



# Newsletter

Issue 93

May 2016

## Kiwi Translocation Success

*Robin and Sandy Toy report on kiwi flocking to Flora*

FOF's fourth translocation of great spotted kiwi has been successful. Twelve birds were captured in South Gouland from 17-20 April by a combination of night capture in which birds responding to taped calls are then caught by hand and day capture in which birds are sniffed out by indicator dogs and removed from their burrows. The first 24 hours was very slow, but two birds were caught and transferred by chopper for a powhiri at Flora Hut. In the next 24 hours catching was much more rapid with ten birds caught, requiring us to increase the release team from three to eight people. We even roped in a passing tramper (John Perrin) to carry birds in bags and he has since become a FOF volunteer. So, while we were prepared for an eight day expedition, it was all over in three days.

Such a translocation is quite an organisational feat. Huge thanks to Alan and Lesley who did a magnificent job collecting the equipment and food. Huge thanks to everyone involved in the fieldwork, to Lotteries and DOC's Community Fund for funding and to iwi and DOC Motueka staff for the powhiri. Thanks too to Ruedi, Lesley and Sam and for the photos.

We've now translocated 42 kiwi into the Flora, reaching the genetic diversity target of 40 birds that is recommended to establish a population. This is the first great spotted kiwi translocation to achieve this milestone. Well done Friends of Flora! Post-translocation monitoring is now underway - so far all birds remain within FOF's trapped area. Let's hope it stays that way.



## Weeds and Biosecurity

*DOC's Mel Whiting sounds a warning on weeds*

Weed control is an important but often overlooked part of protecting native biodiversity. Obviously we have to begin by locating the plants and assessing how widespread they are. Some of us made a start on this during the Salisbury survey in February and it would be great if we could extend this to cover the wider area that over which Friends of Flora volunteers roam. The main ones we are concerned with are the woody weeds, for example broom, gorse, strawberry dogwood and Spanish heath. We would also like to target localised infestations of species that are not yet well established so records of any unusual weeds are useful. These include King devil hawkweed (*Hieracium praealtum*) that is currently only known from scattered sites, and heath rush (*Juncus squarrosus*) that has not yet been detected but could establish in wet areas and exclude native vegetation. Some species are already widespread and beyond control eg. wall lettuce, catsear, sheep's sorrel, *Hieracium lepidulum* and possibly *Carex ovalis*. You can help by making a note of the species (take photos and/or good sample if you are unsure), location (ideally GPS reference) and an assessment of the extent of the infestation (number of plants or approximate area covered). This information can be passed on to DOC staff.



*Hieracium praealtum* below P line on Gordon's Pyramid (pic: Mel Whiting)

And finally a reminder that we can all help to limit the introduction of new pest plants by doing a quick biosecurity check before we head for the hills! Boots, gaiters and packs have handy hiding places for weed seeds so a brief look and brush down at home is good practice.

## Lonely end for Spoonbill

*Robin Toy writes about Mel's macabre find*



On 24 February 2016 Mel Whiting took this photograph of a dead spoonbill in a limestone gryke. The striking thing about the discovery was its location - just below the summit of Winter Peak in the Mt Arthur massif, Kahurangi National Park. The location is above 1500m and is 28km from the Moutere Inlet off Tasman Bay, the nearest site at which spoonbills are regularly found, 50 km from Karamea, the nearest site on the West Coast at which spoonbills have been reported (eBird). Robertson et al (2007) show a smattering of inland records for Royal Spoonbill, mostly in grid squares containing large lakes. Schweigman et al (2014) discuss the migration of Royal spoonbill in New Zealand, with the evidence pointing to coastal migration routes, although there are nomadic inland populations of the species in Australia. Presumably the bird photographed on Mt Arthur was either migrating overland or was blown well off course.

*For further reading:*

Robertson CJR, Hyvönen P, Fraser MJ, Pickard CR (2007). Atlas of Bird Distribution in New Zealand, 1999-2004. Ornithological Society of New Zealand.

Schweigman P, Cash WF, Thompson MP (2014). Seasonal movements and survival of royal spoonbill (*Platalea regia*) breeding in New Zealand. *Notornis* 61: 177-187.

## Alpine geckos persist

*Ivan Rogers finds exciting evidence in tracking tunnels*

Footprint tracking tunnels (FTTs) deployed at high altitude this summer revealed the presence not only of two alpine weta species *Deinocrida tibiospina* (Nelson alpine giant weta) and *D. connectens*, but that of two threatened gecko species. Many tunnels set out for weta had the distinctive prints of Mt Arthur geckos *Woodworthia* “Mt Arthur”, with some tunnels being tracked repeatedly. Gecko species can be identified from footprints as the arrangement of scales on the soles of their feet is unique to each species. When a hand and spotlight search for black eyed geckos *Mokopirirakau kahuteræ* in February failed to get any of the creatures “in the hand” (although a couple got away on us!) FTTs were put out. While only one tunnel was tracked by this species it is evidence that it does persist at altitude. Both species are nocturnal, cryptic and secretive so few live animals have been observed in recent years. Further FTT surveys over coming years will show if these animals are holding their own or declining. Both species are susceptible to rat, stoat and, in particular, mouse predation.



Mount Arthur gecko and prints



Black eyed gecko and prints (pics: Ivan Rogers, except bottom right: DOC)

## AGM again

Friends of Flora's 2016 Annual General Meeting will be held at the Motueka Sports Pavilion Wednesday 18 May from 7.00pm. As well as the usual business - reports, election of committee etc, FoF's Greg Pickford will give a talk on the cave systems beneath Kahurangi. Light refreshments will be served and all newsletter readers are very welcome. Our AGM has become quite popular in recent years, hence the move to a larger venue