



# Newsletter

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## Salisbury surveyed

*Finally, the "bioblitz"*

When the Salisbury Ecological Management Unit (EMU) within Kahurangi National Park was created it made for a great opportunity for Friends of Flora to work alongside the Department and develop a management plan for the site. FoF had previously commissioned a report on the values of the Salisbury block that determined extensive survey effort was needed to see exactly what was there, and, if what was *thought* to be there actually *was* there. FoF agreed to contribute to flying costs and DOC freed up some expert staff to lead the survey teams. DOC Motueka's Leigh Marshall came up with a brilliant flight plan and a week of awesome weather allowed everything to run smoothly.



FoF's Pamela Jenkins and DOC's Leigh Marshall wrestling with some lizard traps. Pic: Ivan Rogers

Five teams hit the ground for a week in February to conduct ecosystem validation (is what we're looking at supposed to be what we're looking at?), search for rare plants, locate weed incursions, note pest browsing and conduct a fauna survey. Each team comprised DOC staff and FoF vollies and also Natale de Burgh, a Sir Peter Blake ambassador. See her blog at <https://docambassador.wordpress.com/> Nine DOC staff were mildly outnumbered by 12 FoF-ers. Areas surveyed included Hoary Head, Mt Arthur, the Horseshoe Basin, Deep Ck, Lake Peel (by snorkel!) and the Tablelands.

By the end of the week one of the week's major goals had been realised – the transfer of skills and knowledge between DOC staff and the FoF volunteers. DOC brought their technical expertise and the FoF-ers their intimate knowledge of the site gained through years of trapping, tracking tunnels, whio survey and the great spotted kiwi project.



Heads down, bums up: L - R - Andy Woodall, Robin Toy and Simon Moore of the ecosystem team.  
Pic: Natale de Burgh

At a phone hookup on the following Monday the teams went through their preliminary findings. Full reports from each team will be presented to FoF once plant samples and IDs are processed in a month or so. Some highlights were:

- Regular tracking by local endemic giant weta and Kahurangi geckos (*Woodworthia* “Kahurangi”) detected in footprint tracking tunnels.
- Quite a few new threatened plants records, some still being ID-ed
- Some incorrect ecosystem type classifications corrected
- Increasing the known distribution of giant alpine snails

And some low notes were struck too:

- Remains of 13 kakariki found near Grecian Stream, probably stoat predated and just outside the FoF trap network
- Extensive browse pressure by hares in the alpine zone
- Barren forest due to deer browse around Heath Ck
- Spanish heath in some of the unique wetland ecosystems

The week of survey is over, but the work goes on, as indeed it had been going on previously. Bat detectors are still out in promising long-tailed bat habitat, tracking tunnels for giant weta and alpine geckos are still running and the sharp eyes of the up-skilled Friends of Flora members are roaming over the habitat looking for the unusual, or the unwanted.

## What lies beneath.

*Greg show us Kahurangi is hollow.*

Keen caver and F Line leader Greg Pickford led a weekend of caving trips to the Cheops Cave back in January. FoF vollies and DOC staff took advantage of Greg's invitation to visit the area of spectacular limestone karst with bluffs and overhangs and descend into the cave in the company of knowledgeable guides. This cave was selected as being relatively easy with large passages and not too much wading through water. All participants came back impressed and enthused.

Cheops cave was discovered in the early 1990s by members of the Nelson spelio group. It runs from Growler creek to Gridiron creek where its resurgence is about thirty minutes upstream of the Gridiron shelter. The cave carries a surface stream from the area between Growler and Hodge creek and also most of the Hodge creek water sinks into the cave via Penguin passage.

*"I enjoyed showing you all the cave and the limestone bluffs. We are so lucky to have such a beautiful area so close to our homes. If there is interest I will run another trip next year"* says Greg



Picture: Mark Townsend

## Whio take time off

*Lots of ducks but no ducklings*

An interesting result from December's walk-through whio surveys of the Flora and Grecian streams. While the number of pairs and single adults was very much the same as previous years, no ducklings were observed in the survey area. A single duckling has been observed in Deep Ck, but outside the annual survey area. This is consistent with whio observations last spring and summer throughout Kahurangi - generally fewer pairs were making nests and if they did, fewer ducklings were surviving. Several factors may be at play here: the fact that 2014/15 was a huge breeding season, predation by stoats and weka or untimely flood events. *"Numbers were down this year and right through NZ a lot of breeding was 3 to 4 weeks later than normal. We did receive 3 clutches from the Coast and they did lose a few clutches from predators. Hopefully a better season later this year!"* said the Isaac Wildlife Trust's Anne Richardson.

## Great spots by the numbers.

*Robin and Sandy Toy give us the Flora kiwi data*

- 9 pairs out of 11 monitored have incubated to date
- 3 chicks believed to have hatched, 1 confirmed on video
- 6 nest failures to date. 1 inviable egg; 1 presumed inviable egg; 1 confirmed weka predation; 1 assumed chick death on hatch; 1 unknown cause; 1 most likely stoat interference
- 2 incubations ongoing (both are second attempts)
- 3 pairs that have not previously bred are incubating this year (1 confirmed chick hatch so far)
- 1 camera stolen by kea
- Mustelids have been videoed at 4 nest sites this season
- Several clips of adult kiwi active during the day
- 1800 video clips analysed to date

## Ewing returns as sponsor.

*Egg on our faces as we ask an old friend for help.*

For the best part of a decade Ewing Poultry, based in Hope, supplied eggs to FoF for our trapping efforts completely free of charge. My back-of-an-envelope calculations make that something like 50,000 eggs! When we moved to replace eggs with rabbit-based Erayz a few years ago we thanked Ewing Poultry for their support and told them we would need no more eggs from them. However, predator trapping is a developing science and after a while we realised there was still a place for eggs. Erayz is subject to being consumed by mice when their numbers are high and sometimes there has been problems with supply of Erayz. Also, we have learned there is a need to change bait type to counter trap shyness. And nothing lasts like an egg. FoF's operations manager Mike Malone made the approaches to Ewings and their support has been restored. A very grateful thank-you to Ewing Poultry.

## Reefton builds retreats for Wrens

*Bill Rooke writes:*

Before humans arrived in New Zealand there were 7 species of a unique wren family endemic to this country. Three species were wiped out by Polynesian rats and a further 2 after Europeans arrived. The 2 surviving species are Rock Wren and Rifleman. Rifleman are locally extinct in many parts of the country but in the Flora we are lucky to have a reasonably stable population; but this could change overnight if there was a sudden rise in predators. As cavity nesting birds (hollows in trees) they are very vulnerable to rats and stoats. The life expectancy of female birds has been estimated as 1.7 years and males at 2.2 years. Nesting success has been found to be 5 times higher in boxes than in natural cavity nests, due to the hole on nest boxes being so small that stoats and rats can't enter. Eight boxes were placed in the Flora in late January, at Flora Saddle and Flora Hut. Although the breeding season is almost over they are in place ready for the next. We will be able to monitor nests and learn more about this remarkable little bird.



Very special thanks to Reefton Area School woodwork class who made the boxes to DOC specification and donated them to FoF. Bill and Maryann are checking the boxes and will be reporting on any activity.



Bill Rooke and Vincent D'ath installing nest boxes. Pic: Maryann Ewers

### Cool Stuff from Clouston's

A bush giant dragonfly *Uropetala carovei* and a tiny orchid *Chiloglottis cornuta*, rare at this altitude. Both from near Clouston's Mine.



Pic: Shaun Atkinson



Pic: Ivan Rogers