



Newsletter

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June 2016

AGM Report

Another well-attended AGM

The 15th Friends of Flora AGM was held in the new venue of the Motueka Sports Pavilion last month. After reports from DOC and committee members Chairman Peter Adams read out a message received from FOF patron Helen Clark.

“Although I am unable to attend your AGM, I’d like to convey the following message to you. Ecosystem destruction is a major problem worldwide, and in this day and age of climate change, we must all work together to save and protect what we have left. New Zealand’s biota is unique, and my congratulations go to Friends of Flora volunteers for the work you have been doing over the past 15 years which has been a massive contribution to protecting what we have left of our natural heritage. I look forward to the day when I am able to meet you all in person, and meanwhile I send my very best wishes.”

Peter went on to give a summary of our work this year:

- Final kiwi translocation successfully completed plus funding in place for the rest of the project
- 15 year milestone for FOF
- Good progress on the Salisbury Ecological Management Unit (EMU) with the drafting of the ecological values document, combined DOC/FOF surveys and the management plan underway. But high rat numbers and multiple mast years make ongoing pest control essential.

Peter gave thanks to all our volunteers, the committee, DOC Motueka, Euan Brownlee, funding agencies and local supporters

2016 Committee.

The current committee members, with the addition of Robin Toy, will form the committee for the coming year.

The official business of the evening being completed, Greg Pickford gave an illustrated talk on the stunning cave system lying beneath the Salisbury EMU.



photos: Greg Pickford

Fascinating facts: Giant springtails

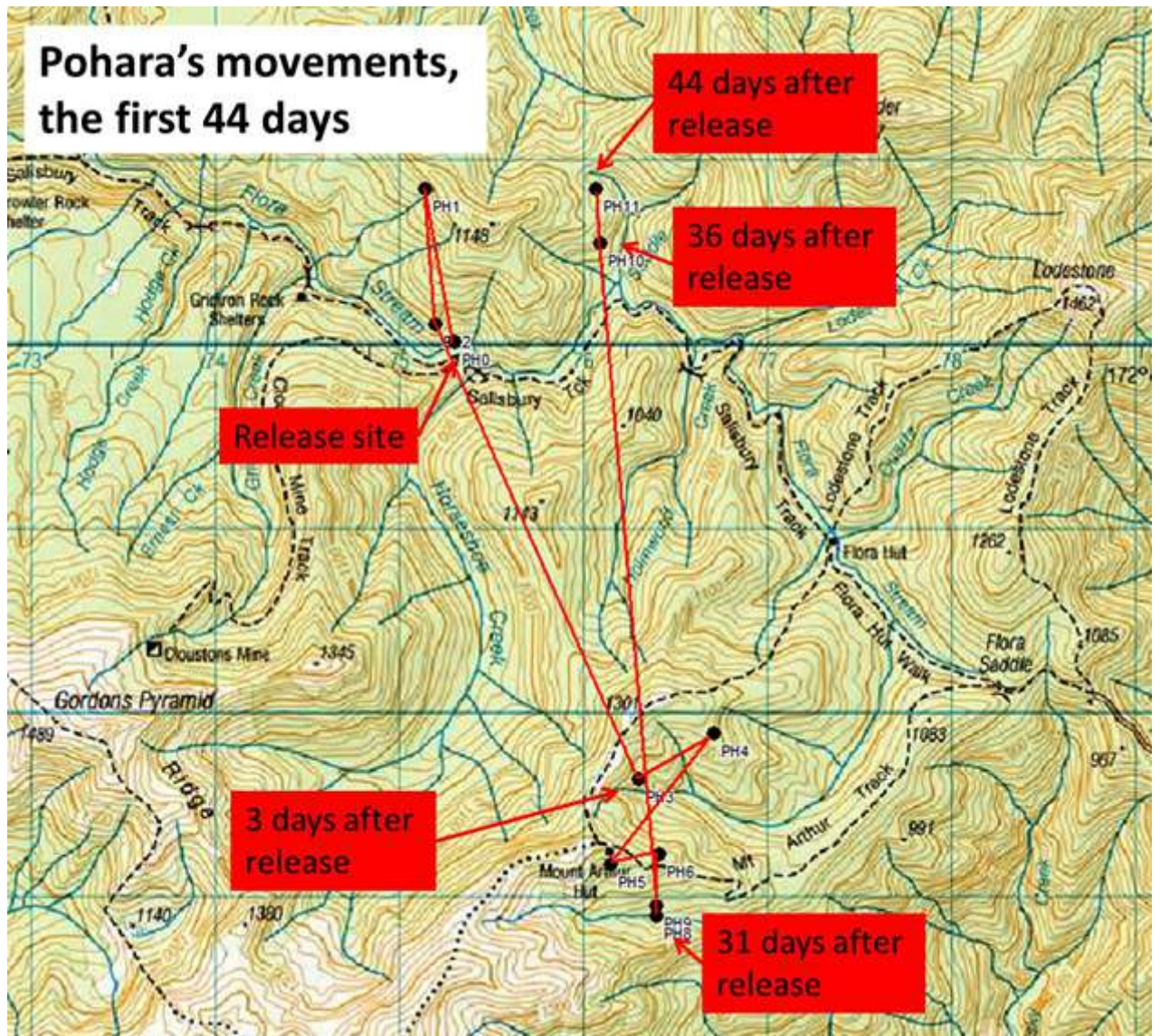


Sandy Toy with more fascinating facts: No this isn't a sea creature in the Flora! This wonderful creature (*Holcanthella paucispinosa*) is a giant springtail and as with so much of our biodiversity it only occurs in old growth forests in New Zealand, like those in the Flora. These giants can grow up to 17 mm while most of its relatives elsewhere in the world are microscopic (see the critters alongside the 18 mm coin). Not only are these giant springtails beautiful, they are essential to the health and continued growth of the beech forest. They feed on rotten wood, breaking it down and releasing the nutrients for trees and other plants to use. Like many of the Flora's special invertebrates they are susceptible to drying out and disturbance of the leaf litter by browsing animals.

Kiwi news

Our trackers run ragged by rambling roroa.

It's been a busy few weeks since the kiwi translocation trying to keep tabs on the wanderings of the new birds. So far, none of the pre-translocation pairs have stayed together, but we know from previous translocations that original partnership can reform a year or more after translocation. One bird, Pohara, has been particularly active, within three days of release at the bottom of Clouston's he had traversed the territories of three established pairs and moved up to behind Mt Arthur Hut, where he stayed for nearly a month. Just as we were thinking we might have to retrieve him before he disappeared irretrievably outside the trapped area, he moved 3.5 km back to Saddle Creek to join up with his pre-translocation mate. Unfortunately they hung out together for only a short period before Pohara took off again and we've failed to find him for a couple of tracking events. Hopefully he'll turn up again soon, although his mate, Wharawharangi, is now in the same area as another apparently single male, so he there may be some competition. Other vanished kiwi have rematerialized – we recently spent three days tracking and on the first two, a female, Awaroa, had vanished from her home range at the bottom of Horseshoe. We thought we'd searched thoroughly including all the surrounding valleys, but on the third day she turned up back in her normal spot. All go in the kiwi soap!

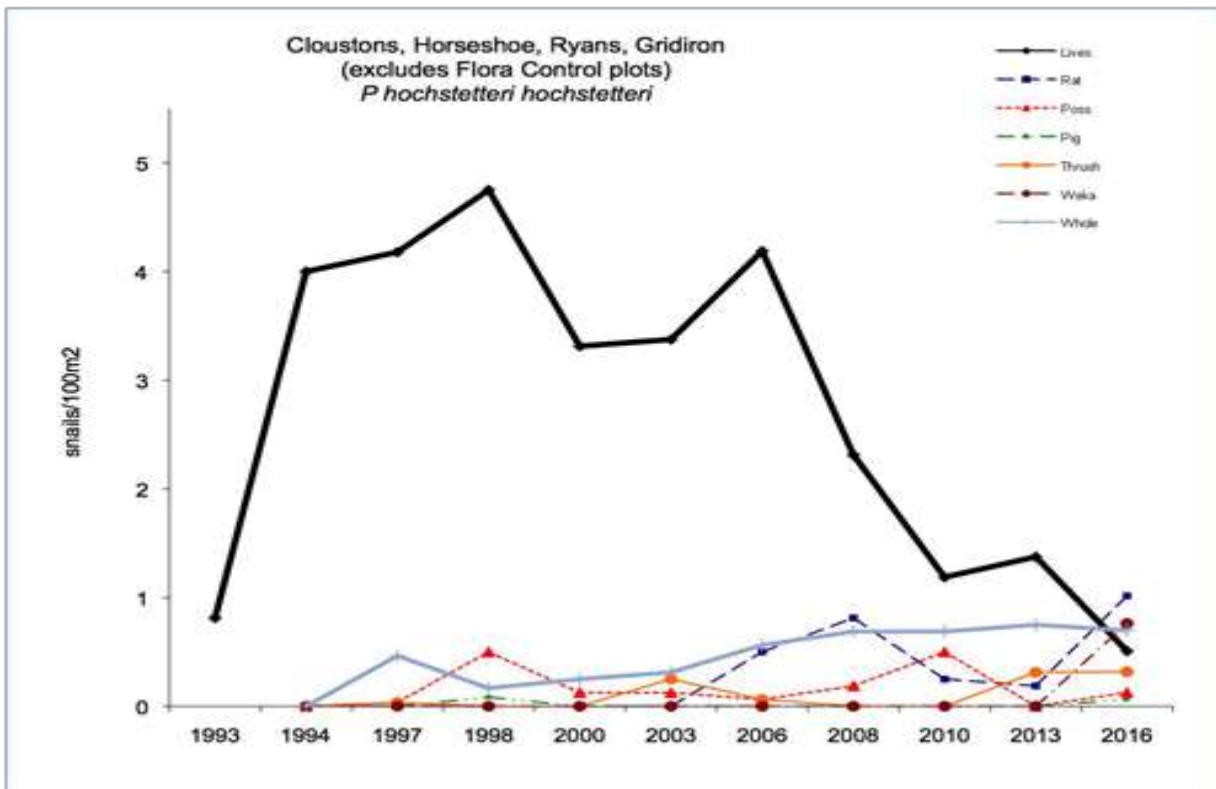
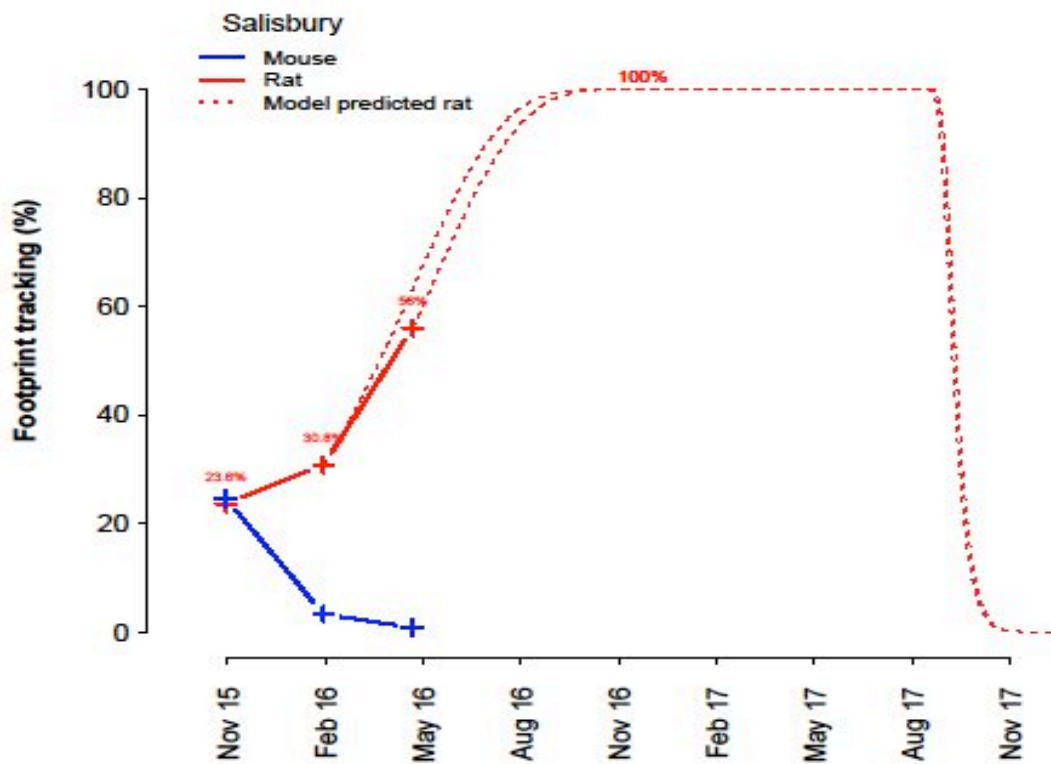


Rats threaten snails

A plan to arrest the rise of rats.

Recent snail surveys conducted by DOC with the help of FOF volunteers have revealed our precious giant carnivorous snails are continuing to decline. In a predator-free environment every 100m² should support 20 or so of our local giant carnivorous land snail *Powelliphanta hochstetteri hochstetteri* but rates have plummeted to 0.5 - 1. The major cause of predation is now the ship rat, numbers of which are soaring as a result of the massive production of beech seed this summer and autumn. The seed will not rot or germinate till spring so will continue to fuel the rat population for months to come. The 1st graph on the next page shows projected ship rat population growth - based on footprint tracking tunnel data collected in November 2015 and in February and May this year by FOF volunteers - reaching its maximum possible by August. The next graph shows the decline in live snails (solid black line) in four Flora plots and an associated spike in shells showing rat-predation (dotted blue line). Aerial 1080 operations scheduled for later this winter are expected to greatly reduce rat predation to allow the snails a chance to recover.

(Thanks to DOC for the use of the graphs)



Speckled skinks

Just a few sightings, but more than ever.

The handful of observations of speckled skinks made during the February surveys and another few made in other parts of the national park last summer is an encouraging sign that this elegant reptile persists in Kahurangi. Found in central New Zealand from Whanganui south to northern parts of Westland the speckled skink *Oligosoma infrapunctatum* is likely to actually comprise several species yet to be described. Variable in appearance - not all are speckled - they tend to grow larger than the common skink (now known as northern grass skink) and grow particularly large on islands. Those found to date in the Salisbury EMU are at relatively high altitude. The specimen below from Winter Peak was at around 1500m and had a distinct yellow belly. Many New Zealand skinks are difficult to identify and individuals within a species may appear more different to each other than individuals of different species. Unlike geckos (see last newsletter) tracking tunnel prints are little use for identification. For its size New Zealand has a very rich reptile fauna with over 40 gecko species, over 50 skink species and new species of each being described each year.



Photo: Ivan Rogers