



Newsletter

Issue: 78

March/April 2013

Chair's Report from the AGM (30 April)

Peter Adams

This year has been a very successful year for us. I will briefly summarise some of our key achievements and plans for the future.

Firstly - Operations. We secured funding for two additional lines in the Deep Creek area – known as S line and U line. Many thanks to the Cobb Mitigation Fund administered by the Tasman Environmental Trust for its ongoing support. These lines fill in the area between the Flora Valley and Cobb Ridge and are both remote and wild; it takes several hours to walk into the start of the line even when all the roads are open. The lines were marked out with help of a group of US ecology students who have made trips into the area for several years now – thanks to Maryann and Bill for arranging this. All the traps to complete the lines have been purchased and the bulk of them helicoptered into place. We aim to position and set the traps over the next few weeks.

We mentioned last year that this would mark the completion of the trap network. However, Bill has identified a possible line on the southern edge of the Tablelands, near to the Leslie River Valley. We have applied for funding for this line to be completed over the next 12 months.

The importance of these boundary lines was shown in our trap results this summer. Whilst the interior traps showed fairly average kill rates there was an influx of stoats caught on lines such as P line, big D line and the Bush and Beyond R line. We believe this is due to stoats re-invading the area from the south-west where there is no predator control.

The closure of the Graham Valley road from July to December has made the regular checking of the trap very difficult and time consuming – several volunteers have made the long trip to the Cobb and then walked into the Flora from there.

In January, the annual whio survey showed 21 birds on the Flora which is an excellent result. This included Bill, one of the original males, otherwise the birds were all unbanded.

Finally, thanks to everyone on the operations team and all the line leaders and volunteers for their ongoing work - without this dedication we could not continue to achieve our goals.

Secondly – the Kiwi project. Firstly, the original kiwi population have settled down and established well defined territories. We had several breeding attempts culminating in the hatching of our first kiwi chick just before Christmas. This is the first kiwi chick in the area in decades and is a great indication that the project is on track.

On a sadder note, one of the original kiwi, Patoto, died. A subsequent autopsy showed no signs of predation and we believe that he died of old age.

We identified last year that we needed to increase the population of kiwi in the Flora so that it could become genetically sustainable. We managed to get funding from several agencies to support the translocation and subsequent monitoring of the kiwi. This included a significant grant from NZ Lotteries who also funded the first translocation back in 2010 – they have been the financial backbone of the whole kiwi project. In addition, we received support from BNZ Save the Kiwi (now known as Kiwis for Kiwi), The World Wildlife Fund and Canterbury Community Trust. We would like to thank all these sponsors.

The success rate of our grant applications is a testament to the quality of work that supports the application, especially at a time when money is tight and there are lots of groups chasing small amounts of money. Thanks especially to Robin, Sandy and Sandra who spent many hours working on these applications.

Once we had the funding in place, Robin and Sandy developed a plan for the second translocation of up to 20 kiwi. This was a very time consuming process as they had to identify and survey possible source sites, get approval from DOC and local iwi, arrange all the logistics of working in remote areas, identify where to release the kiwi, and arrange all the people and materials to make the translocation go smoothly.

In March this year we successfully translocated 12 kiwi from the New Creek area in the Buller Valley to the lower Flora Stream area. The translocation went extremely smoothly and the birds are being intensively monitored to see how they disperse .

We had planned another translocation of up to 8 birds this April but the heavy rain has meant we have had to delay this. We are now planning to do the second translocation in May if the weather allows. Again, a big thanks to Robin, Sandy and all the kiwi trackers for their work over the year.

Thirdly – as you probably are aware, the Animal Health Board is planning an aerial 1080 operation in the area over the coming months, including part of the Flora trapping area. After consultation with DOC we agreed to support the operation and to extend it so as to cover the entire trapping area up to the bush line. Thanks to Maryann, we have found a sponsor who will pay the entire cost of our share of the project – many thanks to T Gear Trust for this.

The AHB operation is aimed at removing possums from the area, as they are a carrier of bovine tuberculosis. It is also very effective at killing rats and mice who feed on the bait and through secondary poisoning, any stoats which eat the dead carcasses. We are working with DOC and AHB to determine the best timing for the operation. The removal of possums from the Flora will help the ecosystem to recover especially plant species such as rata and mistletoe and the *Powelliphanta* snails. Possums and rats also raid the nests of the smaller birds, so we hope that we will see an increase in bird activity, and we will be doing bird monitoring to check this.

Vector Marlborough, who is carrying out the 1080 operation, is currently undertaking public consultation and will then apply for resource consent from the Tasman District Council (TDC) – we will keep you updated via the newsletter.

Fourthly: Finances. FOF is in a very strong financial position compared with previous years thanks to the successful grant applications as mentioned above, and a number of very generous private donations. I think this is also a testament to the increased visibility of FOF due to articles in the local newspapers about the kiwi chick and kiwi translocation. We have also raised funds through events such as sausage sizzles and trap building. I would like to thank everyone involved and especially Sandra for her excellent financial management over the year.

Fifthly, I would like to thank everyone from DOC who have worked with us over the year. We really appreciate the help and support you give us and we are very aware of the current uncertainties surrounding the reorganisation. Thanks especially to Chris, Kate and Ivan who put up with us on a day to day basis.

Finally: The Future. Over the last 12 years FOF has achieved huge successes, especially with the reintroduction of whio and kiwi in the Flora Stream area. Our trap network is (almost) complete and with the next kiwi reintroduction we hope to have a sustainable breeding population. So, where next?

We plan to sit down over the next few months and plan where we want to put our efforts over the coming years. Obviously, maintaining the trap network and monitoring kiwi are a necessity, but we will also be looking at areas such as education and advocacy. We also want to look at how we can attract and involve younger people into FOF so as to future proof the organisation. Also, if we can achieve an effective rodent control programme, we could look at reintroducing other species such as mohua. We will send out information on how the plans are progressing via the newsletter and emails, and we welcome any ideas and suggestions from you all.

Kiwi Update

Sandy and Robin Toy

The excitement continues!

March saw the annual transmitter change programme for kiwi brought into the Flora in 2010. We were interested to see what impact the dry summer and breeding activity had on the kiwi. They were all lighter than they were at this time last year, but most were not in poor condition.

The expedition to translocate kiwi from New Creek in the Buller, was planned to start on 18 March and predictably the summer-long drought broke on 17 March! We delayed the start of the trip and the catching team comprising 8 people and 4 specially-trained kiwi dogs did an incredible job finding twelve kiwi. The following extracts from Robin's diary gives an idea of what was involved.

20/3/13

James and I headed out with Peg, the pup, and Percy, the master kiwi dog. James kept Percy to heel sending Peg out to do the running, seeking out scent. When she appeared to have found something he'd bring her to heel and have Percy go off to investigate. Incredible skill. Pretty quickly Percy found a kiwi pair in a burrow.

21/3/13

Jen and I found the bird wearing Tx7 in a monumental palace of a burrow, with a rock wall on one side, and massive tree roots passing down through one chamber with a second cavernous chamber to one side. No way we'd get her out I thought. Radioed James to see if he wanted to try to catch the bird as she left the burrow at night. He said he'd come and look at the burrow. Within moments of James, Tash and Ruth arriving Tx7 was in the bag. They cut away the entrance to the burrow, Ruth crawled right in and turned around to pass out the bird!

22/3/13

Refers to release of some of the kiwi into the Flora...The sun came out and the ground was (at last) damp from the recent rain. As I put each of the birds into their burrows, Joy sang a haunting waiata. It was tear-jerkingly moving. Wish you well kiwi!

23/3/13

Night catching involves finding an open space (best done during the day before), preferably with fallen logs that will be a barrier to kiwi but not humans. The catchers are deployed around the area and stand silently in the dark, listening. Every so often the lead catcher plays recordings of kiwi calls. When kiwi call the catchers estimate the bearing and distance, then keep listening. Sleepiness enfolds you but you have to keep listening for the tell-tale crunch of a kiwi moving close by. When you hear the crunch, the adrenalin kicks in and the sleepiness evaporates. If the bird is outside the circle of catchers you give a quiet whistle, if it's within the circle, you whistle twice. Ideally, the bird will walk right by a catcher, at which point they put on their head torch and catch the bird in a hand net or, especially if it is thick undergrowth, just by hand. Sometimes you have to give chase, but the kiwi move and turn fast, so it's really hard. It's not for the faint-hearted, nor those who cannot cope with sleep deprivation.

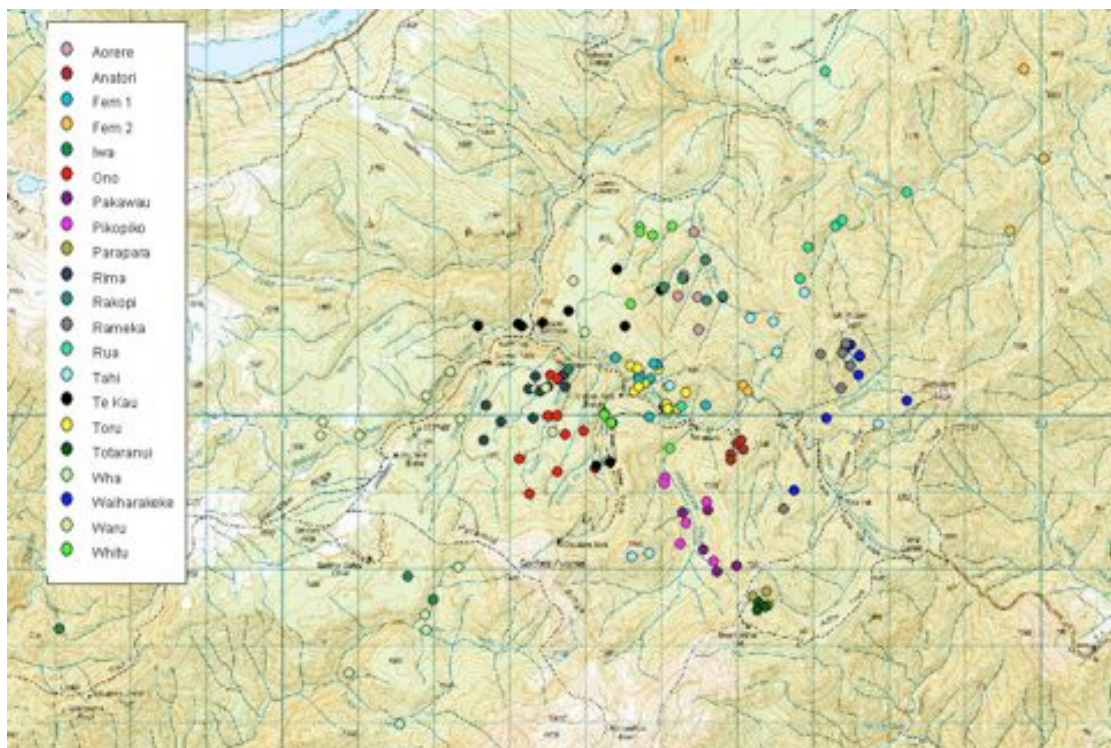
24/3/13

Everyone rather befuddled with sleep deprivation this morning, but the dog teams had another search but no joy. We headed out again about 20:30. At the first and second sites birds responded to calls, but didn't come close, at the third, a male came almost within reach, but eluded us when we switched on our head-torches. Back to camp at 3:30 am as the rain started again.

The translocated kiwi were blessed by iwi representatives at the field camp in New Creek and again in a ceremony at Te Awhina Marae in Motueka. They were released into pre-prepared burrows which were blocked until dusk. The kiwi spent the first night in their new home quietly investigating their immediate surroundings. But they quickly found their legs and within one week had dispersed up to 4 km. Our monitoring route now includes the summits of Mt Arthur, Gordon's Pyramid, Lodestone and Hodder! The girls are being particularly adventurous while the boys have remained relatively close to their release sites. The maps below show their latest locations.

Our target was to bring an additional 20 kiwi in to the Flora to increase the genetic diversity of the founder population. We planned to get the additional eight kiwi from the upper Roaring Lion River valley as soon as the wilderness area hunting block permit expired. This expedition is highly weather dependent because of the necessity for helicopter access, and once again Murphy stuck his oar in – the expedition was due to start the day of the first big rain bomb! So we postponed, and are keeping our fingers crossed for good weather in May.

Twelve additional kiwi does not sound like a big deal, but the effort involved has been huge. So many people contributed generously with their time, funding, advice and support and a huge thank you to you all. Special thanks to Alan White who made the New Creek expedition happen and looked after the whole team; to Lesley Hadley who has everything ready to go for Roaring Lion and was a vital member of the team that camped up in the Flora to release the New Creek kiwi; to the kiwi catching team who were totally committed – even to the extent of working day and night with a broken shoulder in one case and to DOC – three area offices as well as head office were involved and there wouldn't be kiwi in the Flora without their dedication and expertise.





Joy Shorrock assists Robin transfer one of the New Creek kiwi to a carry bag for release into its new home in the Flora. *Photo: Alastair Paulin, Nelson Mail.*

Rod Morris talks about Don Merton (22.2.39-10.4.2011)

The world renowned photographer and conservationist Rod Morris spoke after the business section of the AGM on the work of Don Merton. Don Merton joined the NZ Wildlife Service as a young man and it was his passionate love of birds and our environment, which led to him leading the teams that saved the South Island Saddleback, the Kakapo and the Chatham Island robin. His passion, knowledge and practical dogged approach to solving problems,

Don Merton



such as how to transport a black robin from one small island to another (using a billy of warmed bully beef) led to these bird populations reaching their current numbers. “Old Blue” was the female Chatham Island robin which was able to breed and hence save the population. The Forest and Bird award “Old Blue” was awarded to Maryann and Bill for their work in conservation in 2012.

What’s that Plant?

Marie Firth

FoFers working up on the Cobb Ridge (≈1000m) recently came across this beautiful black flower (*Photo: Deb Foster*). It is *Myosotis macrantha*, one of the native forget-me-nots, which is a tufted perennial herb. Its colour may vary from a yellow/pale gold through to brownish orange/bronze, and can be found in subalpine to low-alpine regions in the wetter mountains from Nelson to Western Otago, ranging from 600m to 1500m. Its sweetly scented flowers appear between December and February.



2013 : A Rata Year

Lesley Hadley



Many people have commented this year on the abundant rata flowering. Hills have been ablaze locally, up the Wangapeka and on the Heaphy. When I was doing my trapline on Lodestone on 1 February, the eastern slopes of Lodestone running down to the south branch of the Graham Valley were scarlet. I spoke to local historian Ed Stevens, who had his

binoculars focused on the rata flowering up the Big Pokororo from his home in Greenhill Road. Being a data collector, he had some interesting notes on rata flowering and other possible connecting factors over the years . . .

The following extract is drawn from an interview with Jim White of 'Glencoe', the last house in the

Graham Valley: *"There was an abundance of native plants back in the ranges. I've seen the long spur leading back to Mt Lodestone red with rata. Also there were rata trees and lacebark (ribbonwood) and others on Sugarloaf."* The White family moved to 'Glencoe' in 1932 and left in 1948.

Avelon Thorn comments that the first possum he ever saw was one that their vehicle ran over on the east bank of the Motueka river, opposite the Pearse valley (the possum ran away). This was in 1932.

At one time it is reported that the rata flowered every other year but since about 1950 visible flowering had almost disappeared. Rata flowers appeared to be much reduced since the possum browsed the trees.

Whilst mustering on the Graham/Pokororo ridge about 1960 Mike Brereton and Ed Stevens paused to reflect on the dead rata trees standing tall and stark amongst the surrounding fauna of native bush on the near faces.

Local knowledge suggests that possum numbers peaked about 1950.

In the 1970s possum trappers, Mike Brereton and Alan Stevens observed rata in flower on the true bank of the upper Graham River on the faces leading to Lodestone. Alan, who farmed this area, called the face the Fuschia Block. Jack Brereton also observed rata in flower at the top of the Graham Valley south gorge in the 1970s. Possum trapper Mike Newman worked the top and bottom side of the upper south branch of the Graham road and in 1970 observed a good showing of rata in flower on the faces of the Lodestone ridges.

February 2004 Ed observed 2 -3 rata trees flowering on a ridge leading from Mt Campbell to Big Pokororo but also took another photo of the devastation to the rata caused by browsing possum.

In 2005 aerial application of 1080 poison for possums was spread on the exotic forest between Pokororo and the Riwaka River south branch, and in 2009 from the upper margin of exotic afforestation to the Lodestone/Mt Campbell ridges.

On Jan 20th 2013 Ed observed rata in flower on the southern slopes of Little Brown Acre. Predominance of flower appeared to be on the main ridge leading from Big Pokororo. Colouration became more visible in late January.

The rata is presumed to be *Metrosideros umbellata* (southern rata) which grows from the ground up to a tree (as compared to northern rata, the epiphyte) and flowers have a reddish-orange colouring.

So the rata has obviously maintained a basic presence throughout the years and this year was a splendid show so I hope you saw it. If anyone has more information or observations to report, feel free to let us know through the newsletter or telephone. Ed is particularly interested in monitoring rata on any slopes / ridges leading into the Motueka Valley.

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Other News

DoC Cuts

FoFers will be aware of the changes occurring within the Department of Conservation. Staff losses in the Motueka/Golden Bay area will occur. FoF strongly opposes the loss of these highly valuable people, with their expert knowledge and skills. A letter has been sent to the Director-General of Conservation (Al Morrison), and the Minister of Conservation (Nick Smith) expressing our dismay at the cuts and our belief that the loss of local experts, and our belief that this will severely impact on the effectiveness of conservation in this region.

Cobb Steatite Mine

Application for a resource consent to mine steatite in the Cobb has finally been lodged with DoC. DoC is currently considering this application.

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