

Land search exercise in Te Urewera

A LAND Search and Rescue exercise over the weekend involved two foreign amateur bird watchers becoming overdue in their quest to seek out rare kokako in the Waimana Valley of Te Urewera.

Whakatane Land SAR co-ordinator Ray Walker said the scenario involved relatives of one of the pair raising the alarm when the bird fans did not make their flight out of the country.

Whakatane Land SAR combined with Te Uru Taumatua and Tuhoe people from the area to begin a search operation on Friday evening to locate the overdue pair.

Mr Walker said the search was a physical affair as no helicopters were used and search teams were required to travel everywhere on foot from the search base at the Te Urewera Education Centre (Lions Hut) in the Waimana Valley.

Persistent rain also meant streams and rivers became uncrossable at times, further challenging the search teams.

Language barriers added complexity as clues written by the missing people were

in French.

“Fortunately, one of the pair was located late on Saturday evening and this led to the location of the second missing person shortly afterward.”

Mr Walker said the assistance of Tuhoe people during the search operation was valuable.

One of the exercise’s main objectives was to bring together Tuhoe and Land SAR within Te Urewera.

“This not only strengthens the Land SAR capability within Te Urewera but also provides the opportunity for suitable local people to be involved with search and rescue, especially within the Te Urewera but also in the wider community.

Over the weekend the AREC (radio communications) at the search base trained several new radio operators. Several Tuhoe people operated computers, logging all messages to and from field teams.

“The exercise was a great success and after clearing a slip on the road by shovel on Saturday the whole crew emerged from the bush on Sunday in the sunshine,” Mr Walker said.