



No. 123

## Newsletter

June 2023

Welcome to this winter update on the Friends of Flora's activities over recent months.

### 'Takahe Bird of Dreams' and the Friends of Flora Annual General Meeting

Around fifty people attended FOF's 22<sup>nd</sup> AGM last month. It was a great evening and an opportunity to thank all the FOF volunteers, supporters, funders, together with the Dept of Conservation and our other partners, for contributing to a year of huge achievements in restoring the biodiversity of the Flora.

Stand-outs included :-

- 5348 volunteer hours.
- 1348 double-set stoat traps serviced 'monthly'.
- Rodent activity monitored 4 times using 15 lines of inked tracking tunnels.
- Whio populations in the Flora and the Grecian monitored using walk-through surveys – two successful broods in the Flora.
- Kea chick fledged from monitored nest: 10,000 videos & 95,000 photos analysed.
- Pest surveillance using trail cameras and mayo motolure trialled. Rats, goats, stoats, deer, hedgehogs, pigs, possum, hares and mice detected as well as more welcome visitors including kiwi and kea.
- Small forest bird populations assessed using 387 five-minute counts. Rifleman call rates have declined 93% in the mid-Flora valley over ten years.
- Mt Arthur giant wētā monitoring effort doubled following its reclassification as critically threatened. Mouse activity in the alpine this season - with tussock mast a concern.
- Alpine Lizard monitoring using 365 tracking tunnel cards. Tracking levels steady.
- Moth surveys undertaken at Flora Hut and Wharepapa.
- Partnered with University of Otago Masters student, Brodie Abel to investigate the impact of wasps on the forest ringlet butterfly and baseline ecological information collected.

Mike Malone stepped down from the Committee after 8 years – many thanks, Mike, for your contribution - though he's not ready to hang his boots up just yet! The rest of the Committee were re-elected and joined by Peter Born. The current Committee is: Sandy Toy (Chair), Sandra Bishop (Treasurer), Lesley Hadley (Secretary), Peter Adams, Peter Born, Gerald Bruce-Smith, Chrissy Kaneen, Warren Kaneen and Robin Toy.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation by Alison Ballance, natural historian, on her latest book: *Takahē Bird of Dreams*, published by Potton & Burton. Alison had us all spell-bound with this inspiring story. It is a beautiful book and a must-have for your book shelf.



Alison Ballance, with her own image of *Dore* and *Tauhou*, released together on Tors Ridge in recognition of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the species' 1948 rediscovery by Geoffrey Orbell's team in the Murchison Mountains.

### An exciting event - Chrissy Kaneen and Sandy Toy

In our previous newsletter we mentioned the camera surveillance currently being conducted in our corner of the National Park. Resulting from this project we have been intrigued to see what is out/about when people aren't around - goats, deer, pigs, possum, hedgehogs, lots of weka, rats, and many more.

Since then, we have had a new camera location catch footage of an incredibly special taonga - a passing kiwi! Sandy states that this area is well outside the home range of a known pair - Awaroa and Puponga - and a convenient distance from another pair - Rata and Tai Tapu - with their patch being on the other side of the valley. The kiwi in the video has a short bill for a roroa, which indicates he is a male or juvenile and..... we can't be certain, but.... it is probable that he is one of Awaroa and Puponga's chicks, now large enough to survive in the Flora and establish his own home range. *Roroa* (Great Spotted Kiwi) may only hatch a chick every couple of years and all chicks remain vulnerable to stoat predation for at least a year - so every chick that survives to, and beyond, this stage is reason to celebrate!

A reward indeed for the hard mahi of all the FOF volunteers trapping stoats month in and month out over the last 22 years. The silver fitting in the photo - attached to the tree - is a mayo lure dispenser, used to entice creatures into the surveillance area, but the handsome new roroa showed no interest - he just happened to be passing by. With the roroa population building, more visitors to the Park are experiencing the unforgettable duet of roroa like Awaroa and Puponga in the dark hours.





## *Montia drucei* – Sometimes the best plants come in the smallest packages!

Laura Parks – Biodiversity Ranger, DOC Motueka



A team of three DOC staff carried out threatened plant surveillance on the Tablelands around Cundy Creek in April 2023. Poking around the limestone outcrops on the bush edge resulted in eight new populations of the Nationally Critical (and miniscule in size!) *Montia drucei* being found.

This alpine species is endemic to the Wharepapa EMU. It can be found in damp aspects on limestone outcrops and the edges of sinkholes, where there is a shallow accumulation of soil for it to establish - and no competition from taller stature species. The total area of occupancy was tallied up as new sites were found and recorded, with the end tally being 64x64 cm. This may sound small, but it is a significant discovery as there are very few known sites – making the existing populations quite vulnerable. The discovery of eight more sites, however small, improves our knowledge and understanding of the total population, and provides a little bit more security for this species.

## Graham Valley South Branch access - closure and remedial work

This year's persistent wet conditions led to some serious mid-June 2023 roadside slippage in the Graham Valley South Branch gorge, necessitating a two week road closure, prompt survey and remedial attention managed by Mark Townsend, Operations Mgr DOC Motueka, the Tasman District Council and Downer Group - the 'Tasman Alliance' team - and DLVC England & Co. Ltd, Geo tech surveyors.

Poor weather continued throughout this period, just adding to the challenges faced. We have been copied with a selection of images reflecting the conditions and work undertaken during this period, which pretty much speak for themselves.

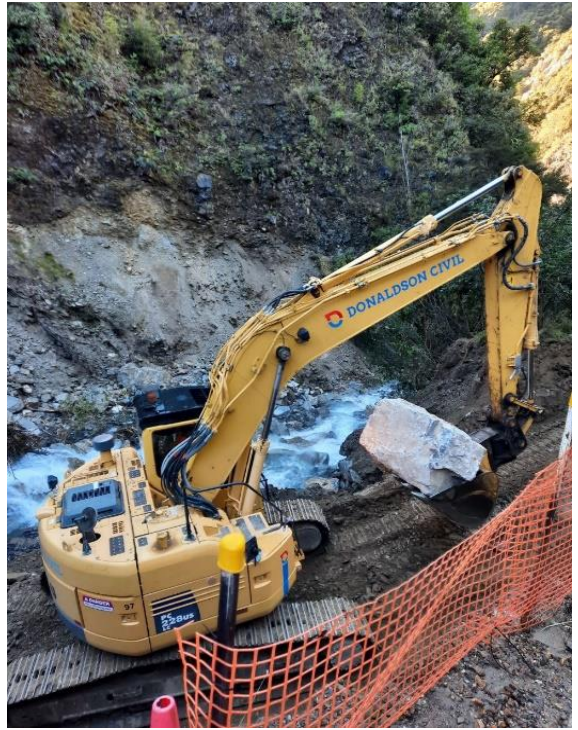
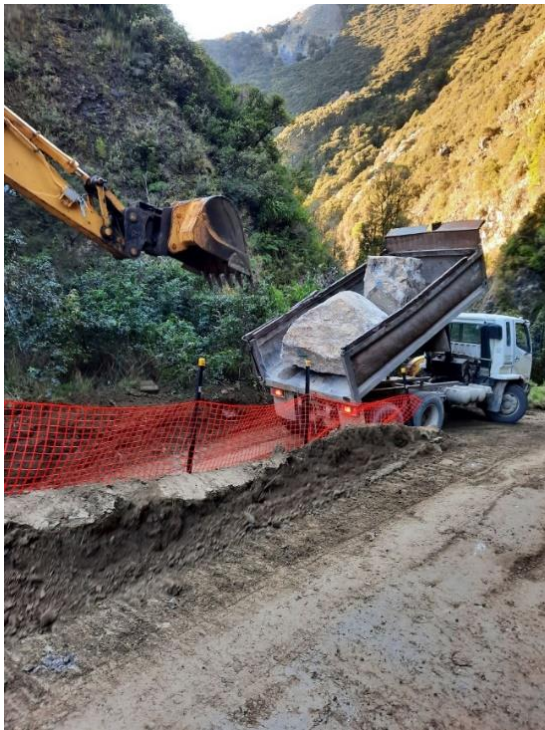
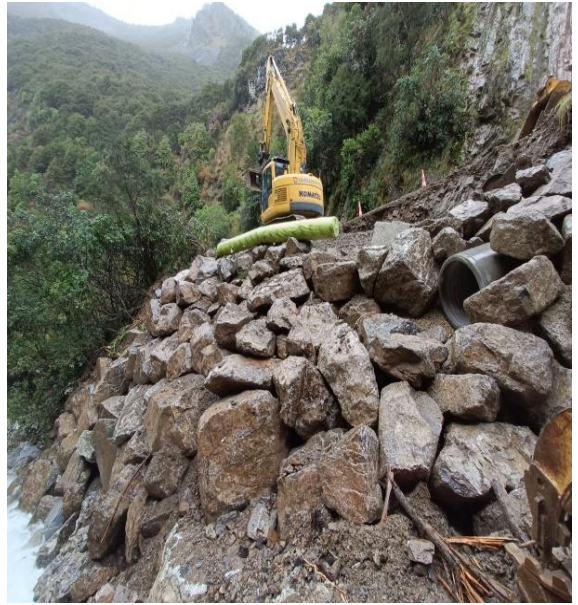
The challenge – to reconstruct the damaged stream side bank, ensure good drainage and rebuild the access road. The end result – a job well done!

Image – Kev England

DLVC England & Co.Ltd.







*Thanks to Drew Hayes, Alliance Manager, Tasman Alliance,  
for these great project images.*





## From the Chair – Sandy Toy

The weather has made things challenging all over Aotearoa, though in Tasman we've been relatively fortunate. However, the recent undercutting of the Graham Valley Rd - resulting in its closure - is a reminder that with the increased frequency of extreme weather events associated with climate change, we'll have to adjust to disruption more regularly. The DOC and TDC-Downer Alliance Team did a great job to get it open again so quickly.

It was great to also have a huge team effort up the hill for the winter rodent tracking tunnel (FTT) monitoring just before the road closed. Rat by-catch in the stoat traps has been increasing, so it was pleasing to see relatively low rat tracking rates, though mouse tracking is higher than it has been for a couple of years – not good news for our vulnerable invertebrates.

With the AGM behind us, the Committee has focussed on reviewing our five-year FOF/DOC operational plan. At a recent workshop, about 15 FOF volunteers provided valuable feedback and ideas, especially in relation to recruiting, informing and supporting volunteers. We value this input and welcome feedback at any time. I would like to thank the Committee, and our DOC liaison officer, Laura, for the hard yards they invest behind the scenes. Some of the issues are not easy - and committee work can be a thankless task.

The recent National Volunteer Week once again emphasised the importance and value of the crucial and varied support – trapping, monitoring, organising, and more – that so many of our volunteers and subscribers provide enthusiastically.

Kia kaha and thank you all.



*Cobb Ridge beauty – Gerald Bruce-Smith*