



Newsletter

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President's Report *Pete Adams*

Firstly, many thanks to Marie for volunteering to take over the newsletter – we look forward to many interesting and informative articles from her. A special thanks too to Maryann for her hard work and insightful newsletters over the past couple of years. There are lots of new challenges coming up for FoF over the coming year – concerns over a possible beech mast in the Flora (which could cause a rat plague), decisions on how to increase our population of resident kiwis and, of course, all the ongoing work on trapping and tracking. We continue to work closely with DOC Motueka on these issues and we are hopeful that the new National Heritage Management System (NHMS) will recognise the ecological significance of the Flora; we'll find out next year. Thanks as always to our great team of volunteers for all their time and efforts and best wishes to all for the upcoming festive season.

Kiwi Update *Sandra and Robin Toy*

Thanks to a grant from the Tasman District Council, FoF have acquired some acoustic recording devices. These flash bits of gear can be placed in the bush for extended periods and will record all the noises around. The sounds are recorded on a card and the data converted to a sonogram, which can be scanned on a computer. This enables many hours of recording to be 'viewed' in minutes. We plan to place the recorders in the area between the Cobb and the Flora to determine whether kiwi move between the two areas. The recorders are admirably suited for this sort of project being much more likely than human listeners to pick up calls from low densities of birds. That the area is relatively remote gives the acoustic devices an extra advantage.

We have done a trial with the devices in the Flora catchment to learn how best to deploy them. We ran 4 devices for 9.5 hours a night for one week. This has given us 1004 files to analyse, which will take a little while, but already we're getting useful information. The very first sonogram we looked at was a challenge to interpret. It turned out to be a male kiwi calling in the distance, with a weka calling much closer at the same time and then a distant female kiwi joining in!

We're getting better at interpreting the traces and fortunately the software enables us to listen to the sonogram when we are uncertain about the trace. We've learned that the devices need to be placed in sheltered positions, since although the recorders can pick up kiwi calls in windy conditions, spotting the patterns on the sonogram can be tricky. We've confirmed that most kiwi calls occur in the 2 hours around dusk, although they do call throughout the night and there's often a call at dawn presumably as they head for the burrow. We've found great variability in call rates on different days. On the first night of deployment one device placed near Mt Arthur hut recorded 19 kiwi calls, while on the next night it recorded only 7. Imagine how you could misinterpret results if you only listened on a night with little or much call activity. It's not all tricky, some patterns are really clear, such as a male - female kiwi duet to a morepork accompaniment! We've also picked up long-tailed cuckoo, kea, pipits, blackbirds, bellbirds and of course, weka. Now we're looking forward to lots of information from Deep Creek – hopefully containing kiwi calls! Finally, if you stay at Mt Arthur Hut and sit outside particularly soon after dusk, you're very likely to hear a kiwi call.

The tale of a troublesome kiwi

Anaweka has had us worried. She went for an excursion into the Pearse last autumn but returned to her mate, Anatori, after a few weeks and settled down for the winter. Then in September she shot off back to the Pearse again. We kept monitoring her in the hope that she'd head back to Anatori before too long, but one day picked up a 'mortality' signal from her transmitter. This signal kicks in when the transmitter is stationary for more than 24 hours. So it could mean that Anaweka had died or it could be the result of the transmitter falling off. The latter can happen since the harness that attaches the transmitter to the kiwi's leg is designed to break after 18 months or so. If it had broken, it had done so prematurely.

So we needed to find the transmitter to work out what had happened. Unfortunately the Pearse is tiger country with lots of bluffs and gullies, which not only make access tricky but makes tracking difficult too, due to blocked and bouncing signals. After a lot of effort in narrowing down the search area we finally tracked the transmitter down to a deep rocky gully. Thankfully the transmitter was on the surface in the open without the harness and with no bones or feathers in sight. So it's most likely that it fell off naturally and that Anaweka is out there laughing at us. Our one chance of finding her now is at transmitter change time when we might just find her in the same burrow as Anatori. Slim chance!

Operations Report *Pam Jenkins*

We have had a really busy time since the last newsletter. The snow has finally melted enough for all the lines to be checked, traps that haven't been seen for months have been re-baited and given an overhaul as part of the annual routine of 'line maintenance'. Snowfall has been so heavy this year that a section of D line around Lake Peel has suffered irreparable damage to its traps and boxes. A hard slog up there and back to retrieve them all was done by the same team that put them out only a year ago!! A real sense of deja vu was had by all!

On a really positive note, another new line has been completed. Last month a team of volunteers climbed up Mt Hodder to survey their way back down along Ghost Creek, popping out on the track that leads to Barron's Flat, just 1km east of the end of I line. A second visit made sure the tags were all in place, so that no-one would get lost! Followed by a helicopter drop of the traps on the top of Mt Hodder - and so everything was ready for the American ecology students to do their bit. This new line or 'Little F' as it is now known, incorporates another 3.5kms of stoat traps and seems to be a popular place for a group of inquisitive kaka seen on each visit there so far.

We have also had a really interesting talk this month by Chris Golding from DOC about best practices for stoat and rat traps, involving setting, maintenance and 'on the job' repairs. Chris advised us on 'do's and don'ts' and had plenty of helpful tips. It was a great forum for discussing ideas and problems with traps that we all, as it turned out, had in common. We had a great turnout, despite the horrible weather and everyone who attended came away knowing much more than they had when they arrived.

Finally, some more good news is that our numbers for kills were one of the lowest ever for October, perhaps due to so much snow, in particular the late falls.

More great news *Maryann Evers*

FoF would like to send a big thank you to Keith Broady and his friend Selwyn who responded to our request for backpacks. We are thrilled to have been given a number of backpacks by Selwyn and they have been used on our recent deployment of traps along the extension of F line. We are still in need of some backpacks for our trapping line crews, so if you have a backpack lying around that you might not need, we can put them to good use!

Congratulations to our DOC Motueka liaison officer - Chris Golding. Chris and his partner Caz Gray welcomed a son, Liam, on October 19. We wish them all the very best.

US Wildlands Studies Students

For the third year, we have once again had a group of 16 American ecology students and their 3 instructors, this trip - Adam, Mike and Annie - spend 3-days in the Cobb/Flora area doing volunteer work on our project. Volunteer FoFers Pam, Steve H and Maryann were with them organising and helping for the 3-days. Three good days of trap work were put in by these very keen students - none of whom had experienced trap work

before – and all jobs were accomplished. This included monitoring traps and laying out traps on a new line. One day was a very arduous one; walking from the Cobb, over Peat Flat into Lower Junction, up Ghost Creek and then up a spur off Hodder Ridge. There they picked up the harnesses and boxes dropped by helicopter a few days before. They returned down the spur, dropping off the 35 (3.5km) boxes to the junction of Ghost Creek and the main Lower Junction track, then returning to the Cobb. A huge ‘THANK YOU’ to all the students and instructors, for the help they have once again given FoF/B&B (Bush & Beyond) in our conservation project. The students followed the conservation volunteer days by a walk through the Heaphy Track, to learn more about conservation in NZ, and our flora and fauna. Also, many thanks to DOC Golden Bay once again, for allowing us the usage of the hostel and the rangers’ house for this time.

Ed's Note: The Newsletter is very plain for this issue, as I am still learning how to keep it to under 1 megabyte. Bear with me and I will soon start being able to include all the graphs and photos!! Many thanks!! Regards, Marie.

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