



Newsletter

No.120

October 2022

Conservation Week – Spreading the Word – Chrissy Kaneen

This year's Conservation Week was 5th - 11th September, so on Saturday 10th we set up a display at the visitor kiosk in the Flora carpark with boards, photos, and a table full of information about the voluntary work we've been doing for 20-plus years now. A stoat trap, footprint tracking tunnel, ink cards, an information sheet of what people might find in the area, a map of our trapping lines - and lots more.



We had around 30-35 people that stopped to talk about our work, before heading in for their walks. There were a lot of positive conversations about what we do in the Flora - including many 'thank you' compliments - and people enquiring how they could get involved if keen in contributing themselves.

The highlight for me was when a family of four came through and the youngest boy came over - what an absolute sponge! After explaining a few things about what we do he brought over the rest of the family and promptly repeated everything we had said to them! With an information sheet in hand, they went on their walk, excited to see what they could find.

We were lucky regarding the weather, having a sunny, windless, warmish day on the Saturday, but unfortunately the Sunday forecast was sleety showers & rain, so we had to call it off. Many thanks to Jenny, Warren & Lesley for helping, and to Sandra who was all ready to go for the Sunday.

We have also had a pictorial display set up in our very smart new Motueka library, with photos of some of the amazing flora and fauna that can be found up in the Flora, together with a selection showing our keen volunteers at work on various projects through the years - including a number of group photos from the much earlier days.

Being 'Save the Kiwi' week, our displays have more recently focused on our resident Great Spotted Kiwi/rokoa, their return to the Flora after a long absence, and the measures taken to provide their crucial predator protection.



We are grateful to Janine, and the Motueka Library staff, for their ongoing support for ourselves, our displays and the work we undertake.

'The Friends of Flora provided a well organised display for New Zealand Conservation week at Motueka Library this year. It was superb to acknowledge the local environment, flora and fauna. As there is a lot of community interest in the natural environment and conservation, it made it all the more pertinent hosting this display in the new library. Thanks so much Chrissy and colleagues for this amazing support'.

*Janine Gillions
Branch Librarian - Motueka*

Te Noninga Kumu
Motueka Library

As the 2022-2023 breeding season starts at the kea nest, we have already seen some action.

The Female kea arrived at the nest on the 23rd of August with the male arriving on the 27th.

As of the 29th of Sept, both the female and male are settling into their normal routine and we also have photos of actual mating, so it is looking very promising.

A feral cat was spotted on the 4th of August - before the kea arrived - and has not been seen since.

As well, a few rats have been sighted, a possum, some goats, and a deer - but no stoats at this stage.



More news on roroa - Sandy Toy

It is now well known that roroa (great spotted kiwi) are tricky – they're notoriously toey, making them difficult to work with, they inhabit largely remote locations, are sparsely distributed and in the absence of sustained landscape-scale predator control have low productivity. Even their scientific name is confusing and changed from *Apteryx haastii* to *Apteryx maxima* last year. So, it's not surprising that the Flora roroa project is the only one (in the world!) to have translocated 44 founders, more than the recommended number for a genetically sustainable population. As previously reported the eight years of monitoring data in the Flora was analysed and published in the scientific journal *Notornis*. The most recent issue of *Notornis* includes another roroa translocation paper, this one by Peter Jahn and colleagues, and describes the dispersal of roroa

following their translocation to the Nina Valley. This involved 13 founders of the Arthur's Pass/Hurunui population of roroa. The Nina monitoring results were remarkably similar to those in the Flora: some kiwi settled close to their release site while others were long-distance wanderers, with straight-line distances from release ranging from 0.5 to 10.3 km, compared with 0.4 to 9.8 km in the Flora; and the home range size of the roroa translocated to the Nina averaged 76 ha compared with 73 ha in the Flora! The paper highlights the need for expanded predator control beyond the 1,600 ha along the valley that is currently trapped for stoats in the Nina (compared with 10,000 ha in the Flora), as well as the need for more founders for long-term sustainability. For more information:

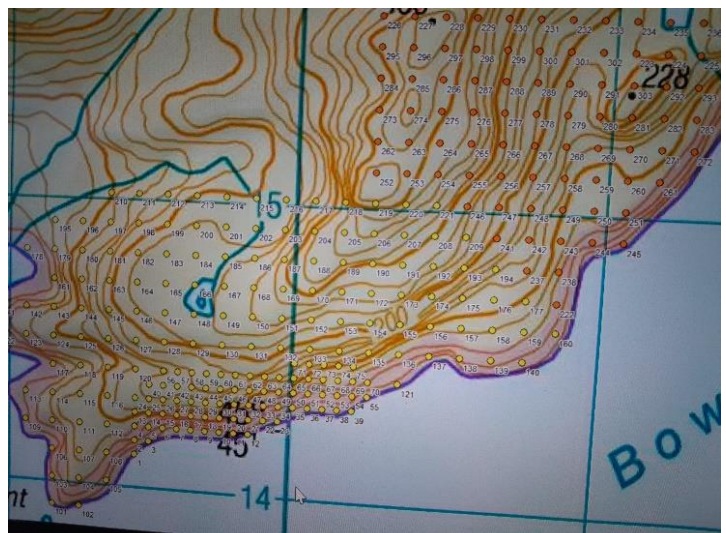
- Jahn, P.; Ross, J.G.; Mander, V.; Molles, L.E. 2022. Post-translocation movements and ranging behaviour of roroa (great spotted kiwi, *Apteryx maxima*). *Notornis* 69: 135-146.
- Toy, R.; Toy, S. 2020. Post-translocation dispersal and home range establishment of roroa (great spotted kiwi, *Apteryx haastii*): need for long-term monitoring and a flexible management strategy. *Notornis* 67: 511-525

Rat trapping on Resolution Island – Lesley Hadley

Resolution Island -19,200ha - is the largest of the Fiordland islands, and is "rat-free." However, a recent rat incursion necessitated a quick response with a field team of DOC, contractors and volunteers to deploy a grid of 50x50 Victor snap traps (in wooden boxes) within a 200m radius of recent capture sites (see map for planned deployment). A request was received by the Friends of Flora for experienced trappers who could/would work in difficult off-track terrain, and be available at short notice for ten days. Ruedi Mosimann, Lesley Hadley and Peter Born drove south three days later and, following quarantine at Te Anau, flew into Supper Cove on 22nd Sept.

The field team and 'control centre' were based on the DOC boat "Southern Wind" (hot showers and delicious hot meals provided) and the weather conditions were very favourable. Flexibility remained the key to the plan, depending on the results of each day's finds. Cliff faces and a positive sign from the rat dog were two reasons that trap placement plans altered. However, all 170 traps were deployed and checked 2 or 3 times. Mice were the biggest problem in "jamming" the traps, and trail cameras an essential tool in detection.

It was an incredible opportunity to be a small part of the ENORMOUS pest eradication operation on the Fiordland islands and to experience the passion of those working for the crucial biodiversity gains. Thanks to DOC, the tourism operators (eg Real NZ and Pure Salt, both contribute considerable time and money to conservation) and the huge numbers of volunteers - just like the Friends of Flora volunteers.



The grid plan for the Victor trap deployment



The trapping group on Wilmot Pass, leaving Doubtful Sound



Ruedi viewing Resolution Island, looking towards Supper Cove

Operations Update for October – Mike Malone

Completing the trapping lines over the last few months has been a challenge during the very unsettled weather, so thanks to all our trappers for working through these trying times. Rat numbers are steadily increasing from the very low levels earlier in the year, and stoat catches remain low. Rather disappointing to see that four traps are missing from the Flora road line. I can only assume that they have been uplifted by person's unknown and maybe put to use somewhere else. There had been some vandalism of traps on this line earlier in the year so we thought they could have been thrown down a bank somewhere, but no luck finding anything.

The August Forest FTT's were completed towards the end of the month and confirmed the increasing rat numbers, particularly at the lower valley tunnels. We were struggling a bit for volunteer numbers and unfortunately had to skip the new Ghost Creek tunnels.

A special note of thanks to Martin, who volunteered to do the Z tunnels both days, braving the high flow crossing of the Takaka!!

Hopefully we are now entering a drier warmer period with less mud and snow to trek through.



Nearly the top of our world – 1400m on the Cobb Ridge last month. *Mike Malone*

From the Chair - Sandy Toy

A big shout out to all the FOF volunteers who continued servicing FOF's network of traps all through the winter and into the fickle spring period. The tracking tunnels were run in August, thanks to a big organisational effort by Mike. It was important to understand how the rodent population is tracking heading into spring. A beech mast has been predicted for some parts of Te Waipounamu and the tiny flowers are evident in lower altitude areas already. Flowering is generally later up in the Flora, and we'll have a better idea of the situation in November. Beech masts always bring mixed emotions: they provide abundant tucker and drive the breeding cycle for our forest parrots, but also bring an explosion of predators.

As usual winter has provided FOF's Committee with time to take stock and work with DOC to review and update our rolling five-year Operational Plan, and our Health & Safety plan and protocols. This year we plan more effort working with DOC on threatened plants, and in understanding the special invertebrates of the Flora - and the threats to their populations. We are delighted to have partnered with conservation ecologist Jo Monks at Otago University, and look forward to welcoming one of her Masters students to the Flora over the summer.

Meanwhile the bird monitoring season has kicked off. The nesting season is underway, as Chrissy reports. Shining cuckoo are back from their winter holidays in the Pacific and long-tailed cuckoo will soon be rackassing away in the Flora. November will be full on with bird counts across the altitudinal spectrum. FOF's alpine monitoring programme will also be expanded over the coming year. Monitoring data becomes increasingly valuable over time and after six years, FOF's alpine data sets are delivering results. Lesley & Martin will be looking for support over the summer period, so please keep an eye open for their invites!

Finally, I wish to share a comment posted on FOF's Facebook page recently: -

'You lot are living legends. On behalf of our great great great great great grandkids: THANKS!'

It's wonderful to get this recognition, and the reminder that we're all in this for the long haul.....