



Newsletter

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Chairperson's Report

Peter Adams



As you may have seen in the news recently, TBfree NZ (the old Animal Health Board) have obtained resource consents for an aerial drop of 1080 in the areas around and including the Flora catchment. These drops are planned to take place in two phases - one this spring in the areas further away from public access points (which will include the FoF trapping areas in Deep Creek and up to Peel Ridge)

and a second drop next winter which will include the FoF trapping areas from Flora car park down to Upper Junction. The primary objective of these drops is to reduce possum levels to very low numbers so as to minimise the risk that they infect the local cattle herds with TB. The operation will be carried out only over the forested areas, not the open Tablelands, so as to reduce the chance of kea taking bait.

DoC and FoF are supporting TBfree NZ so as to slightly increase the original proposed drop area so that it covers the areas where we have a trapping network and have reintroduced Great Spotted Kiwi. We have been donated funds specifically for this purpose from a private trust, which will cover our portion of the additional costs. In addition, FoF volunteers will help with some non-technical jobs in the field as needed.

As well as killing possum, 1080 is a very effective method to reduce rat and mice numbers to low levels. It also kills any stoats which feed on poisoned animals - this would include any "trap-shy" animals which are not being caught in our existing trapping network. While no predator control system is perfect, we believe this is the only effective way we can reduce rodent numbers in our control area. This is supported by many reputable studies and the Commissioner for the Environment's recent studies: <http://www.pce.parliament.nz/media/media-releases/1080-must-not-be-banned-environment-commissioner>

Early indications suggest that this season may be a beech masting year. In other areas in NZ masts have caused plagues of rats and mice and subsequent exponential growth in stoat numbers, such that no amount of traps can contain them. One of our biggest fears in FoF is that all our hard work over the last 12 years could be undone by one significant mast event.

David Kelly (Professor of Ecology at Canterbury University) and his team are starting a long term study on the impact of the 1080 drop on local bird numbers - there will be opportunities for FoF members to help with this study.

Just when we thought that the kiwi monitoring was going to get easier with the Graham Valley slip being cleared, another deluge brought down a load of more dirt! Nonetheless, the kiwi tracking team have done a fantastic job in regularly monitoring the kiwi, which are now spread over some 10,000 hectares.

We're now into the kiwi breeding season and Tasman District Council have generously provided us with a grant to buy infrared trail cameras to help us monitor activity at nest sites without disturbing the kiwi. The cameras are activated by movement and by carefully positioning two cameras we can capture some of the activity in front of the nest. The slight delay in triggering the camera means that some action is missed. However, we should be able to see if predators such as stoats, possum, weka etc enter the nest and most importantly to see if a chick emerges from the nest. The photo shows a camera being set up near a nest site, which is marked with orange flagging tape. We take extreme care near a nest site to be absolutely silent, so that there is no risk of disturbing the incubating kiwi.



Great spotted kiwi share incubation duties. The male will generally sit on the nest during the day and for much of the night, but the female will take a turn at incubating every night, so the male can grab something to eat.

They spend two and a half months incubating the egg, which is a major commitment – hopefully they're nice and fat after a good winter of long foraging hours when they start. The females will need to be, given the size of their eggs.



The photo here shows an infertile great-spotted kiwi egg beside a hen's egg.

Operations Report

Pamela Jenkins

As I write this, I am watching yet more snow fall on Tū Ao Wharepapa, or Mt Arthur, and whilst contemplating the benefit of these extra doses of snow in terms of “pest population control”, I am also interrupted by the return of Steve from an unsuccessful attempt at the bi-monthly check of Z-line, (which follows high along a ridge aligned halfway between Deep Takaka River in the Flora catchment).



Snow has its benefits, but also its disadvantages for those of us trying to squeeze in our line monitoring on a weekend somewhere between the rather “messy” and unpredictable spring-like weather we are having at the moment. There's always next weekend....if a little on the ‘late’ side.

The two new lines S & U have been set and baited, with the first check of S-line (which is aligned parallel with Z-line, 1 km away to the west starting at the Cobb Ridge and finishing at the Balloon

Creek/Takaka River confluence) being completed last month. Teething trouble with some of the new traps involved return journeys to tweak and adjust them to the right setting, but no catches were recorded in the line's maiden check. Hopefully this is a good sign of low stoat numbers rather than the possibility of stoats not liking shiny new traps! It will be interesting to see what the first check of U-line next month reveals.

It should be noted that the kill-rate this year has so far exceeded that of previous years of monitoring, making a lot of work for some of our volunteers, (especially those up on the Tablelands!) and the slip is still doing its best to scupper our efforts. To add to that, a beech masting is looking imminent. So, all in all, as we start warming up and getting back into it after our winter "break", yet another challenging year lies ahead for our dedicated and hard working teams of volunteers.



Wayne and Bill (R) on the Cobb Ridge

A group of FoFers were up in the Cobb Ridge, Bullock Track and Lower Junction areas recently, checking traps. Here is a picture of two of us, Bill (right) and Wayne, discussing important issues of the day, including the environmental. *Bulbinella hookeri* is appearing now in the tussock areas here. Three rats were found, and no stoats. However, a lot of stoats are being caught up on the slopes of Mt Arthur at the moment.

Field Notes

Marie Firth

I was lucky enough to spend three days up at the top of the Cobb valley recently, staying at the beautiful Fenella Hut. I heard a female Great Spotted Kiwi at about 9pm on the 18th October. The call was very distant and away over towards the Burgoo Stream. This is good news as one of our hopes is that the Kiwi we have released in the Flora and Tablelands area will eventually meet up with those over in the Cobb. I also saw an unusual looking bird moving around on the far side of the big rock pool ("the swimming hole") up at Fenella. It was the behaviour of the bird that was unusual; it was right down near the water's edge, moving slowly along in a very purposeful way. Its full markings weren't clear, nor were its feet, but when the bird flew a short distance it looked as if it had a white marking in the middle of its back. From my bird book it looks as if it might have been a female rock wren (*Xenicus gilviventris*), and Maryann has since confirmed that rock wrens are known to be in this area. Interestingly, the place where we saw the bird is on the lower slopes of a rocky peak called Xenicus (1525m). Last summer a report was made to DoC of a rock wren on the slopes of Mt Arthur (1795m), and a call went out for any sightings to be reported.

On this trip I heard my first long tailed cuckoo of the spring and we saw weka, one with chicks. Sadly, we didn't hear any moreporks.

The early clematis is out – *Clematis paniculata*. There are many different types of native clematis, and *C. paniculata* (Puawananga) is a very early flowering one.

"Festoons of starry, white flowers, looped from tree to tree, light up with delicate beauty, the edges of the dark bush in the early spring".



Photo: Maryann Ewers

NB. The pest plant “Old Man’s Beard” is also a type of *Clematis* – *C.vitalba*, and is sometimes confused with native clematis especially *C. paniculata*. All native *Clematis* species are evergreen, (except the leafless *afoliata*), have unfurrowed stems and generally flower August - December. All exotic wild species are deciduous and flower December – May. *Source: NZ Plant Conservation Network www.pcn.org.nz*

Some plants are starting to flower (as at Tuesday 29 October, when 3 of us checked A Line) on the slopes of Mt Arthur, including early buttercup, parahebe and dracophyllum.



Other News

Graham Valley Road Open

The second big slip on the access road to the Flora road has been cleared and the road is now open. FoFers can now get up and down the road without having to make special arrangements with the earthmoving contractor, Dusty Digger. A big thank you to Barry M for all the work he and his staff have done on the road!



Steve Holloway is back

We are delighted to have Steve Holloway back in Motueka. Steve has been working around the country but has now returned to Motueka. He will be looking after T Line, which is the line around the Tablelands.

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