



No.128

# Newsletter

June 2024

Welcome to this mid-winter update on the Friends of Flora's activities, and the recent vulnerable species protection work undertaken in Kahurangi National Park.

## Kea season just around the corner - Chrissy Kaneen

It is getting to that time again when Warren and I head back up into the Flora to reinstall the kea cameras at the known nest site/s.

After last year 'incidents' with *Mischief* the juvenile kea, we have purchased cases which will protect our camera from further tampering and keep the kea safe. Hopefully, we will get some great footage of the comings and goings at the nest - without the worry of the camera being adjusted so that you only see the top of the rock face the nest is in, or arriving at the site to see the camera opened and the SD card on the ground! With kea being such inquisitive birds the only surprise was that the cameras hadn't been tampered with during the previous 5 years of monitoring.

With no nesting attempt last year at this nest we are hoping for big things this year. A positive is that in a different area on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February Robin came across what looked to be a recently fledged kea. It was with two adults, but he was unable to identify if any of the adults were banded. It may be that *Ironman*, our male from the nest, found another nest site which often can be the case - or a brand-new set of parents is raising chicks. A search will be on to try to locate this new nest site, which may be easier said than done, but we will give it a go.

Until the next update...



2023 Juvenile kea

## Volunteers are FOF's secret weapon – Sandy Toy

The Friends of Flora's AGM in May was a special occasion – an opportunity to thank everyone who has worked over the last year to look after our amazing biodiversity. Four volunteers in particular were honoured as Life Members in recognition of their extraordinary service to Friends of Flora since the founding.

FOF owes its existence to Maryann Ewers and Bill Rooke. They did the hard yards in setting up the incorporated society back in 2001. They nursed FOF through its early years and were the powerhouse behind the ever-expanding trapping network. They laid the ground-work for the whio and roroa re-establishment projects and set a course FOF continues to follow. They advocated strongly for aerial-1080 at a time when community groups didn't get involved. On top of all this, they were active up the hill until 2019 and Maryann served on the committee for around 16 years. Their vision for a biodiversity restoration group in partnership with DOC, remain guiding principles.

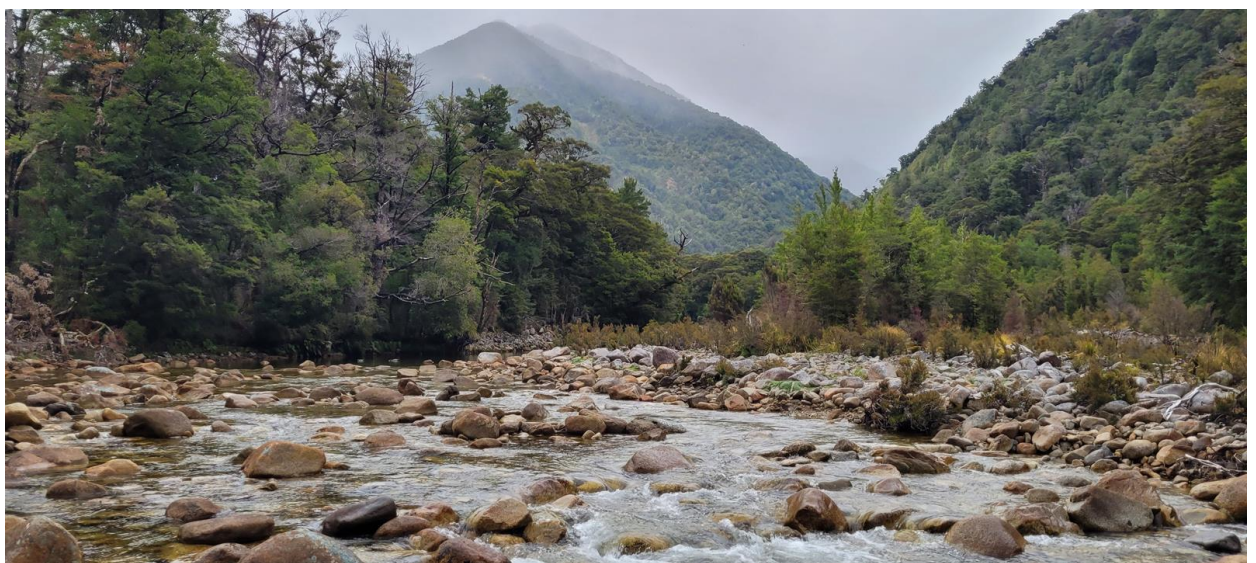
Chris Potter was FOF's first formally elected Chair and long-standing committee member. He recognised the importance of visibility for the fledgling group and took every opportunity to promote Friends of Flora and volunteering. FOF's reputation grew in leaps and bounds under his leadership. He was involved in all FOF's field activities including the whio and roroa re-establishment projects and remained an active trapper until 2017.



Alan White is unfailingly reliable, practical, helpful and un-surprisingly, FOF's go-to stalwart. The kiwi re-establishment project would not have happened without him. He was involved in everything from source site surveys with Chris Potter at Boulder Lake, to assisting with translocations, in the field, organising logistics and being the link between catch and release teams. He was up the hill kiwi tracking regularly for 8 years and his good humour kept the team going on many occasions. He has been a long-term trapper and continues to organise the B/C team.

The commitment from these four has been exceptional, but FOF is a volunteer organization, and every single day of volunteer contribution makes a difference and is appreciated.

Our guest speaker, Annette Lees, was unable to attend the AGM due to Covid, but Jason Malham from the DOC Science Team kindly stepped in to tell us about how whio are faring in Kahurangi. Between 2020 and 2024, Jason and other whio champions have surveyed 884 km of back country river for whio – that's literally walking in the river. The campsite in the photo looks idyllic but Jason explained that winter is the best time to survey whio populations, so he has to wrap his outer clothing in a hot water bottle to keep it from freezing solid overnight. The surveys showed an increase of around 350% in whio pair numbers found between the surveys in 1998-2000 and those in 2020-2021, a result of DOC's aerial predator control operations. However, since 2021 the number of pairs has declined on some rivers, particularly around the periphery. Thankfully, the Flora whio population is still strong, with Jason's work indicating that whio benefit more from a combination of trapping and aerial 1080. His talk brought home not only the dedication of DOC staff, but also the importance of sustained predator control in enabling Kahurangi's iconic whio to flourish. Many thanks, Jason - and everyone who came to the AGM...!



*Can you spot the whio..?*

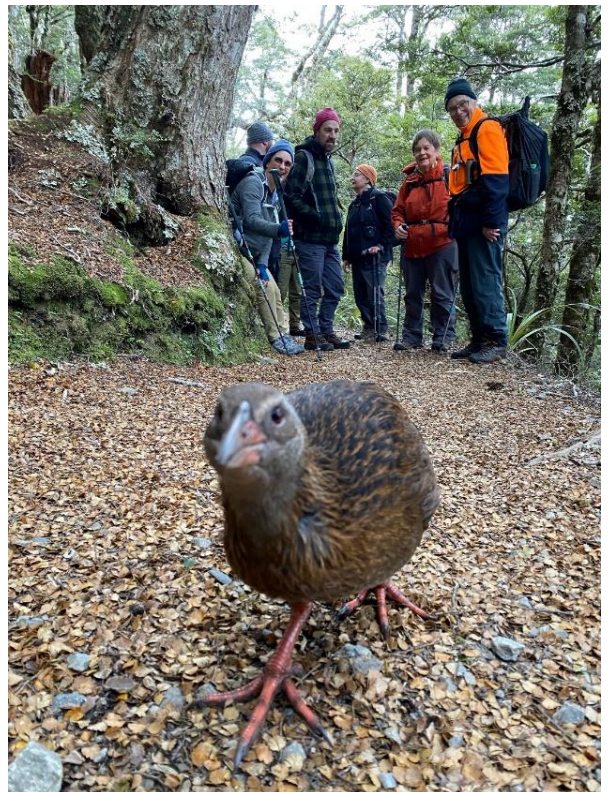


## Birds NZ conference 2024 – Robin Toy

The Birds NZ conference was held in Nelson this year. There were many thought-provoking presentations. Two stood out for me -

The first was Graeme Elliott and Kath Walker's plenary presentation '*33 years of monitoring wandering albatrosses on Antipodes and Adams Islands. The sorrows and joys of a long-term study*'. Over this time, Graeme and Kath have visited the sub-Antarctic islands every year over summer to count the wandering albatross and work on various other projects. Most of this time, their expeditions have been self-funded and their self-sacrifice (so much sea-sickness) is humbling. As Graeme said, not once in all those years have they had fresh tomatoes from the garden, because they are always away at that time. The other really impressive thing about their story is the data. Such a long run of monitoring data is almost unparalleled and particularly useful for such long-lived birds. Satellite tracking of these magnificent birds is showing fisheries interactions and Graeme and Kath's monitoring is showing the impact on the populations. Graeme's storytelling and humour is always entertaining, and his and Kath's story is inspiring, even if the fate of wandering albatross is depressing.

The other presentation was by Neil Fitzgerald, another gifted storyteller. He talked about kaka that nest in shelterbelts on farms around Hamilton, not the sort of place I normally associate with kaka. He has put GPS tags on some of these birds and they have revealed some incredible movements. I have sat on Hauturu in the Hauraki Gulf and watched kaka circling up and up and up in the evening, then fly out over the sea until they were only visible with a spotting scope. But those I watched always turned back. It turns out some don't, as some of Neil's birds flew out to Hauturu and then returned. But the most amazing movement was a kaka that went all the way to Cape Reinga, a straight line distance of about 450 km. As Neil said, it flew until it ran out of land, and then came all the way back again. Makes me wonder where the kaka in the Flora go!



*Weka leads the way on the Birds NZ fieldtrip to the Flora! Thanks to Jeannie Preddey for sharing this photo.*

## Predator control in northern Kahurangi National Park Feb - May 2024.

DOC carried out aerial 1080 predator control in approx., 161,000 ha of northern Kahurangi National Park between February and May 2024. This was part of the National Predator Control Programme to protect vulnerable native species from high rat and stoat numbers following a partial 'mast' or beech seeding event the previous year. Such protection was focused on kaka, kea, whio/blue duck, great spotted kiwi/rorua, multiple species of giant *Powelliphanta* snails, long-tailed bats/pekapeka, and rock wren/tuke, as well as a general benefit for other native plant and animal species.

The 76,000 ha Cobb block, which encompassed the Flora and Grecian, was one of the three operation blocks which had varying native species present and impacts of/from different predator numbers – these varying factors determined the preferred and optimal timing of the aerial operations - with a particular focus on stoats as early as possible after their summer breeding.

The Cobb operation was completed on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2024 – thankfully followed by a prolonged period of fine weather!

As had been undertaken in the previous 2014, 2016 and 2019 aerial operations, 9,950 ha of the above Cobb operation bait was treated with deer repellent following consultation with NZDA.

Rodent levels are monitored before and after each aerial 1080 operation to gauge the operation's effectiveness, using inked tracking cards – the same footprint tracking tunnels (FTTs) as utilised by FOF for our Forest and Alpine monitoring work.

A total of 980 DOC rat tracking tunnels were monitored as part of the 2024 operations, *with pre and post operational monitoring of rats* no more than 3 months apart. Of these, 36 FTT lines were monitored for rat density by DOC within the Cobb operation, their results closely matching those of FOF's own monitoring in May 2024 – reporting reductions to <1pct from the higher >14pct three months prior.

Stoat numbers are similarly tunnel monitored, *but over a 21 day period in February following their post breeding dispersal*. Hence this necessitates waiting until February 2025 for the Cobb monitoring results - *which will show some recovery/reinvasion by stoats in the interim*.

Many thanks to Steve Deverell, Biodiversity Ranger – Project Lead, DOC Takaka, for his liaison with the Friends of Flora, and his dissemination of the above post operational notification.

## From the Chair – Sandy Toy

With Matariki rising, it's a good time for reflection, and the FOF Committee is starting the annual review of our joint Operational Plan with DOC. Our monitoring over the last year has highlighted the need to tackle new challenges and to think hard about how we can be most effective in moving towards our goal of biodiversity restoration. New projects are in the pipeline and we're grateful for support and co-ordinated action from our neighbours and partners. New projects bring requirements for new resourcing. FOF is fortunate to have some incredible donors, funders and supporters. A huge thank you to you all – you enable us to keep doing the hard yards up the hill. Thanks also to FOF's dedicated Committee. Effective projects on the ground are only possible thanks to your behind-the-scenes work. The Committee welcomes feedback, so please let us know if you have ideas for doing things better.

It was a pleasure and a privilege to acknowledge the contributions of our four Life Members at FOF's recent AGM. To paraphrase Isaac Newton, FOF stands on the shoulders of giants. We measure our achievements in the biodiversity that abounds in the Flora. When Maryann and Bill initiated the FOF story in 2001, there was just one single whio left in the area. Now, as we heard from Jason, the Flora area has one of the strongest whio populations within Kahurangi National Park. This has been achieved through vision, commitment, partnership and continual expansion of FOF's trapping network.

It is always a pleasure to share the achievements of FOF and the wonders of the Flora, with new people. Robin and I attended the recent national Birds NZ conference and led a field trip to the Flora. We had a display to illustrate FOF's bird monitoring programmes and Robin gave a presentation on the roroa re-establishment project. There was much generous feedback, and new opportunities forged.

We are deeply saddened by the sudden passing of Roger Gaskell this week. Roger was one of the passionate group behind the formation of the Friends of Flora, and a key liaison Ranger with DOC Motueka. Our sincerest thoughts and condolences are with his family.

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Some Cobb Ridge track and Flora roadside beauty – *Gerald Bruce-Smith*