

OUTDOORS

THESE ADORABLE FLIGHTLESS PARROTS ARE MAKING A COMEBACK AFTER BEING HUNTED TO THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION: 'A MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT'

The birds were hunted to near extinction by both predatory animals and humans.

By Leo Collis / August 11, 2023

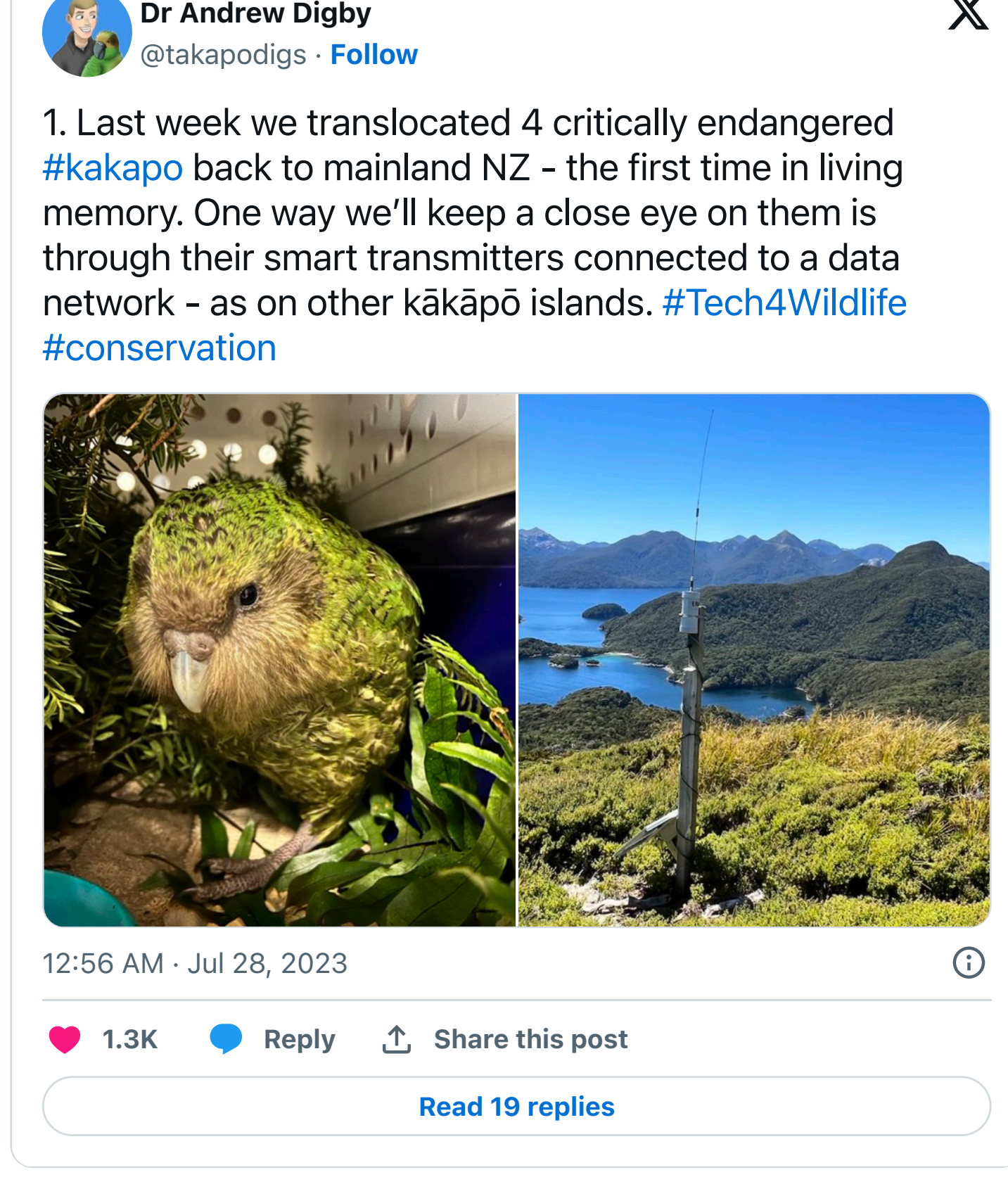


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Kakapo birds will soon be found on New Zealand's mainland for the first time in 40 years — thanks to an effort to discover suitable alternative habitats.

It's a boost for conservation efforts, which drew from modern science and Maori knowledge to bring the bird back from the brink of extinction.

In 1995, it was thought that only 51 kakapos were still in existence, but between 2016 and 2022, the population reached a high of 252.



Kakapos are flightless birds — they are also known as "owl parrots" — and last lived on the New Zealand mainland in the 1980s, when efforts to move them offshore and away from predators began.

They were hunted to near extinction by predators, and now most live on five offshore islands. Five birds were in captivity on the North Island in the 1960s, but they've not been seen there since.

The effort to bring them back to the mainland has been spurred by the Department of Conservation and the South Island's Ngai Tahu tribe.

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Four male birds will be relocated in the program on Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari. While they aren't being brought to breed, this is still a symbolic step for the future of the kakapo population.



According to the New Zealand Department of Conservation blog, Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari is as close to a pre-human ecosystem as you can get in New Zealand. The addition of a 29-mile fence keeps predators out so kakapo and other species can thrive.

If the translocation is a success, five or six more could join the initial group later in 2023.

Deidre Vercoe, the Department of Conservation's manager for kakapos, said in a statement, "Until now, kakapo[s] have been contained to a few predator-free offshore islands, so to have them now returning to the mainland is a major achievement for all involved."

"It's still unknown whether they will successfully establish here long-term," Vercoe continued. "The main focus of this translocation is to learn if kakapo[s] can thrive in a fenced sanctuary, while taking pressure off the islands ahead of future breeding seasons."



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