



Newsletter

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Welcome to this update on the Friends of Flora's activities – both on and off the species protection field.

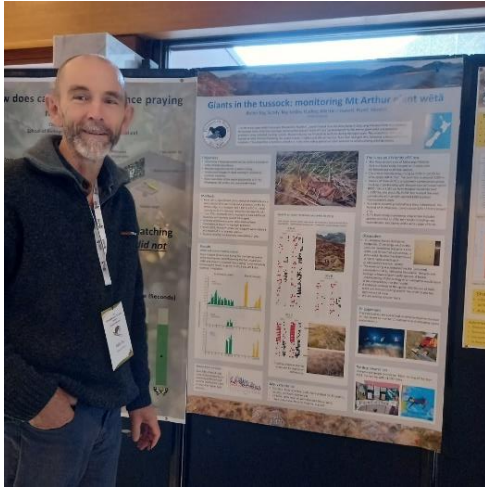
Bugs attract young and older – Robin Toy

Sandy and I attended the New Zealand Entomological Society annual conference in Christchurch the end of August. Nicola Toki gave a plenary presentation in which she discussed New Zealanders' attachment to the environment and how to use it for conservation gain. One point she made was that invertebrates are fascinating and accessible, and a way to engage young people in environmental issues. Not just the young. At the end of the conference, Canterbury Museum took advantage of having a crowd of entomologists on-hand to hold a public Invertoblitz. Late afternoon the crowd gathered and dispersed through parkland in the Red Zone to collect whatever invertebrates they could find. Treasures were put into pottles and brought back to a central station where Morgane Merien put them under a microscope displayed to a screen. All clustered around to identify the beasties, and an inventory was recorded on iNaturalist. The enthusiastic audience kept going long after dark.



Buoyed by the experience, I subsequently tried an abbreviated version with Riwaka Scouts. After a discussion about what different birds eat, I had the troop search for 'bird food' around the scout hut and then displayed their findings via microscope and computer screen. Of course, we also talked about what eats birds – an excuse to pass around a frozen stoat (very little squeamishness in Riwaka Scouts) and demonstrate a FOF trap catching a rice-filled stoat bag (everyone likes a loud bang). As the photo shows, it was effective engagement and hopefully fostered an interest in the environment.





One of our motivations for attending the Entomological Society conference was to promote the Mt Arthur giant wētā, which FOF championed for Bug of the Year earlier this year. Sandy gave a speed talk entitled, *Bug of the Year 2024 Runner Up was it worth it?* Another opportunity to make a wider audience aware of FOF's work. And, of course it was worth it — more than 1700 people were sufficiently 'engaged' by Wharepapa's special wētā to vote for it. We also presented a poster '*Giants in the Tussock*' on behalf of FOF's alpine monitoring team. Incidentally, FOF was the only community group represented at the conference, and we made a lot of contacts we hope will help with our ongoing invertebrate projects.

From the Chair – Sandy Toy

Spring has arrived with typically unpredictable weather conditions and the FTT team had their work cut out finding two good consecutive days for the quarterly rodent footprint tracking tunnel monitoring, as it's a complex operation involving 13 volunteers. The good news was the complete absence of rat prints – **0% tracking**. This bodes well for rat vulnerable species like tititipounamu | rifleman. FOF's 5 Minute Bird Count (5MBC) monitoring in November will give us an idea of how they respond.



FOF's volunteers are extraordinarily dedicated. Two volunteers serviced 94 traps between them last weekend covering 28 km, with a 1,450 m ascent and descent, and 50 creek crossings, between them. Their reward – 13 who!

Many FOF volunteers have been part of the FOF whanau for more than 15 years. Many have a lifetime in the hills behind them, but we're always pleased to see younger volunteers as well. A recent returned volunteer spent the 2016 summer on the Wharepapa ridge, monitoring FOF's alpine tracking tunnels as a 10-year old. She's now a trainee ranger. Everyone's time is valuable and pressured, and we appreciate the generosity of those who quietly get the job done month after month. As a volunteer group we can only continue to look after the threatened wildlife of the Flora if we have volunteers willing to do the hard yards.

Winter is the busiest season for the FOF Committee – a time for reviewing our plans, operations and paperwork with our colleagues in DOC. This behind-the-scenes work is vital for the effective running of the group, and I thank everyone involved.

One of the joys of the changing season is the arrival of our migratory birds. Down at the coast, the godwits are streaming in at the end of their epic non-stop 11,000-12,000 km flight from their

breeding grounds in Alaska. Birds tracked by satellite took 8-9 days, with an average flight speed of 56 kph. Up the hill the koekoeā | long tailed cuckoo will soon arrive from its winter sojourn in the Pacific islands. For me, it's characteristic screech and laughing call is one of the defining sounds of summer in the Flora.

Finally, fun of a different nature...

Dr Robert Hoare, moth expert at Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research and Aotearoa's insect poet laureate is a remarkable storyteller and provided much entertainment at the Entomological Society conference. He's spent time in the Flora and considers it a moth hot-spot. The video of his reading of his poem *Fred the Thread* about the larva of a native moth, *Houdinia flexilissima* is hilarious. The poem is from his book *Six-legged Things and Scaly Wings: An anthology of New Zealand insect verse*. <https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/videos/1858-fred-the-thread-a-poem>

I have a friend (his name is Fred)
He's thinner than a cotton thread
His colour is an orange-red
He doesn't feed on jam or bread
But *Sporadanthus* stems instead.

Such narrow tunnels must he tread
He needs a hinge inside his head
To give his jaws the room to shred
The food that is his home and bed
And stop himself from dropping dead.

Now when our friend is fully fed
And knows the time has come to shed
His final skin, a sense of dread
begins to filter into Fred:
How fast, he thinks, the time has sped!
And what a sheltered life he's led!
He hopes he'll have some outdoor cred
And won't be thought of as inbred.

He sloughs his skin from A to Zed
And there's a pupa in his stead!
Three weeks have passed, and it's incred-
ible to see the adult Fred,
A mothy person born and bred
To look like that on which he's fed.

He shows an admirable ded-
ication to his art, his sed-
entary posture leaving ed-
ucated mothmen ruby-red,
The effort of locating Fred
Causing a rush of blood to head
Resulting in potential med-
ical emergency and bed
With cooling drink and favourite Ted
Until delirium has fled.

To summarise, he's Fred the Thread,
He's red and has a hing-ed head
His head is used to shred his bed,
His bed's the food on which he's fed,
His bed is red and I am led
To think the redness of the Fred
Reflects the bedness of the red
I mean the redness of the bed –
The bed he shreddeth with his head
Until the Fred is fully fed
And sheds the skin he has to shed
To flee the bed that must be fled
To lead the life that must be led
To woo the wife that must be wed
To father further Freds of Thread.
Then Fred can smile and drop down dead.

I've said the things I wanted said.

From the Editor – Gerald Bruce-Smith



Gerald Bruce-Smith

Our trapping days in the field provide numerous rewards. Mine include getting close to our stunning alpine flora, in this instance @ 1360m on the Cobb Ridge, with Iron Hill - above the Sylvester lakes - way off in the distance. Hands and knees stuff...magical.

Laura Parks, biodiversity ranger DOC Motueka, references these as whipcord hebe *Veronica hectorii* susp. *coarctata*, and *Epilobium margaretae*, which is Naturally Uncommon and confined to the Top of the South.
