



# Newsletter

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## Chairperson's Report

*Peter Adams*

Some updates on the progress with the planning for the Salisbury BMU and the changes in local DOC structures. Subsequent to the planning meeting, we have written to Lou Sanson to express our concern with the lack of clear timescales and funding for the project - we will keep you updated on the response.

Salisbury Biodiversity Management Unit update (from Sandy)

DOC organised an expert workshop to progress management planning for the Salisbury Biodiversity Management Unit. Representatives from FOF, Forest and Bird and NZDA were invited. Maryann and Sandy attended on behalf of FOF.

The workshop followed a structured process to develop a high level 'Conceptual Model' for each of the main aggregations of ecosystems in the unit. In our case these are: alpine, forest, freshwater rivers and lake, tussock and subterranean karst and caves. It was fascinating to have the experts confirm what we all know – the Flora is a very special place! The number of rare ecosystems (for instance, wetlands associated with forested karst) and number of threatened species was a surprise and it was great to learn more about these unique features. There was good discussion about boundaries, and we are hopeful that the upper Grecian and the ridgeline from Hoary Head to Lodestone will be included in the Unit.

The draft conceptual model resulting from the workshop was a good result. However, (why does there always have to be a however?) we were very disappointed that there is no clear process or timescale to complete the management planning and subsequent implementation processes. Also of concern is the lack of funds to undertake any management.

DOC Structural changes - Nelson pilot (from Chris Golding)

All of DOC's work now comes under services ie visitor assets, biodiversity and what was called partnerships. Another group has been formed which is called Step Change (made up of a subset of previous partnership staff). This group will focus on progressing opportunities that will make a big change which could be in the form of obtaining sponsorship, supporting others to achieve large conservation projects etc.

In Motueka because we have such a large team we now have two services managers. One with a visitor assets focus (Mark Townsend) and one with a biodiversity focus (Chris Golding).

During the pilot the structure or other aspects such as processes will be tweaked as we learn what works well and what doesn't. At the conclusion of 90 days there will be a review and recommendations made.

It's been an amazing bird breeding season in the Flora – There have been 15 kiwi incubation attempts by nine pairs and it's delightful to be serenaded by young bellbirds, kakariki, tomtits, riflemen and robins every time we stop to track a kiwi.

To date four kiwi chicks have hatched this season, but there's exceptionally late breeding activity and two pairs are still incubating. In both cases, it's the third attempt this season, the first two having failed. We have monitored 11 of the 15 nests using infrared, motion-triggered cameras and so far we have analysed 3500 video clips. Wekas have been frequent visitors to most of the kiwi nests this year, with many instances of persistent wekas being chased away from the nest in broad daylight by an irate male kiwi. If you haven't already seen them, check out some of the video clips on FOF's Facebook page. You don't have to sign up to Facebook to see the footage – just go to the FOF web site [www.fof.org.nz](http://www.fof.org.nz), click on the Facebook link and scroll down through the videos/photos. The video is also showing loads of rodents around the nests but few stoats/weasels.

A hugely exciting highlight of the video clips, was footage of a little kiwi entering Hoire and Poai's nest - this is their chick from last year, nearly a year old and presumably taking a turn at incubation duty. Unfortunately despite the little one's assistance the incubation attempt failed, but it was a very satisfying video to capture!

Another major excitement was a clip of a male kiwi with absolutely no bling – no metal bands and no transmitter. Iwa, is one of last year's wandering females. We brought her back from the Peel and after a few months she settled near the Bullock track in an area with no transmitterd kiwi. In the spring, her activity dropped suggesting that she was incubating. If so, there had to be a male around. We put acoustic recorders near her and sure enough, we recorded some lovely male-female kiwi duets. But who was the male? Unfortunately, Iwa stopped incubating before a chick hatched and since the female is never on the nest during the day during incubation, we did not know where the nest was. However, a few weeks later, Iwa's activity indicated that she was incubating again. This time she stuck it out for more than 76 days suggesting that a chick had hatched. Many great spotted kiwi females stay in the nest with the male and the chick after hatch and we hoped this would be the case with Iwa. We tracked her to a castle of a burrow atop a steep slope with multiple possible entrances and dense scrub all around – a horrible site in which to install infrared cameras. Consequently, we were over the moon when we got clear video footage of a male kiwi without band or transmitter i.e. not a kiwi brought into the area by FOF. Early in the kiwi project, FOF, together with Friends of Cobb, did a kiwi survey of the Cobb, which confirmed there were a few kiwi in the Cobb. It has been a long-term hope that the kiwi FOF have brought into the Flora would hook up with and boost this remnant population, so it is great to have reached this milestone so early in the project. We have just seen a video clip of Iwa's chick, now looking strong but not entirely in control of his legs – he bumbles along and then tumbles down the steep bank in front of the nest!

The weather has changed and we're starting the kiwi transmitter change and health check programme. Paul and Sandra ponder how to approach the first pair.



### Stoats and weasels

FOF's flash new display materials (thanks for the funding DOC!) attracted attention at the Te Awhina marae Waitangi day celebrations. Lesley, Mike, Sandra and Sammy the stoat did a great job raising awareness of the impact of predators on the wildlife in the Flora. There have been increased weasel trap catches recently and several visitors to the FOF stand asked about the difference between stoats and weasels.

The photo below shows the difference in size with the stoat being larger (unusually so for the animals in the photo) and having a characteristic black tip to the tail. Despite its small size the weasel is still a nasty predator – look at those teeth!



### Operations Report

*Ivan Rogers*

Large numbers of rats and mice are being caught on the lines with 108 rats, 40 mice, 27 stoats and 7 weasels being caught in January alone. Weasels are being caught, and the differences between stoats and weasels is explained above. If it has a black tip to the tail it's a stoat. Weasels have short tails, no black tip and an uneven margin where their pale belly fur meets their upper body fur. This margin is clearly defined with stoats. While generally speaking weasels are much smaller than stoats, there is a degree of overlap between a big weasel and a small stoat. Some of the Flora weasels being caught (such as those on E Line) are at the high end for size and weight.

Line leaders are now being trained in the use of the new Volunteer Management System. This is a centralised database which allows catch data (among other things), to be entered directly into a database for analysis.

The bird life in the Flora is sounding great, and the weka are back along the road down to Lower Gridiron. We also see examples of *Paraphanta hochstetteri* in the bush, some just empty shells, but when we get lucky we see one out of its shell, such as this one on I Line recently (*these photos below by Chris Ecroyd*).



## Other News

*Maryann Ewers*

Friends of Flora have been asked to speak at the opening symposium of The NZ Ecological Society conference which is being held in Christchurch this year. This year it is focusing on non-government conservation initiatives in New Zealand.

On behalf of the organising committee, David Norton & Laura Young said “Given the magnitude of the biodiversity crisis we are facing and the lack of sufficient government funding, we want to explore the role that non-government groups (individuals, community groups, companies, Trusts etc) can play in achieving positive conservation outcomes. As part of this we would like to profile a range of different non-government initiatives and thought that Friends of Flora could be an excellent example to include.”

We have accepted the offer.

The excellent Friends of Flora film, made by film maker Owen Kilgour, has been selected for the Wildlife Conservation Film Festival in New York in October. For those of you who have yet to view this wonderful film, here is a link to it: <https://vimeo.com/107632657>

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