



Newsletter

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September 2020

Hi there, and welcome to this quarterly update –

Highlights from the 2020 Kiwis for Kiwi hui – Sandy and Robin Toy:

We've just been down to Queenstown to the national kiwi hui, organised by Kiwis for Kiwi and DOC. As usual it was a great event, and hats off to the organisers for organising it, despite the challenges of COVID.

It was a huge privilege to meet Carolyn King, stoat researcher extraordinaire. She has written a wonderful new book which is available at Nelson library: *Invasive Predators in New Zealand. Disaster on Four Small Paws*. She reminded us of the complexity of predator dynamics and the need to focus on control to minimise residual stoat numbers, rather than numbers caught – a subtle but important difference. It has long been a challenge to determine residual stoat numbers using tracking tunnels.

Tom Agnew talked about ZIP's experiments using trail cameras baited with a stoat lure that may provide an alternative approach. Helen Blackie from Boffa Miskell, 'Zoomed' in and continued the optimising trapping theme – her focus was to take account of habitat preferences and animal behaviour to design trap networks, rather than relying on a standard grid approach. A lot of work is also going on to identify and trial new long-life lures. Reliable efficacy trials take time, so commercialisation is some way off still. All up, it was stimulating to imagine how in a few years we may be able to take advantage of all this work to trap more effectively.

On the kiwi front, it was exciting to hear about the establishment of a new population of rowi using Operation Nest Egg bred birds. Rowi is New Zealand's rarest kiwi species so this is a significant milestone. The dispersal of one of the newly released rowi was covered in the media last year, but if you didn't see the full video at the time, it is well worth checking it out: <https://blog.doc.govt.nz/2019/11/21/aroha-the-wandering-rowi-kiwi/>. Thank goodness none of the roroa translocated to the Flora explored in quite such gnarly places, although we did have to use helicopters to retrieve wanderers.

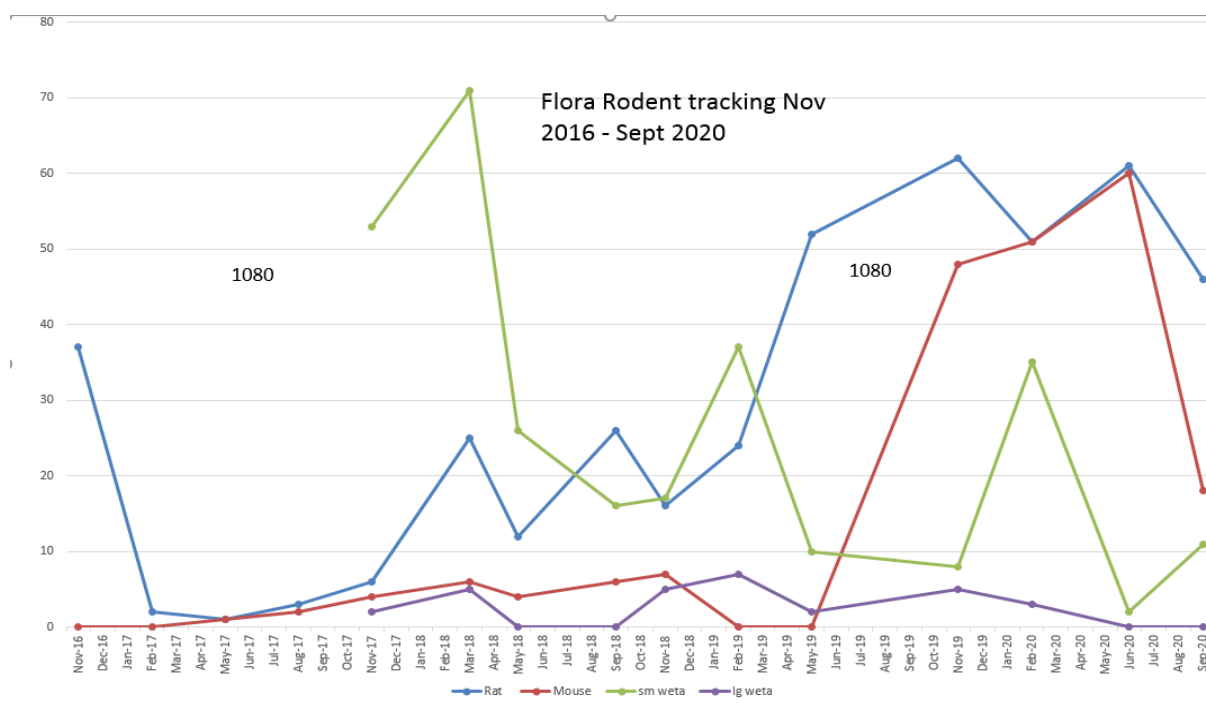
If you want to read about the wanderings of the Flora kiwi, a paper on their post translocation dispersal has just been published in *Notornis*. (Toy, R. & Toy, S. 2020. Post-translocation dispersal and home range establishment of roroa (great spotted kiwi, *Apteryx haastii*): need for long-term monitoring and a flexible management strategy. *Notornis* 67:511-526). It's available free online to members of Birds New Zealand, but we can provide a pdf on request to non-members.

A few trap lines have shown continued high rat catches, however thankfully the majority are now trending down from those distinctly higher levels seen earlier in the year. With consistently warmer weather (?) now upon us it is crucial to maintain regular trap checks for the protection of our breeding kea, rorua, whio and kaka - particularly from mustelids.

The autumn forest Footprint Tracking Tunnel monitoring has been done, with thanks to those FOFers who helped out. These are again due in November and, together with the summer Alpine Project work on the Mt Arthur Range, provide an opportunity for newer volunteers to be involved in a team day out, to access and enjoy some of our scenic, and more challenging off track, country.

Trap maintenance, calibration and weight testing still needs to be completed on some of the lines and working bees will be organised over the next few months, as required. This work is especially important for the new double traps - ensuring they perform properly, and don't just end up becoming expensive singles!

It's also great to hear that Farmers for Whio have now extended their Graham Valley Road trap line to meet up with our central line, just below the Flora car park. Their early mustelid catches within this non-1080 treated territory are an encouraging indication of their potential impact on predator populations along the Park boundary, and the benefit to the Flora wildlife.



Kokako sighting?

An apparent blue wattled kokako sighting in the upper Graham Valley last month has rekindled interest in this species and its uncertain status in the South Island. Visitors to the top of the Valley are requested to keep an eye open for this unique bird, the wattle colour being variable and likely age related.

This orange wattled specimen is a Te Papa exhibit.



DOC's Biodiversity Threats Team, based in Nelson, have been busy this winter wading the waters of Kahurangi counting whio. The thinking behind winter surveys is that the birds tend to be on the water for much of the day, whereas in warmer weather they tend to be more crepuscular. The results are very surprising - the Wangapeka/Fyfe Whio Security site last had a tally of 43 pairs from a dog-assisted survey in 2017. The winter survey has already turned up 75 pairs, with still a large chunk of the site to survey.

"The upper Takaka/Flora/Grecian looks pretty good too:- from Sams Creek up the Takaka valley including the Cobb, Diamond Lake Creek, Grecian River, Deep Ck, Balloon Ck and the Flora catchment (excluding Holmwood and Quartz Cks - still to do) we had 41 pairs (97 adults total). I was particularly impressed with the quality of habitat in the Grecian (13 pairs)" Said the Biodiversity Team's Jason Malham.

Friends of Flora will still continue with its summer surveys – December to measure nesting success, and later in summer to measure fledging success.

It seems quite possible that the national population of this icon bird - estimated in recent years to be around 2,500 individuals - is probably nearer to 5,000.



The red line shows waters surveyed, green dots show whio pairs and singles.

Readers of our recent Newsletters will recall the chopper retrieval of the older single traps from the field, and their replacement with double taps. These traps - which like ourselves remained hunkered down during the Covid-19 lockdown - have now been distributed to a variety of local conservation groups, spread from Golden Bay to Murchison. We sought some feedback from them on their particular applications -

The **Mārahau Halo Trapping Project** is a new local conservation group located in Mārahau - the Gateway to Abel Tasman National Park, and it's very popular Coastal Track. Whilst still small - ten volunteers and 75 traps - with support from similarly focused local groups we will ensure that our fledgling trap network enhances the extensive predator control work currently being undertaken within the adjacent National Park through the creation of a pest free halo at the southern entrance. In targeting stoats, weasels and rats, we are helping to protect those recently reintroduced native birds - kaka, whio and pateke - as well as the wide variety of wildlife.

Farmers for Whio is a group of landowners and volunteers looking to help protect the expanding whio population, which is spilling over from the Park into the lower catchments on non-conservation land. Our initial goal is setting up a trapping network along the river margins of the Pearce, Baton and Graham Valleys, all linked by the Motueka River, with rats and stoats being the main target species. This is going to require a huge number of traps, and the receipt of 40 of the old Friends of Flora traps was a very welcome addition to the project. Most of these traps are now already back in the field, with some being visible as part of a trap line through the gorge on the south branch of the Flora Rd, focused on areas with large numbers of rats. A new 27 trap line linking up to the Flora Carpark has got away to a great start with a catch tally of 39 rats, 6 stoats and 1 mouse in 8 weeks! A survey of the Graham Valley in the next week or two will help give us a clearer indication of the numbers/distribution of whio present in this catchment. *Barry Burger - FFW*

Love Our Little Blues is an informal, casual group of about a dozen Kaiteriteri locals with an interest in supporting and protecting the 'at risk/declining' little blue penguins/korora and their habitat along the Split Apple to Tapu Bay coastline, with rats, stoats, cats, dogs, car/boat strikes, set nets and water pollution amongst their current threats. To more accurately gauge their base population and distribution, Alastair Judkins and his tracker dog 'Mena' will next month undertake a survey through that coastline. Currently 25 x DOC200 traps are situated on private and public property, Core flute Victor domestic traps are available for sale, and nesting boxes are positioned as required to better protect the target families. Increased input by TDC/DOC is being sought to support our work - particularly in beach signage and bylaws - to complement public education and awareness, and link with similarly focused groups.

The **Friends of Cobb** provide a progress report on the last pile of traps, taken over Takaka Hill - Quite a few recently went to a new Native Forest Restoration Trust block in the Parapara inlet, some going to Bird's Clearing (an area abutting ATNP), and along Parapara beach - where traps don't last long because of the dynamics, but they do provide protection for nesting penguins amongst others. PeterG reported on the DOC200 traps sourced from them for his trapping project on the Tata Islands - off Abel Tasman Point, Golden Bay - Hi Guys, Just letting you know that the box traps you supplied have been water blasted and repaired where necessary, mechanisms taken out, cleaned and reinstalled and extra mesh on the front of each box to Weka proof them. With help from some volunteers they are all now in action on the islands.

Clarke Kaitiaki/ Clarke Valley Trappers - This is private/public land in the Clarke valley - beyond the Baton - with four landowners involved in predator control. We're focusing on looking after the forest birds - Robin, Riroriro, Mirimiro, Morepork, Korimako, Tui etc., have Whio visiting and the Weka population is fluctuating wildly. We have some skinks and orchids we look out for. The primary predator threats are rats, stoats and cats, with possum creeping back after 3 quiet years, and our main goal remains increased protection for whio.

The Natural Flames, Murchison – We purchased this business in 2015, a guided bush walk to a naturally occurring gas seep in the beech forest behind Murchison. The gas seep was ignited by a couple of hunters in 1922 and has been burning almost continuously ever since. The previous owners started trapping stoats and rats along the Flames track with just 6 DOC 200s and we have continued to do so, this year expanding that number by 30 x DOC 150s from Friends of Flora. The track is 2.5 kilometers long and the Blackwater basin is a well-defined area surrounded by hills. Our goal is ambitious - to see Kaka, and hear Kiwi, in the Blackwater basin around The Flames. We have caught 20 stoats 5 cats and around 80 rats along the track- a good start. Each year we have approximately 400 visitors who are drawn to experience a little of back country NZ and are very interested in what we are doing, and these goals.

Hancock Bonny Family Trust, Tadmores Hill – A 6ha QEII Trust block cleared of gorse and planted out with native species, all thriving and increasingly well established. We have been trapping for 10 years, using single DOC 200s, rat traps and combination rat/mouse poison stations. Our target species are primarily wild cats, stoats, ferrets and rats, to support the native fauna. We have several Kereru pairs, Korimako and Tui are heard singing most days, Piwakawaka flit around our house, Pukeko stalk the paddocks, and have a pair of Paradise ducks which raise a brood each year at the dam - and occasionally we hear the Karearea. Our goal is to support the neighbours in starting their own trapping and expand our joint species protection bubble.

Kina Bird Song – A recently established community project, working under the Tasman Environmental Trust umbrella and covering an extensive coastal area around the Moutere Inlet, from the Motueka Estuary Walk through to Ruby Bay, including Jackett Island. Their goal is to increase the variety and population of native birds throughout that coastal belt by predator trapping and the restoration of their long compromised habitat. This group is up for a long journey, and welcomes support from all nearby residents.

From the Chair –

It's great to hear that our old traps are being recycled into new and/or expanding predator control areas, together with an increasing community focus on flora and fauna restoration in Tasman District.

The challenges never get any less, regrettably, and we welcome support from all FOF volunteers able to contribute their time, energy and enthusiasm to our cause.

Thanks in advance!

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