



Newsletter

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Goat control underway.

Contract hunters are sorting out the Flora's goats:



Photo: Backcountry Contracting

Backcountry Contracting, a respected team of North island contract hunters have been hunting on the Salisbury Open and Tablelands over November. The eight hunters are targeting goats and potting deer and pigs if encountered. All the hunters' dogs have been put through kiwi and weka aversion - their cv's are scrutinised by DOC for compliance to ensure they pose no risk to our great spotted kiwi project. Goat browsing puts the Flora's plant communities under stress. Threatened plants such as the forget-me-not *Myosotis augustata* and the marble mahoe in the alpine zone are particularly vulnerable to goat browsing. Able to breed twice every 18 months, if allowed to build up numbers goats' trampling further disturbs plant and animal communities, including the iconic *Powelliphanta* giant carnivorous snails.

Mass beech flowering.

Worrying signs from the beech forest:

An early and vigorous flowering of all beech species is raising again the spectre of a mass production of beech seed or a "mast" next autumn. A mast will inevitably lead to a massive increase in rodent numbers which in turn permits mustelid numbers to soar, putting pressure on native birds (BFOB). This phenomenon occurred only last year and prompted DOC's "Battle for our birds" aerial 1080 operations. Conservation

minister Maggie Barry is waiting for data to be gathered over the coming months on rodent tracking and beech seed production before making any decisions on a BFOB-type response.



Silver beech in flower, Pearse River, October

FoF at the Ecological Society's Conference.

Maryann Ewers delivers a reality check:

Last month's Ecological Society's annual conference (held at Canterbury University), featured an opening symposium on the first day focusing on non-government conservation initiatives in New Zealand. Given the magnitude of the biodiversity crisis we are facing and the lack of sufficient government funding, the conference was about exploring the role that these groups (individuals, community groups, companies, trusts etc) can play in achieving positive conservation outcomes. FoF was asked to represent one of these NGO's.

Lou Sanson spoke at the Symposium and his message was; rural/urban conservation - empowering communities, and philanthropic monies is the way to go, and this will save our native biota.

My talk was the opposite to this message. I focused around the realities of a stoat trapping program in-situ in a National Park; what FoF has achieved to date, and the pitfalls we continue to face. My emphasis was on the fact that trapping alone will not bring back a healthy ecosystem and unless DOC looks after our conservation lands until such times philanthropic money MAY come along, there won't be anything left to save - it will end up a restoration project at best. The best tool we have to do this at this time is aerial 1080 and we should take heed of what the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Dr Jan Wright, has said; we need to use more of this, more often, over a greater area.

It was well received, with many calling it the 'reality check' that was needed. If anyone would like to read my presentation, please email me at: maryann14@xtra.co.nz

Carpark kea concerns.

Don't feed Maximus:

Kea are regularly visiting the Flora carpark and inevitably visitors will succumb to the urge to feed them. We all know this leads to bad behaviour and possible health problems for the birds so DON'T! Warning signs to not feed the kea are in place. A useful thing for visitors to do is record (and photograph if possible) any banded birds as sightings of such birds are extremely useful to researchers. One of the carpark kea, boasting the name "Maximus" was identified by his blue band with a yellow "D". Sightings can be notified to the Kea Conservation Trust www.keaconservation.co.nz



Note band combo: white W on red above metal on (from the bird's view) right leg, white W on red left leg. Photo courtesy of Leimomi Oakes

Salisbury block Ecological Management Unit fascinating facts

Sandy Toy has a further fascinating fact

This gorgeous creature is the Mt Arthur giant weta or *Deinacrida tibiospina* (many thanks to Neil Fitzgerald for generously allowing us to use his great photo). FOF is planning a monitoring programme for the weta, using tracking tunnels. It will run for 8 weeks over the summer.

Lesley Hadley is leading the weta monitoring programme. Please let her know if you're interested in being involved.

At about 4 cm in length, the Mt. Arthur giant weta is the smallest of New Zealand's unique giant wetas. They inhabit sub-alpine tussock and herbfields. They are nocturnal and during the day they hide in or under the bases of tussock, generally between 1300-1500 m. They are restricted to Kahurangi National Park and are rarely encountered, with fewer than 30 reported sightings reported from 1980 to 2012. The EMU is considered a stronghold for the species.



Predation is considered the greatest threat facing the weta, which evolved without pressure from mammalian predators. Every few years, the dominant tussock grasses (*Chionochloa* spp.) of the alpine zone experience a mast year and produce large numbers of flowers and later set seeds. This may result in pulses in the abundance of introduced mammals such as mice. There is evidence that a mouse irruption associated with a tussock mast event in 2010 resulted in a decline in giant weta on Mt Arthur. Over time, FOF's monitoring will enable us to assess whether the weta population is holding its own against periodic mouse irruptions or whether there is a long-term downward trend in weta numbers. The effects of mice on weta could also serve as an indicator of their likely effects on other threatened fauna in the subalpine.

Kiwi update December 2015

Robin and Sandy Toy keeping an eye on kiwi..

FOF trailcams have captured video of the first 2015 kiwi chick (<https://www.facebook.com/friendsofflora>). The nest, buried in a cleft in the rock face on Tahi's knoll, eluded us for virtually the whole incubation, but Sandy found it just in time to get cameras on the entrance before the chick appeared. We put three cameras on this nest, but when we came to check them, one had disappeared. The supplementary battery pack was still fixed to the tree, but the camera had gone. Lucky that we had three cameras, because the other two have videoed the likely culprit - a kea. Removing the camera from the battery pack is a real fiddle, demonstrating, once again, the intelligence and tenacity of kea.

Elsewhere five kiwi incubation attempts have failed. One went to full term and we suspect the chick may have died getting out of the egg. We know this is sometimes a problem with Operation Nest Egg, maybe it is for wild kiwi too. One other egg was broken in an altercation between the incubating kiwi and a pair of weka and another probably due to stoat- kiwi interaction. One egg was infertile and the reason for the final abandonment is unclear.

Since the last newsletter three more pairs have started incubating. The cameras continue to show very few rodents, even though footprint tracking tunnels are showing they are around. We have seen a stoat at one kiwi nest and a weasel at another. We've also seen some fascinating kiwi behaviour including the female Ngutu-roa calling vigorously when her mate is 'late' coming to relieve her from incubation duties (<https://www.facebook.com/friendsofflora>).

STUDENTS BACK AGAIN:

Bill Rooke leads a regular working party

American based Wildlands Studies is an Ecology based partner of California State University. They run field trips to New Zealand annually. This year was the 7th occasion a group of students, accompanied by tutors, Adam and Mikey (all but one time), have done volunteer work for FoF. Some FoFers may recall in past years the students placing boxes for us on several of our more remote lines. This year Steve, Pam and Bill accompanied them across the Tablelands as they weight tested traps on four lines. Near Salisbury Hut we also did a bat observation exercise, whereby the students spaced themselves on the tussock edge at dusk, for an hours quiet observation. This area had long tailed bats recorded via a bat recording box recently. No bats were observed but kea and morepork were. Kea were also heard at Flora car park, but the highlight was a student sleeping on the veranda of Balloon Hut being woken in the morning by a kea picking at this sleeping bag. A big thanks once again to Wildlands, and we look forward to seeing old friends , Adam and Mikey again next year.



The students relaxing on R line on the Cobb Ridge.