statement of the problem. This gives the final statement a strong impact.* **IMPLICATION** *By using words and expressions that the reader should already understand, writers can imply information.*	**ASK** questions to help students identify places where they can add details • How can you help your readers to understand the importance of an idea or problem? • What kinds of details will support the main idea? • Where can you find any additional information? • What impact does the placement of details have? **EXPLAIN** that not all information has to be spelt out: some details can be implied. • Think about your audience. What would you expect them to know already? How can you use this as you select which details to add to your writing?
How a Clap Trap Works The purpose of this kind of trap is not to kill predators but to catch a living creature without harming it. A clap trap is made from a square of fine netting with a light frame around it.	**PARAGRAPHS** *Writers use paragraphing to organise information. This is important in a technical explanation because each paragraph usually covers a separate idea or piece of information.*	**MODEL** how to label sentences or sections when structuring a written text. • When I plan my writing, I decide what each paragraph is going to be about. I do this to make it easy for my audience to follow. • I make sure that the ideas in the paragraphs follow on from each other. • After, I might have a look at whether I need any subheadings or visual features to help my readers understand. **GIVE FEEDBACK** • The structure you've used works well because your use of tenses helps the reader to distinguish what happened in the past from what is happening now or from what is always true. • The opening paragraphs helped me to understand the context for the topic because you included the most relevant detail. They made me want to learn more about ….

METACOGNITION

ASK QUESTIONS to encourage the students to think more deeply about their writing.

• Why did you choose to write about this aspect of the topic? How does it help to meet your purpose?

• How did your own experiences help you to write about this topic? What words or images could you use to help your readers better understand your experiences?

• Other people's writing can help you find structures and language features to make your writing more interesting. What other articles have you enjoyed reading on this topic? What could you learn from them to help make your writing more engaging?

Writing standard: by the end of year 5

The Literacy Learning Progressions