



Newsletter

Issue: 82

Nov-Dec 2013

Chairperson's Report

Peter Adams

Good news and worrying news

Hope you all had a good break over Christmas and are raring to get back up the hill!

Some great news on the kiwi - our infra-red cameras picked up a new kiwi chick just after Christmas. The proud parents are Pikopiko and Pakawau. There is some great footage on our facebook site - <https://www.facebook.com/friendsofflora> Plus we have another 3 nests being incubated at the moment. One of the nests had been visited by a stoat (also caught on the infra-red camera) so extra traps have been deployed to try and catch it before the chick hatches.

On a more worrying note, the beech forests of the Flora have had an exceptional flowering this season and all evidence is pointing to a "mega-mast." Without any intervention, this will almost certainly lead to a plague of rats and mice this winter followed by a population explosion in stoat numbers later this year. This could easily undo all the hard work of the last 12 years - the expected predator numbers would overrun our trapping network.

DOC are very aware of this problem and working on a programme to minimise the impact. However, the whole of the South Island is likely to be impacted so we are lobbying hard to make sure we are not forgotten.

We will keep you posted on developments.

Kiwi Update

Sandy Toy

It's been a hectic month for the kiwi team, so this is just a summary of highlights.

Aerial tracking.

As previously reported some of the kiwi introduced this year have wandered very widely taxing our ability to monitor their whereabouts. So, when Don Grant offered to try aerial tracking of the wanderers we jumped at the chance. Don has the only Piper Pacer in the country, 60 years old and equipped for bush flying (check out the size of the tyres designed to handle emergency landing in the bush). On our first attempt we covered 184 km (see map) and found all six kiwi that have been eluding us, 1.25 h flying instead of a week's foot-slogging! Kuikui Kuini now has the title of Great Adventurer – he's nearly down to K-Bend, 12 km from his release site in Deep Creek. Many, many thanks to Don and PEE (that's the plane!).



Korowhiti returns

Korowhiti is another challenger for the Great Adventurer title. On release last March she rapidly moved from the Flora into the Grecian with intermittent forays over to Barrons' Flat. Three weeks ago we decided we needed to bring her back. After two days tracking Lesley and Robin caught up with her on the saddle between Mt McMahon and Mt Crusader. At 1260 m, she had some pretty spectacular views (see photo). Luckily for her and us we caught her within 100 m of the only helicopter landing site in the area, so she and Lesley flew back to the Flora in style. Alan, Lesley and Sandy released her at the confluence of the Flora Stream and Saddle Creek and so far she has stayed put. Many thanks to Lesley and Alan for all their help in this marathon recapture.



Night listening

Sandy and Robin spent a night listening for and tracking Waiharakeke and Rameka every twenty minutes. One of the most interesting things we heard was a duet between Anatori and Korowhiti. Since Anatori's mate, Anaweka, has disappeared again, we're hoping the exchange was friendly, but of course we don't know.

Soil sampling

We have now completed soil invertebrate sampling in the valleys of Ghost Creek, Deep Creek, No Name Creek, Gridiron Creek and the Flora. The aim is to determine how kiwi food availability in the Flora compares to other sites with kiwi and how the invertebrates vary within the Flora project area. The data have been sent to DOC's Rogan Colbourne who has done similar sampling in other parts of the country. Many thanks to Paul, Becky, John, Lesley, Sandra and Marie. Thanks to Sandra for the photo.



Pikopiko and Pakawau hatch a chick

Pikopiko and Pakawau started incubating on 24 September. Four weeks later we installed a trail camera close to their nest burrow. For 76 days they have shared the night-time incubation with both parents reducing their foraging from 11 to about 4.5 hours/night, while Pikopiko shouldered the dayshift. We collected some great footage of the comings and goings of Pikopiko and Pakawau. On 10 December Pikopiko didn't go out at all, while Pakawau foraged all night, indicating the egg had hatched. Until that time Pakawau had spent the daylight hours away from the nest burrow, but from then on both she and Pikopiko stayed in the nest burrow during the day – perhaps giving extra protection to a chick. On 27th December we saw the first video clip showing a chick outside the burrow – highly entertaining with the chick and Pikopiko bumbling around together. At one point Pikopiko seems to sit on the chick. We are not sure if he is stirring up food for the chick or if he is being protective. The camera is still on the nest burrow and hopefully the family will continue to use that burrow for at least another couple of weeks. Pikopiko and Pakawau had two breeding attempts last year abandoning both early on, so it's great that they've succeeded to hatch a chick this year. See some of the video clips on the FOF Facebook page. Thanks to Tasman District Council for the grant that enabled us to buy the cameras.

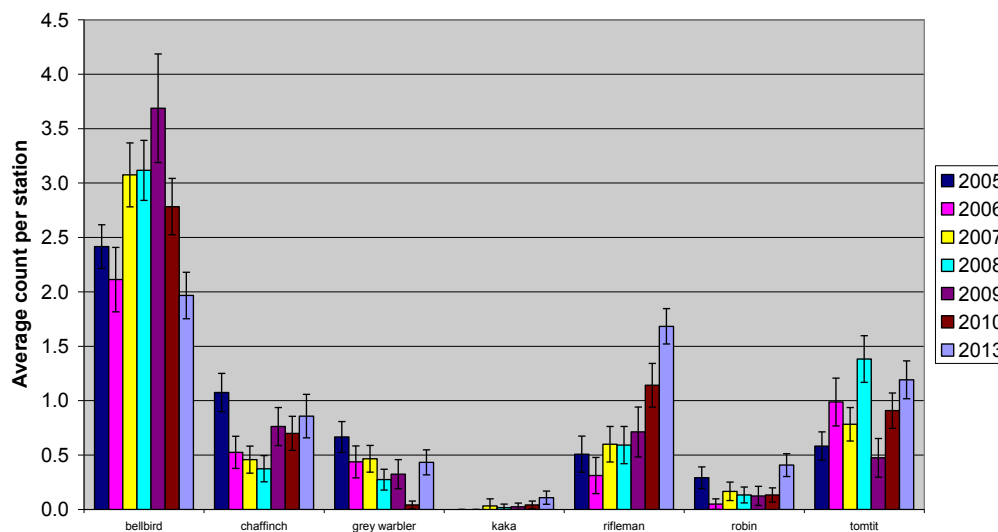
Other kiwi breeding attempts

One of our Roaring Lion pairs, Te Manu-huna & Ngutu-roa, have abandoned their incubation. We're not surprised since Te Manu-huna never reduced his night-foraging hours. Either he was extremely lazy or it may have been a phantom incubation with no egg, but the burrow was so enormous we'd have needed a JCB to sort this out. The second pair Toro-ngangara and Whakangangahu are still incubating, somewhat miraculously because the nest is under a small overhang. When Robin and Sandra tracked it down, Whakangangahu was fully visible showing just a slither of egg under his breast feathers. The third Roaring Lion pair, Hoire and Poai are also still incubating. Their burrow is so open and large we've installed four cameras to cover all the entrances. Finally, Waiharakeke and Rameka are also still incubating in a secure looking burrow.

Ornithological Society's Five Minute Bird Counts

From 2005-2010 the Ornithological Society (OSNZ) performed a series of 5 minute bird counts (5MBC) along the Flora track from Flora Hut to Holmwood Creek. 5MBC show a lot of variability making it difficult to draw conclusions from small studies. But Dave Kelly (University of Canterbury) is performing a large meta-analysis including 5MBC of several sites in the South Island, so 5 members of OSNZ repeated the Flora counts this last November. The figure shows the results for the six most abundant species, rifleman, bellbird, robin, chaffinch, grey warbler and tomtit and also kaka. The count for rifleman is very dependent on who does the count because many people have difficulty hearing this species. All other species appear from the figure to have shown no change in numbers, but further analysis awaits Dave's study. Kaka showed an increase, which is very apparent as we wander around the Flora, but they are still too uncommon to figure significantly in 5MBC.

Flora 5MBC



Operations Report

Bill Rooke

A thank you again to USA students



For the 5th year in a row, the Wildlands Studies Group of students from the USA assisted in FOF volunteer work. Time was spent on the Tablelands and in the Cobb boundary area where they checked and rebaited 250 traps and helped place 20 possum traps (supplied by DOC Golden Bay) on the Cobb Ridge. One highlight of the time was a sighting of a male rock wren in the Lake Peel area. As I am sure any Fofer who has spent time with Wildlands students would agree, these students are dedicated conservationists and a pleasure to work with. A big thank you to Adam, Mike, Janice and all the students, and to Fofer Steve Harris for his help and organisation on the Tablelands.

Trapping results

December results are still not all in, but November pretty much mirrored last year. Only 3 stoats, 14 rats, 13 mice, 15 possums and 2 hedgehogs were caught. The hedgehogs are an interesting addition. In our early days hedgehogs were never recorded but now, since first caught on

I line, they are appearing deeper in the Flora. They may be cute but can be devastating to any ground nesting birds and our precious ancient Powelliphanta snails. We can as usual, expect an increase in catch numbers of all predators in the new year.

Bush and Beyond

Bush and Beyond has recently sold its guiding business. The 153 traps (R, X and Y line) that form the northwestern boundary of the project have been donated to FOF. These lines will continue to be monitored by Bill and Maryann and FoF volunteers.

Line leaders' meeting

A line leaders meeting was held at Pam and Steve's house in November. This was a useful get together for line leaders to meet socially and share opinions and ideas on trapping. Another meeting is being proposed in a few months to discuss any issues regarding trapping and will be open to all volunteers. Meetings such as these are of good value, as many volunteers know only their own lines.

The Flora's only tōi

Ivan Rogers

One of the very few specimen of the mountain cabbage tree (*Cordyline indivisa*) or tōi is the somewhat munted one growing in the Flora car park. These days it's obscured behind the large mound of road metal that should very soon be distributed along the Graham Valley Rd. Only two others have been observed in the Flora - one near the Growler shelter and one near the Upper Gridiron woodshed.



Flora carpark toi - note dead limb to left.

Uncomfortable in warm or low habitats the tōi is a tree of montane and sub-alpine forest and particularly of the north-west and western South Island mountains. It is distinguished from other cordylines (cabbage trees) by its broad blue-green strap-like leaves. It flowers in mid-summer producing a magnificent inflorescence from the growing point. This, combined with its largely unbranching palm-like form gives it the oddly tropical appearance it shares with some other alpine trees - mountain ne nei for example.



The flower here is from a grove of tōi near the Perry Saddle hut on the Heaphy Track.

Quite why it is nearly absent from our part of Kahurangi is a bit of a puzzle. DOC botanist Shannel Courtney says "the gentle marble country around Mt Arthur with the dolines, natural openings and tall silver beech forest should have groves of tōi scattered through it ... but alas it's not the case." Shannel believes browsing of seedlings and central new growth by deer, goats and possums has led to its current patchy distribution in NW Nelson.

For more on this and our other cabbage trees read *Dancing Leaves: The Story of New Zealand's*

Cabbage Tree, Ti Kōuka by Philip Simpson.

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