



Five fruit and veg a day good for hihi too

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By Eloise Gibson

The popular dietary advice to eat five or more servings of fruit and vegetables a day also applies to the endangered hihi, new research shows.

A study of hihi, or stitchbirds, on Tiritiri Matangi island in the Hauraki Gulf found adults needed to eat a variety of different plants to help protect their chicks from parasites.



Hihi chicks on Tiritiri Matangi Island.

A team led by New Zealander Dr John Ewen found carotenoids – which give eggs their rich gold colour – eaten by adult hihi were important for balancing the negative effects of the blood-sucking mite *Ornithonyssus bursa* on their chicks.

Fruit and vegetables are rich in carotenoids, so the researchers concluded it was important for hihi parents to build nests in forests with high plant biodiversity to get a healthy, balanced diet.

Once widespread in the North Island, the hihi is now endangered and confined to Hauturu (Little Barrier) Island and a few satellite populations such as Tiritiri Matangi.

The Department of Conservation wants to eventually create five self-sustaining populations of hihi.