



Newsletter

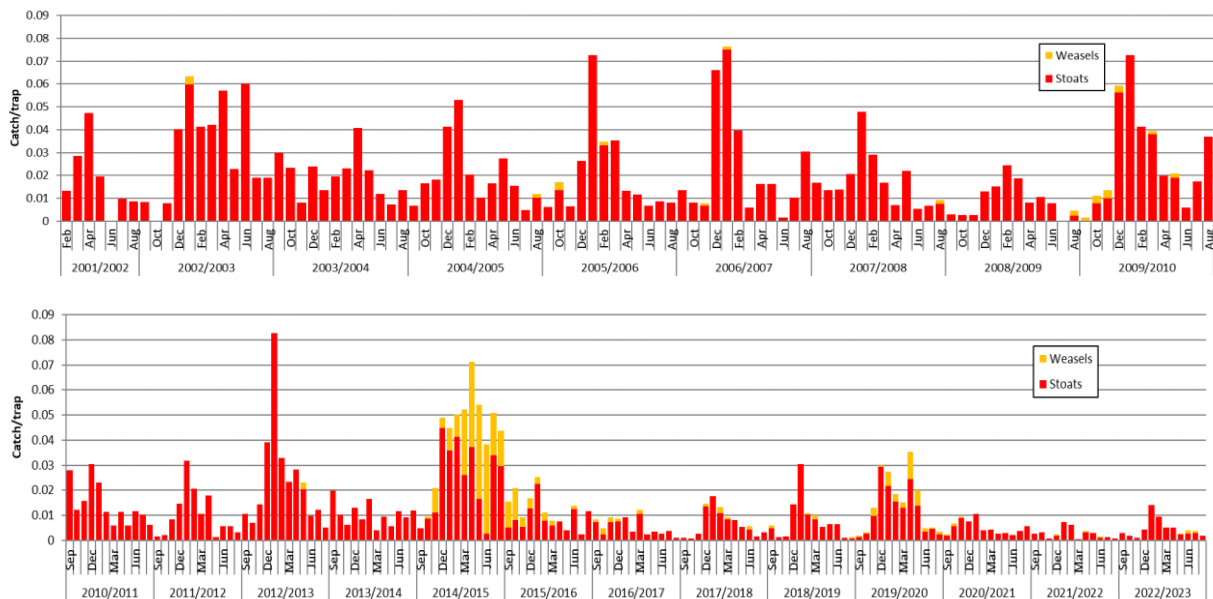
No.124

September 2023

Welcome to this update on the Friends of Flora's activities -

Mustelid trapping – Robin Toy

We treat September as the start of the biological year in the Flora — birds are looking at their glossy, breeding best, roroa may well be incubating by now. So it's timely to reflect on predator numbers. For mustelids, catch rate is our best indicator and the last three years have seen the lowest sustained rate since FOF started trapping. Hopefully this indicates low stoat numbers rather than trap-shy animals; as always, it doesn't matter how much we catch, it's what we don't that counts. Our August forest footprint tracking indicated low rat numbers - but a higher mice presence.



Kea nest: 2023/2024 season – Chrissy Kaneen

The latest season at the kea nest has proved to be a bit of a head scratcher....

When we removed the cameras in April the footage showed the female and our male Ironman still hanging around the nest, which we hadn't seen the previous two seasons. So with this in mind, and after drying out the cameras for a month, they were reinstalled in May to catch any goings on at the nest.

The usual suspects of rats, a stoat, some goats and even a pig, were seen, as well as Ironman, the female kea, a juvenile and possibly another male. With only having Ironman banded it's hard to confirm the identity of the other kea, but one was feeding another and neither birds were banded.

More recently the footage has shown a slowdown of kea visits to the nest site, apart from a juvenile that has displayed a little too much interest in our monitoring equipment. With kea and their well-recognised curiosity this was also going to be a possibility, but with the cameras further secured and hopefully a juvenile kea losing interest, we continue to capture footage, thankfully.

Here's hoping we will see some nesting progress in our next update!

The Flora Whio story - Sandy Toy

The whistle of a male whio, the guttural growl of the female and fluffy whiolings bobbing on the creek margins are an unforgettable experience for many FOF volunteers. But this was not always possible. 22 years ago when FOF began, there was a single male whio in the Flora. Working in partnership with DOC, FOF's mahi in controlling stoats to very low levels across 10,000 ha has enabled whio to flourish. They now occupy every creek and valley and have spread out into surrounding areas. But FOF's project area is only around 2% of Kahurangi National Park.

DOC's science team have recently repeated a 1998-2000 whio survey of Kahurangi National Park and found a massive 340% increase in the Kahurangi whio population <https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2023-media-releases/big-increase-in-whio-numbers-in-kahurangi-national-park/>. DOC's aerial 1080 predator control over large areas of the National Park has driven this increase, but the study indicated that the highest densities of whio occur where there is a combination of stoat trapping and aerial 1080 control. Stoat trapping alone is insufficient when predator numbers irrupt and does not address the growing threat from feral cats that FOF's pest surveillance has revealed. Continued aerial predator control is essential to sustain the wonderful turnaround in whio fortunes.



A trail camera used in FOF's pest surveillance programme captured a feral cat investigating a lure dispenser in the Grecian.

DOC's results also indicate climate change may have impacted whio in some parts of the national park. In places, repeated flooding of rivers in successive very wet winters appears to have led to fewer breeding attempts and very few ducklings or juveniles encountered in most surveys at those sites. The effort invested by the DOC science team in this survey is mind boggling. The only way to survey whio is to walk the wild mountain rivers that are their home, often in winter. Anyone who has waded across the Takaka in winter will have an idea of just how cold and challenging the task of the DOC team in surveying more than 700 kms of creek was. A huge thanks to Jason Malham and the team for their commitment to whio and their excellent monitoring data. FOF is proud to have played its part in the whio recovery story.



Whio in the Flora. Photo: Ruedi Mosimann

New Trap Warning Signage – Warren Kaneen

If you've been up in the Flora lately you may have noticed some new signs on our traps.

Ageing in the damp forest environment has led to some of the stenciled warning signage on our traps - particularly the black lettering – becoming harder to read. With our duty of care to Park users being a priority, we have had new signs made up with the help of Jamie Brown at CopyArt Richmond, which are being stapled to the lids - as shown.

Line leaders are working to get this signage on all traps sited alongside the public tracks.



Thank you, Ivan – Gerald Bruce-Smith

Ivan Rogers, community liaison Ranger with DOC Motueka recently retired from official duties, his variety of contributions being acknowledged both by his fellow Rangers and numerous appreciative community conservation groups. He had joined the Friends of Flora in May 2002 and during the past twenty plus years has closely supported FOF's work in monitoring crucial species – whio, snail, gecko, weta and roroa – and our predator and pest control and monitoring. Amongst his many roles he held the position of FOF Newsletter editor prior to my arrival, and I've both enjoyed and benefited from the guidance he has offered during the ensuing years.



Clockwise – Stencilling new traps in 2018 with Lesley and Mike. Early days at Flora Hut with a few catches. At the 2018 TDC/TET trapping workshop with Nicola Toki and Michelle Bridge. Lastly, at his own DOC Motueka farewell, together with Laura Parks, Biodiversity Ranger.



Thanks also go to DOC Motueka Rangers Matt Bolton, Fraser Knowles and Phil Brooks for undertaking road and drainage remedial work on the Flora Road, just recently. Still some key areas needing work - and hopefully they'll also get attended to.

Buttercups – Sandy Toy

We tend to think of buttercups as weeds, and creeping buttercup is decidedly unwelcome in the veggie garden. But as spring edges up the hill, the metallic gleam of *Ranunculus verticillatus* amongst the tussock heralds the change in season, and hints at the floral abundance to come. There are more than 30 native buttercups with around half living in the alpine zone. As summer progresses look out for *Ranunculus insignis*, the aptly named striking buttercup especially in sheltered tomos. The name *Ranunculus* means little frog, referring to the swampy habitat of many species, especially in Europe.



Ranunculus verticillatus. Photo: Ruedi Mosimann

From the Chair – Sandy Toy

Ivan Rogers' retirement from DOC prompted a hunt through the FOF archives. The committee meeting minutes of 18 July 2005 reported: *Ivan and Kim had a kiwi monitoring adventure, using the DOC equipment. From Flora hut climbed to Arthur hut, then on to the ridge in blizzard conditions! From there down to the bush line they played the caller and heard....wekas calling back! No kiwi, but they thought at least four or five weka, including a sighting of our juvenile. The intrepid duo said they would be back!* The story illustrates the commitment of Ivan and other FOF volunteers over the years, not only to the ongoing mahi of stoat trapping, but to monitoring biodiversity outcomes. Thank you, Ivan.

Next time you look down on the Motueka sandspit from the Wharepapa ridge, think about the drama quietly unfolding there. The bar tailed godwits|kuaka are returning from their breeding grounds in the Alaskan arctic. Post-breeding adults and young birds congregate along the southern coast of the Alaskan Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta preparing for southward migration. Several have been fitted with satellite tags which have shown they fly directly to Aotearoa across the Pacific – an incredible 11,000-12,000 km over 8-9 days, with an average flight speed of 56 kph. They'll stay here over the summer, feeding on the intertidal flats and roosting on the sandspit at high tide. The birds are exhausted when they arrive and need to be able to recover undisturbed, so please give them space if you're out on the sandspit.

Spring brings the return of the kuaka, unsettled weather, and no doubt new challenges for FOF.

Also... please keep an eye out for the footprint tracking tunnel (FTT) invites – forest FTTs in November, gecko FTTs in December, and the weta FTTs in January.

Thank you to all our volunteers and supporters for your dedication and commitment.

Do you have video and social media skills?

Do you crave community engagement?

Do you like running a campaign?

But more importantly



CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET?



Friends of Flora have some very exciting news (that we can't share yet) BUT we are looking for people who can help make something special happen. If this sounds like something you can help us with or would like to know more information, please let us know.

Contact us at - twotoys@xtra.co.nz



Gerald Bruce-Smith

A recent view westwards - over the Flora, towards the Cobb and Sylvester catchments.