Newsletter

Issue: 83 **Jan/Feb 2014**

Chair's Report *Peter Adams*

A big thank you to all the volunteers who have been out trapping and kiwi tracking this summer - the Friends of Flora project has grown so large that many of the lines need a full day and some an overnight stay at one of the huts, and the kiwi tracking has become an almost full time occupation for the team.

The setting of the new K line on the tablelands is a major milestone as this is the last planned stoat trapping line for the project. Together with DOC, we now have 1,125 stoat traps set in the area over 112 kilometres of trap line. There are 22 lines and FoF manages 18 of these. Many of the stoat traps are paired with possum and rat traps.

Finally, a big thank you to one of our forgotten heroes. David (Titch) Klement is a founding member of FoF and has been one of our most active volunteers. In addition, he has managed the FoF gear shed and kept us equipped with bait, radios, screwdrivers and all the other necessities of our conservation programme. Recently, ill health has forced him to stand down from active duties. Thanks Titch - we know how much you have given to FoF!

Kiwi Update *Sandy and Robin Toy*

The infra-red cameras used to monitor 3 of our 4 ongoing breeding attempts have given us some fascinating insights into great spotted kiwi breeding ecology. Check out Friends of Flora's Facebook page for some of the highlights.

A chick successfully hatched at each of the three nests monitored with cameras. This is fantastic. It appears that the chick comes out of the nest for the first time a week to a fortnight after hatch. Parental behaviour varies between nests. For instance, Pakawau and Pikopiko were very attentive of the chick when it was small, but the other two sets of kiwi parents did not appear to spend time with the chick outside the nest.

The fate of the chicks is currently unknown. In one case the parents moved away from the nest about 5 weeks after the chick hatched. Unfortunately the cameras do not capture all activity at the nest, so we do not know whether the parents have moved away because the chick got munched or perhaps because the nest was in a dry location. Another pair is still at the nest 5 weeks after hatch. This nest has been visited by a stoat, possums, a weka and its chick (they frequently enter the nest) and a goat! Fingers crossed Hoire and Poai can fight off the various predators. The final nest with cameras was visited by a stoat four times prior to chick hatch. A few days after the chick left the nest the parents exhibited very unusual behaviour, wandering around the nest sniffing, entering the nest and then immediately leaving it and finally abandoning the nest altogether. We think it is most likely that they abandoned the nest because the chick has been predated, although there's a chance

we may find the chick with one of the parents when we change their transmitters in a couple of months.

Our thanks to Tasman District Council for the grant to purchase some of the cameras, to DoC for lending us additional cameras, to Kinopta Ltd for loan of a new type of camera to trial and to Terry of Supercharge Batteries for donating a battery to run the new camera.

"Flora Bioblitz" and electric fishing – the big fish story *Ivan Rogers*

The electric fishing survey of the Flora Stream is the first survey in a roll-out of the "Flora Bioblitz" - not so much a blitz as a series of surveys to be undertaken by Friends of Flora to answer some important questions about the biodiversity of our protected area. In the next newsletter we will look at the results of a bat survey currently under way (see below). Meanwhile, native fish expert Stella McQueen writes about the fish survey:

You don't mind catching only one fish in a day when that fish is a monster! Koaro normally only reach 160-180mm but this one is nearly 290mm – the same as the largest koaro on record.

The koaro is one of the five whitebait species. This fish would have hatched one autumn, all of 8mm long, then been swept on floodwaters to the sea and migrated back inland three months later.

Little work has been done on how long these animals live, but similar related species can reach ten years old, possibly more. Koaro normally live at high altitudes and are able to climb waterfalls on their migration inland by moving out of the water into the splash zone and wriggling up the wet stones. The rough 'traction' on the undersides of the fins of could easily be felt on this koaro.

The habitat seemed ideal for koaro and there were plenty of aquatic insect larvae for food, so why did we only get the one fish? There may be migration barriers between the sea and Flora Stream – natural or man-made areas where the water flows too swiftly or falls freely with nothing for the fish to climb on

- or the high-flow events in the area are too large or frequent for a decent population to build up. Obviously the fish we caught has survived a lot of floods. Adult koaro can be fairly site-loyal and this one was found in a hollow against the bank with safe places to hide away to wait out a flood.

Weka chicks

Over the last few months FoF volunteers have been watching the progress of the Flora carpark's resident female weka, who had three chicks this year. The mum weka has a twisted beak and is well known to visitors, but this is the first time she has had chicks (for the last 2-3 years anyway). Nic Berkett managed to get this photo:

Sadly on Sunday 2 March, only mum and one baby (quite big now), were seen feeding around the carpark. Despite the twisted peak, mum weka seems to manage very well. The resident weka at the Mt Arthur hut was also seen on the same day.

Operations Report *Bill Rooke*

New Line on the Tablelands (K Line)

The new K Line was laid out, baited and set, on the weekend of the 8th of February. The trap boxes had been dropped earlier by helicopter at two locations on the Tablelands. In the photo to the left, the team wrestle the boxes out of the big bag they were dropped in. Special packs allow three boxes to be carried at once.

Sadly, 2 packs left under the Salisbury Hut had had their straps cut and could not be used. Despite this, we still got all the traps out in one day, set and baited.

The 50-station trap line takes in the Potholes area and eventually joins the Leslie/Karamea track at the bush edge, then follows the track to join up with D Line.

The group consisting of Andy, Bill, Maryann, Josh, Debs, Tony and Marie had a very enjoyable night at Salisbury Hut celebrating.

On Sunday a bat recording box (Tony and Bill setting up in the photo to the right) was placed overlooking the Sphinx Creek Catchment. There are historical records of bats on the Tablelands and this recording device is part of FoF's Bio-Blitz programme to find out exactly what we have left in our amazingly diverse area.

On arriving back at Flora car park we were dismayed to find a group of distraught trampers, including overseas visitors, greet us with the news that for two nights in a row vandals had broken into cars, stolen goods and siphoned fuel from seven cars.

Trapping Results for January

For January, 13 of the 18 lines were monitored. Of the other 5, three are bi-monthly lines and two were not done due to unavailability of volunteers. Six stoats, 17 rats, 5 possums, 11 mice and two hedgehogs were caught. There are two interesting things to note here. All 6 stoats were caught above the bush line on the outer edge of the project on D, P and R lines. Hedgehogs are starting to appear more often (something unheard of in the early days of FoF), with two hedgehogs being caught this month. Hedgehogs eat the *Powelliphanta* snails, as well as wetas, and other native fauna.

Thirteen lines were also monitored in January 2013 with 60 stoats, 18 rats, 4 possums, and 9 mice being caught. Historical records show that high stoat kill years are usually followed by a year with lower numbers, so this decrease is not unusual, but it may be partially attributed to the recent 1080 boundary drop. It should be noted as well that the huge beech flowering event we have experienced is still to kick in as an actual mast when all the seed has dropped. That's a few months away yet.

We are embarking upon a programme of rat trap replacement over the coming months. The damp conditions have gradually taken their toll on our Victor Rat traps causing rusting and rotting, and this has been leading to a fair amount of frustration and sore fingers! We ordered our first new batch of 80 last month and these will be used on I line, which follows along the bank of the Flora Stream from the Flora Carpark to Gridiron Shelter. Many thanks to Peter Baker Transport for yet again, not only being so efficient, but for making no charge for the transporting of these all the way from Auckland to Motueka.

A whio survey has also been carried out this summer (results in the next newsletter), and Nic Berkett managed to get these two lovely photos last week.

Mistletoe flowers at last!! *Chris Freyberg*

Those with eagle eyes (or in the know) might have spotted this Christmas treat not far off the track up to Mt Arthur hut. This specimen was first seen in the bush close to A Line about ten years ago. This seems to be the bush's first flowering in that time - perhaps a result of the same conditions that are leading up to the 2014 super beech mast.

Given the leaf blisters and the flower arrangement, I think it is *Peraxilla tetrapetala*, common name Red Mistletoe, rather than its very similar but equally showy close relative *Peraxilla colensoi*, the Scarlet Mistletoe. After a bit of digging on-line, I found that that we have just eight indigenous mistletoes (we had nine species but one, *Trilepedia adamsii*, has been deemed extinct) and three species are by nature small leafless sprigs no bigger than your hand, that only a botanist, maybe, could find and love. DoC seem well aware of plants that we have locally and protect some bushes on Cobb and Sylvester ridges at least. Here's hoping that the bumper catch of possums on A-line recently means that none remain to make a meal out of this particular bush!

One little curiosity that I picked up in my reading is that a bellbird population can lose the knack of opening the mistletoe flowers to get their nectar (which is how the flowers get pollinated). Let's hope the bellbirds up the Mt Arthur track haven't forgotten.

Mountain Cabbage Tree Flowers

Chris Potter reports that the mountain cabbage tree in the Flora carpark is now flowering. This plant has been discussed in a previous newsletter. Denise Raymond took this wonderful photo on the 25 February.

Friends of Flora
P: PO Box 317,
Motueka 7143,
New Zealand
T: 03 528 9054
E: fof@fof.org.nz
W: www.fof.org.nz