



Newsletter

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Chair's Report

Peter Adams

It has been fairly quiet on the FoF front with the Graham Valley road (our main access route into the Flora Valley) still being closed due to a major landslip over the winter. A few brave souls have made the long journey via the Cobb valley to check their lines, usually necessitating an overnight stop or two en route. The contractors are making good progress on the slip and, hopefully, the road will be open again in the next few weeks. So, when Chris at DoC asked if we had any keen volunteers to help build some trap boxes, we jumped at the opportunity.

As you may know, there is a major long term project under way to protect and restore the biodiversity in the Abel Tasman National Park – Project Janszoon (<http://janszoon.org/>). One aspect of this project is to create an extensive trapping network in the interior of the park, not dissimilar to our trap network in the Flora. DoC Motueka had starting building the traps with some help from a local school, but were making slow progress as other jobs kept on diverting them. Chris offered us the chance to help whilst earning some funds to help with our own projects.

As always, the job turned out to be bigger than anyone originally thought – in the end, we had built over 220 boxes, including cutting all the wire, screwing together the ply, stapling the ends and fitting the traps. A great effort, and many thanks to everyone who put their hands up to help.



As well as helping to get the Janszoon project trap lines in place for spring we also managed to raise \$3,000 for FoF projects – job well done!

Kiwi Update

Sandy and Robin Toy

Anaweka, the tale of an independent kiwi. Exciting Times

Anatori and Anaweka settled into a territory in Homewood together soon after their translocation to the Flora. Then, in the autumn of 2011 Anaweka (the female) went walkabout. She headed east into the upper Pearse catchment, but after five weeks came back to Anatori. She settled down again over the winter, but in the spring she went back to the Pearse and this time went further afield. Then the bad news – we picked up a ‘mortality’ signal from her transmitter. This happens when the transmitter does not move for more than 24 hours, which can happen if the bird dies or if the transmitter falls off. Unfortunately the transmitter was in a pretty tough location to reach but we eventually tracked it down and were hugely relieved to find no dead kiwi attached (see photos). Sadly this meant we didn’t know where Anaweka was anymore. We hoped against hope that we might find her back sharing a burrow with Anatori when we changed his transmitter last autumn but no such luck.

A few weeks ago we noticed that Anatori's nightly activity had dropped from an average of 9.9 hours a night to 6.6 hours a night. This could indicate that he was incubating an egg. But if so, who produced the egg? As far we knew there was no female in the vicinity but we left an acoustic recorder in Anatori's home patch just in case. Surprise, surprise – the very first night of recording picked up a female kiwi loud and clear! Of course we can't be certain the female is Anaweka, but the only other female we know of is a kilometre away on the other side of the Flora and would be very unlikely to have been recorded. There may be an unknown female in the area, but we're guessing Anaweka's returned from her travels. Clearly, the presence of a female encourages us to hope that Anatori's change in activity is due to a 'real' incubation, rather than a 'false' one.

At least one other pair (Pakawau and Pikopiko) are also showing reduced nightly activity which is very exciting. Great spotted kiwi incubate for about 77 days so it will be a long time yet before any chicks would be expected to hatch.



Operations Report

Pamela Jenkins

The odds have really been stacked against us with the Graham Valley Road closure and regular heavy snowfall. Big efforts by volunteers have meant that the vast majority of those lines that are not under snow have still been monitored for September and October. Access has been gained by driving all the way over to The Cobb Valley, often involving one or more nights staying in huts in order to get the lines done. As expected, kills have been quite low, and September saw 2 stoats, 13 rats, 5 possums and 2 mice.

Who's that FoFer?

Chris Potter

Chris Potter is a passionate planter of trees. He and wife Cheryl have transformed a piece of land in Tasman from a weed infested pine plantation into a beautiful piece of regenerating bush in the space of 12 years. "Potters Bush" is now protected by a QEII Covenant. All the existing natives were preserved and about 10,000 trees planted, so that now the bush contains many healthy specimens of totara, rimu, silver beech, miro,



maire, lancewoods etc. The undergrowth is slowly transforming itself from gorse into a green oasis of ferns, mosses, lichens and other native plants. A green mistletoe can be found on one particular tree. Native birds abound, including fantails, tui, bellbirds, waxeyes, riroriro, and at this time of year, shining cuckoos. To top it all, Chris has a genuine bush hut, now with the ever hopeful name of "Kiwi Flat Hut" but in its previous life lived in the Richmond Ranges. There is also an ex-DoC dunny (but which is now a flash flush loo).



Here is a photo of the green mistletoe (*Tupeia antarctica*) grown from seed. The tree Chris is standing under in the photo above is a narrow-leaved maire (*Nestegis montana*).

Chris brings a variety of skills to FoF including IT and he was chair of the Quail Island Trust in Christchurch before he came to Tasman. A visit to Antarctica many years ago to help drill ice cores left an indelible impression on him of the need to care for and preserve beautiful, fragile natural environments.

Chris first encountered Flora's friends when he went and helped build boxes one day, and this initial voluntary work ended up with him being chair of FoF from 2002-07. This was a very important time for FoF because in those early stages the established conservation movement was wary of a very small, localised voluntary organisation with no established track record. However, the profile of FoF was raised by taking part in various events such as the Nelson Ecofest, and entering in conservation awards such as the Nelson/Tasman Environment Awards (which we won in 2003). Hard work by all volunteers meant that FoF proved it was an important conservation group and was here to stay. Raising the profile of FoF with the general public helps to raise money from donations, attracts willing workers, and contributes generally to recognition from the community.

Initially FoF's aims seemed an impossible dream, but with the hard work of an amazingly dedicated team of volunteers, Chris says that FoF has definitely made a difference. Initially I line for example, used to catch very large numbers of stoats and rats, but now the rate is much lower. Now that so many more trapping lines have been put in, the frontline is moving further and further to the west. For the future Chris hopes that maybe a kiwi chick might appear and maybe at some point even mohua could be re-introduced, as apparently there was an extensive number in the past. Other issues for consideration could include more extensive use of poisons and multi kill traps.

Chris says that he is always amazed by (and very grateful for) the amount of time and energy people give to FoF, and how much skill and effort goes into the work of making boxes, laying out new lines, checking and rebaiting traps etc and that this work is being done by people from all walks of life.

What's that plant?

Marie Firth

Red tussock (*Chionochloa rubra*; Family Gramineae) can be seen in the alpine grasslands on the slopes of Mt. Arthur and the Tablelands. It grows as large, dense brownish-green clumps up to 1.5m high. Red tussock grows on the volcanic plateau in the North Island and all through the South Island high country, from 1,900m to sea-level in the deep south.



NZ's native grasslands are dominated by tussocks, which are grasses that have a clumping growth form, with stems fanning up and outwards from a central bunch. This growth form helps the tussocks to survive, as much of the plant is protected in a bunch of basal stems unlike woody plants, which have exposed and vulnerable growing stem tips. There are 24 species of the *Chionochloa* genus, which is largely endemic to NZ.

Detailed ecological research of the high country tussocks only began in the 1950's. This research (much of it carried out by Prof. Emeritus Alan Mark, Otago University), has found that tussocks grow very slowly, and live a very long time. Each stem takes 10-15 years to mature, after which it may flower and die (the attached photo shows red tussock with seed heads), and then is usually replaced by one or more new stems. Therefore mature tussocks have hundreds of stems, with a range of ages. This pattern of rejuvenation means the tussock may potentially live forever, but it also means that scientists cannot tell the age of individual plants.

Recent studies have highlighted the ability of the tussock grasslands, which, if in good condition, will give high water yields for their upland catchments. Tussock grasslands retain water and release it slowly, reducing the probability of flash flooding.

We are very lucky to have areas in the FoF project that have alpine tussocks. One of the most beautiful views of a tussock grassland can be seen from the verandah of Balloon Hut, up on the Tablelands. This is an area where FoFers have recently extended our trapping lines. These lines will require a lot of work and overnight trips to maintain, because of the harsh climate, and distance from the road-end.

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