



Newsletter

No.110

March 2020

As the Covid-19 lockdown sinks in, enjoy a catch up on the Friends of Flora's recent activities. First up, though, we need to reiterate DOC's trapping update for community groups such as ourselves –

Whilst we are at alert level 4, the Department of Conservation are strongly advising people not to check traplines on public conservation land or other public land. Checking traplines carries a risk of injury, particularly in remote areas, which puts pressure on already over stretched emergency services. In addition, handling shared equipment such as traps, trap boxes, radios, PLBs, and first aid kits increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Therefore, even if your trapline is close to home, please do not go and check it while we are at alert level four. We appreciate your energy and enthusiasm for working towards a predator free New Zealand, but right now our main priority is to flatten the curve of COVID-19.

If you have a trap at home, we do encourage you to keep this baited and set. It will be making a real difference to keeping predator numbers down in your immediate area, and ensuring native birds and lizards are safe when they visit your home. If you don't have a trap, talk to your local predator free group about getting one once it is safe to do so.

Best Practice Trap Network -

As readers of previous Newsletters would be well aware, the layout of the new double traps has consumed much of our group's time and energy. Robin Toy reports on the latest progress –

The programme to replace the single-set traps on the FOF network with double-sets is almost complete. Double-sets have become best practice since they are more effective; if one trap catches something, the trap station is still effective and the first catch may act as an attractant to a second pest.

Since 2015 new lines have been set up with double-sets, but there were 1114 single-sets on older lines. Some of these old traps were more than 15 years old and it was hard to keep them working efficiently.

DOC funded the replacement of most of these traps and flew them to strategic positions from which they could be distributed. Over the last year FOF has been slowly distributing the new traps. Old traps close to a road end were carried out. Special thanks to Regan Bridge who has moved about 200 traps on his own. Bizarrely one fadge of new traps washed down the Grecian River for 3 km in a

The washed-away fadge that floated down the Grecian for 3 km



flood, before they could be distributed! The float-away traps were largely unscathed, all credit and many thanks to the trap-building skills of Menz Shed Waimea.

Unloading the last 8 double-set traps from a fadge



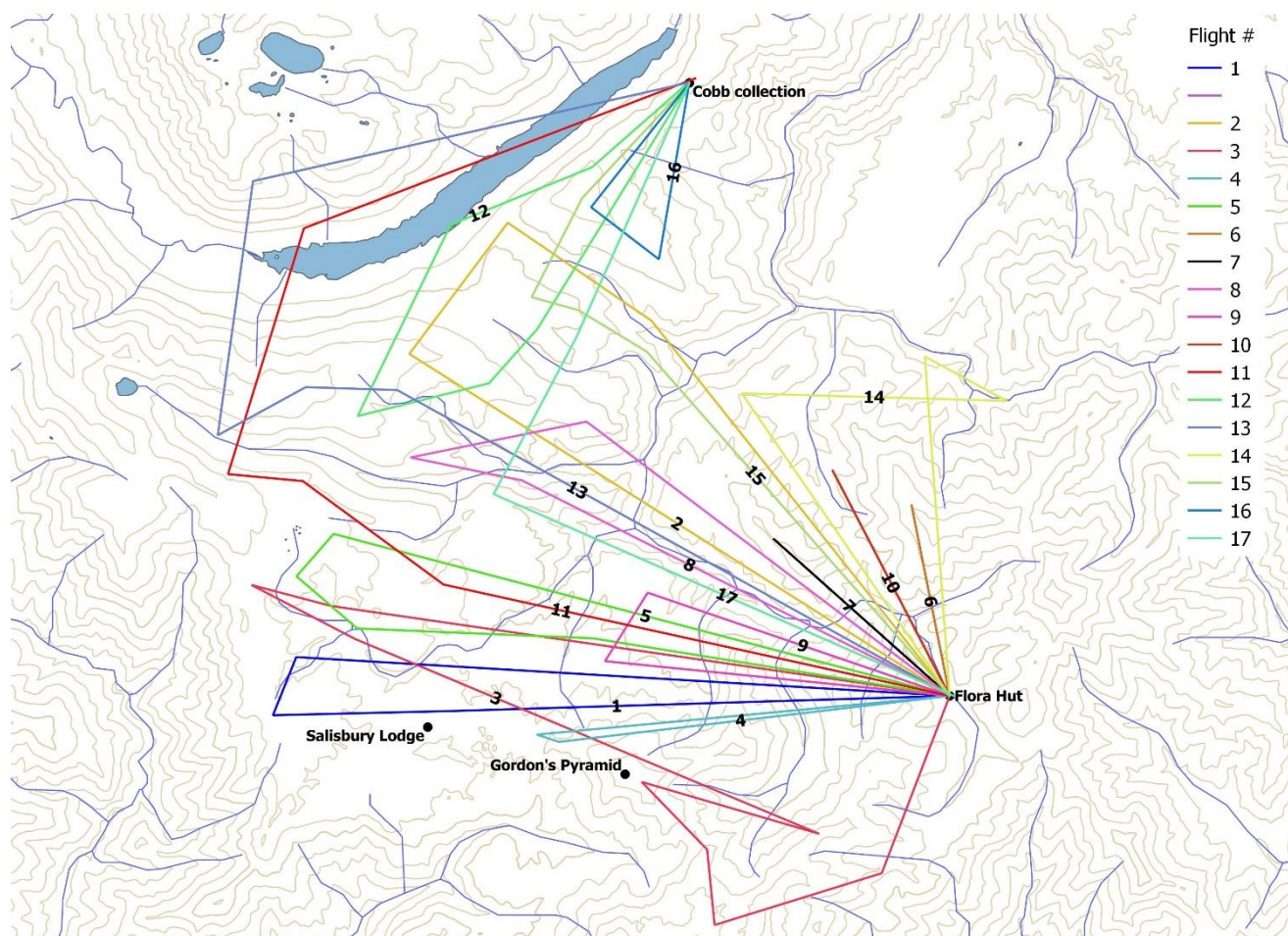
But there were still 440 old traps that needed to be removed by helicopter. This complex operation involved 12 people on the

ground, 55 helicopter movements and the removal of 42 fadges of traps. After two days of weather delays we removed all the traps on 5 March. Many thanks to the super- skilled team of Toby Reid and Hamish from Nelson Helicopters. The old traps were returned to Motueka for resale/reuse or disposal.

The DOC team leave the Flora with two trailers of old traps and the Cobb team with their bulky load >



The logistics of the chopper lifts required exact coordination, well represented in this flight plan prepared by Robin –



The removal of the old single traps by Friends of Flora has resulted in a tidier National Park, and will enable local predator control projects to benefit – once cleaning and maintenance has been undertaken.

The layout and installation work for the new doubles over recent years has been considerable, and the FOF volunteers and DOC staff who have jointly contributed to it – and this chopper retrieval exercise - are to be thanked. Robin Toy and Regan Bridge's individual contributions to the planning, monitoring and ground work, deserve particular praise – Ed.

Friends of Flora trial new laser-triggered camera traps on Tu Ao Wharepapa -

Sandy Toy discusses how science is assisting our biodiversity monitoring –

The vista of framing mountains is one of the defining features of the Tasman District, but what do we know about the biodiversity of those beautiful ranges and how it is faring? The Tu Ao Wharepapa (Mt Arthur) area is well known amongst botanists for its threatened plants, but what critters live in those harsh conditions?

Friends of Flora has trialled a new laser-triggered camera trap called Critterpic[®], to provide some answers.

The camera is under development by BoffaMiskell and Redfern Solution, and the answer is.....geckos, giant spiders, weka, skinks, cave wetas and devastatingly high numbers of mice.

Last year the tussock grasses mast seeded, providing abundant tucker for mice, and based on previous years' data we expect these high numbers are not 'normal'. We hope not, because they'll be feeding on our precious alpine beasties, the first photo below illustrating this threat.

Friends of Flora volunteers monitor trends in numbers of alpine giant weta, alpine lizards and rodents using 150 tracking tunnel stations. It is a long-term programme, and now we've identified the threat we need some tools to manage it. And the weka? They are so curious and can't resist the opportunity for a selfie! They'd probably enjoy a meal of a nice juicy lizard if they got the chance, but unlike mice, weka can't follow the lizards into the numerous rock crevices and so are unlikely to be a major threat.



Alpine Project -

Lesley Hadley reports - Early this month (April 2020) the last set of lizard FTTs were collected and all the field work finished for the 2019/2020 season. The analysis and recording of the data will be completed during the winter. To date, the cards have only been perused but even a quick look shows the high presence of rats and mice in the alpine tussock (see card below with rat, mice and gecko prints). This year the FOF alpine project has benefitted from:

- a visit and input from Jo Monk, a DOC herpetologist based in Dunedin
- 2 months' use of Critterpic cameras
- Sandy & Robin Toy's attendance at the World Herpetology Congress in Dunedin.

All the advice and information gained will be utilised in the planning of the 2020/2021 alpine project.



FTT card prints – Nov19 above

March20 right

What a difference in a few months!

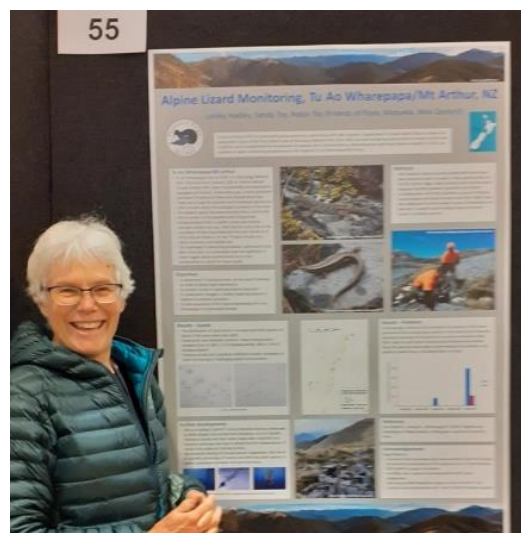


FOF goes international -

FOF's poster on the alpine monitoring project generated much interest amongst delegates at the World Congress of Herpetology in Dunedin. It appears there are few community groups involved in this sort of work.

Both Sandy and Robin Toy represented Friends of Flora at this Congress, and formatted the poster.

Herpetology is the branch of zoology focused on the study of amphibians and reptiles.



New site for critically threatened shy foxglove -

The Flora is a stronghold for the critically threatened shy foxglove (*Ourisia modesta*).

FOF recently discovered a new location for this plant with DOC confirming the identification. This wee treasure lives up to the 'modesta' species name, as it's some 300 times smaller than the introduced foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*). It is totally unrelated and everything about it looks different, so goodness knows why it was given the popular name 'foxglove'. The shy foxglove is only found in a few sites, so finding a new one is very special.



Whio Surveys – February 2020

FOF volunteers returned to the Flora and Grecian streams in February to see how the ducklings counted in December 2019 have fared. The results for December were 22 ducklings across both waterways, the majority being in the Grecian Stream. The February survey revealed 11 juveniles, so 50% made it from ducklings to young adults. Of the four single adult birds encountered one or two were possibly juveniles moving into adult plumage – chestnut flecking across the chest and the bill getting more pink-white than grey.

As a bonus a further pair was encountered in the Flora who had not been observed in December. So both the Flora and particularly the Grecian continue to host a very healthy whio population and we witnessed a pretty good breeding season all things considered.



Juvenile whio feeding (pic: Ivan Rogers)

Nearly ready for lift off –

The Grecian Biv will be ready for moving in several weeks. DOC ranger Stu Houston has just about completed his transformation of the old two person biv, and was caught last week giving it a dose of stain.

Well done, Stu. Your work will be much appreciated by the Grecian trap team, particularly during the wetter and winter visits.



Fire on Lodestone - 1462m



Thankfully this morning blaze on 2nd January was brought under control promptly by FENZ and DOC - thanks guys.

Friends of Cobb -

Nina, Chairperson of the Friends of Cobb, reports they are experiencing new challenges in the Henderson Basin above the Cobb Valley, with rodents becoming increasingly evident. To further protect their remaining rock wren population they laid out an additional ten traps in February, with 11 rats already caught.

This month's Cobb Road and Lower Cobb Valley trap checks recorded 7 stoats, 2 weasels and 51 rats - similar numbers to those for February.

Seeking a Social Media enthusiast.....

How can we best share FOF's messages? Social media is surely one way.

We dabble in Facebook, we periodically update our Website, and we issue this newsletter quarterly, but we could surely do so much more.

If anyone reading this has skills in social media and would like to help please contact fof@fof.org.nz.

From the Chair –

The current lockdown puts a dampener on our predator control work, but hopefully it is short lived for all our sakes. So, please keep the fitness up, and be ready to get back in when the all clear sounds.

A few new volunteers to welcome into the fold – Jenny G, Emily D, Pacey G, Chrissy and Warren K and Tim F. Many thanks for your interest in our work and hopefully we can show you the beauty of the Flora without too much delay.

Trap catch numbers remain at high levels, and mustelids still roam within our 10,000ha territory. As Robin pointed out in his article on page one, the double traps are purposely targeting multiple catches and will achieve this provided they are well bedded into solid ground and the energy generated from the initial trap snap is well dispersed through the side rebar or base plate. A considerable amount of refit work has been undertaken to address poorly laid traps during the past quarter, as if not addressed these traps just become expensive singles. Thanks to those volunteers attending to such key issues.

Lastly, a special thank you to those generous donors who continue to support our efforts and facilitate the variety of biodiversity work illustrated here, linked so intrinsically to predator control.

Keep well and safe

Cheers

Gerald

