

# Friends of Flora Newsletter



No 131, March 2025

## From the Chair Sandy Toy

As another busy field season winds down, it's a time of major change for Friends of Flora. The Committee will farewell two important members at the upcoming AGM. The mahi of the Committee goes largely unseen, but it is no exaggeration to say that without it, FOF would not have achieved the biodiversity gains that we have – there would be no whio in the Flora, no roroa calls rending the night. Gerald Bruce-Smith has been on the Committee for seven years and has brought a wealth of practical trapping expertise. We also thank him for instigating a robust volunteer induction process and for editing the newsletter. Peter Adams has served on the Committee for an astounding twenty years, eight as Chair. He has deftly steered FOF through major developments, notably the roroa re-establishment project which grew from a dream, via a major project to the

*Peter installing a stoat trap way back in 2007. Note the original FOF logo (designed by Wayne Ellia) on the trap box that featured only the whio. Photo Ivan Rogers.*

*Gerald in the DOC yard*



success described in this newsletter. As FOF grew in size and in the complexity of the projects undertaken, Peter recognised the need for a web-based system to manage FOF's volunteer activities and trap data collation. This vital tool was developed by Garry Webber of WeDoWebsites (another FOF hero who flies under the radar) and is fundamental to FOF's operation. Peter also instigated a more detailed joint FOF/DOC rolling 5-year Operational Plan, with time and dollar budgets for each project. Peter has been FOF's systems man, and the Committee will sorely miss his clear thinking and institutional memory. On behalf of FOF and especially the Committee, thank you both. Gerald and Peter will continue to volunteer for FOF.

As the scope of FOF's activities continues to grow, so does our need for new volunteers. This comes at a time of increasing societal demand for volunteers across a spectrum of activities and competition for people's spare time. Volunteering for FOF is uniquely rewarding — where else can you hear the whio whistle, look out over the expanse of Kahurangi and connect intimately with such a very special place? But it can be challenging, and we appreciate every day spent volunteering for FOF — your mahi keeps the Flora singing.

A year ago, we reported on a ferret incursion into the Flora with its' accompanying threat to whio and roroa. Working with our neighbours Farmers for Whio and with DOC, there is now an arsenal of DOC250 traps guarding the Flora's eastern flank. The great news is that no ferrets have been caught in the Flora this season, and none have been seen on any trail cameras. Special thanks to Martin Howard and Barry Burger for the effort they've put into this project.

FOF's alpine lizard and giant wētā monitoring programme is wrapping up for the season. It's been running for ten years, and some interesting trends are starting to emerge. The threat from mice is becoming evident. The project is a great example of how volunteers can contribute to long-term biodiversity outcome monitoring. Using inked tracking tunnel cards has minimal impact on the alpine habitat and is an enjoyable treasure hunt. First in finding the tunnels and then in discovering footprints on the cards. And when the cards have been compiled there's the pleasure of a good cup of coffee as the team studies and categorises the footprints and updates the database. It's FOF's commitment to high quality data that enables us to make meaningful contributions to conservation beyond the Flora.

All of this is only possible due to the ongoing support of our volunteers and generous donors – thank you all.

Finally, I look forward to seeing many of you at FOF's 24<sup>th</sup> AGM

**Upper Moutere Community Hall at 6:30pm on Wednesday 21 May.**

## Newsletter Editor

Friends of Flora is looking for a new editor for the newsletter. Gerald has been doing this for many years and has now stepped aside. Robin is standing in as a stop gap. If you might be interested, please contact [fof@fof.org.nz](mailto:fof@fof.org.nz).

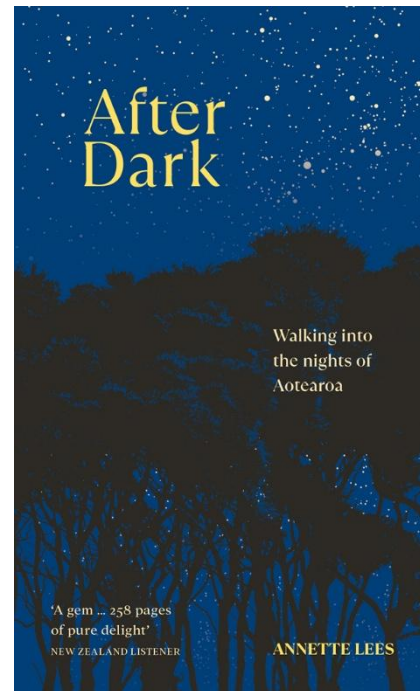
Friends of Flora's AGM will be held at Moutere Hills Community Centre at 18:30 on Wednesday 21 May.

Please put the date in your schedule. We look forward to seeing you all.

There will be a brief overview of FOF's year and our guest speaker will be Annette Lees, renowned author of *After Dark*.

This will be both entertaining and fascinating:

*In After Dark Annette Lees walks us into the nights of Aotearoa. In the company of bats, owls, moths and seabirds, she guides us from dusk to dawn with fascinating night stories: tales of war stealth and ghosts; nights lit by candles and lighthouses; night surfing, fishing, diving and skiing; mountain walking and night navigation on ocean voyaging waka (Potton & Burton's website).*



## In the footsteps of George Vernon Hudson Sandy Toy

In the summer of 1889 George Vernon Hudson spent a week 'on the 'Tableland of Mt Arthur' for the purposes of investigating the insect fauna.' This was a significant

*Waiting for the moths to arrive. Photo Sandy Toy*



undertaking requiring pack horses to carry the bulk of his 'impedimenta' which included an 'abundance of clothing to put on during the cold nights'. He was an old school self-taught naturalist who described and illustrated in beautiful paintings many of Aotearoa's invertebrates for the first time. FOF has recently undertaken a similar, but much easier, entomological tour. With the help of Ryan Bauckham, a band of FOF volunteers spent three nights 'mothing'. Back in 1889, Hudson had only a kerosine lantern with which to attract moths; we were privileged to have high-



intensity UV lights. We set up while it was light, carefully selecting a location with good sight-lines and convenient trees from which a white sheet could be suspended. As the dark deepened, ruru called, and our attention focussed on the sheet. The survey was timed for a period with little moonlight, so nearby moths would be attracted to the light and land on the sheet where they could be photographed and identified. Many were extraordinarily beautiful when seen up close and, while highly visible on a white sheet, they would be near invisible on lichen-coated tree trunks where many rest during the day. The exquisite carpet moth, *Asaphodes adonis*,

*The exquisite carpet moth. Photo Ruedi Mosimann*



first described by Hudson is one such. It is an uncommon, South Island beech forest specialist. On our second night, an aerial bombardment of huge moths commenced

*Male ghost moth, note its' feathery antennae. Photo Ruedi Mosimann*



shortly after dark. They were another rarely seen South Island species, *Aoraia lenis*, a ghost moth which occurs only in low alpine shrubby grassland. The females have very reduced wings (brachypterous) and cannot fly. The males highly developed antennae (see photo) no doubt help in locating mates. John Dugdale reported that the males fly for short periods of about an hour in mist or light rain about an hour after sunset – exactly the conditions we experienced when they visited us!

One species that Hudson did not find in 1889 was the gorse soft shoot moth which was brought into Aotearoa in 1990 to control gorse. It was a surprise to find it on the Tableland since it's a long way to the nearest known gorse – we hope it's not a sign of an undiscovered gorse infestation in the Flora.

At one point during the second night, Ryan asked whether native mistletoe grow in the area. Perplexed by his question, we confirmed we were near a strong population of red mistletoe (*Peraxilla tetrapetala*). The explanation was a grey moth, *Ipana griseata*,

whose larvae feed on mistletoe, which had just flown in! The next night, we were visited by a female *Tatasoma agrionata* – another mistletoe specialist. Both moths and their mistletoe host plants are listed as At Risk Declining. This is a great illustration of how investing in protecting showy ambassador species, the mistletoes, will benefit many more less obvious species associated with them. All credit to DOC's periodic 1080 applications which have reduced numbers of possum, which feed preferentially on mistletoe, to very low levels

After three nights, I was a bit bleary-eyed and was focused on coffee and a hot shower as we walked out, but Ryan was still spotting tiny moths in the undergrowth and adding to the tally of species for the trip. Our thanks to Ryan for opening our eyes to the wonderful world of moths and sharing his expertise. It's satisfying to know that many of the moth species that delighted G.V. Hudson 135 years ago are still enlivening the night skies of the Flora. Thanks to our funders for making the survey possible and to Ruedi Mosimann for sharing his stunning photos.



*The mahoe stripper moth, Feredayia graminosa, suffering a bad hair day?*

*Photo Ruedi Mosimann*

Further reading: Gibbs, G. 2020. An exquisite Legacy. The life and work of New Zealand naturalist G.V. Hudson, published by Potton and Burton; and Hudson G.V. 1889. An entomological tour of the Tableland of Mt. Arthur. *Transactions of the New Zealand Institute* 22: 179-186.

## The Flora kea Chrissy Kaneen

When Warren and I first took over the monitoring of the known kea nest it was exciting. It was something we had never done before so every time we went up, we couldn't wait to view the footage to see these amazing birds.

And that footage was huge, from two cameras placed outside the nest we had a total of 10,600 videos and 3,286 photos. We noted every shot that had a kea in it and what it was doing onto a spreadsheet to grow our knowledge. That season the 2021/2022 season Ironman & his partner fledged one chick and to follow their journey was an honour.

The following season we added an extra camera to the arsenal and although we only recorded notable events into our spreadsheet there was still nearly a thousand videos & 95,195 photos to view. But it was all worth it to see another juvenile fledge and add to the population.

For those of you that remember last season 2023/2024, we had to bring the cameras in early as there was little footage of Ironman and his partner but a lot of a juvenile kea trying to make sure we got his best side by playing and opening the cameras. With the shortened season only 630 videos & 1,567 photos were taken. But we were hoping that Ironman was just having a year off this year & hopefully they had settled in another nest.

So, we had our fingers crossed for this season. Action started with a flurry in July with lots of footage, but it looked like Ironman and a female were joined by another kea (possibly a juvenile). With only Ironman banded it is hard to identify other individuals. Then in August everything went quiet. When we returned for another check on the nest we did so with fingers & toes crossed. We had a couple of hundred photos showing numerous visitors to the nest, goats, a deer, a resident thrush, an inquisitive weka & one lone rat but most of the photos were of two kea one of whom was Ironman. So, no chick this year from this nest, but we remain hopeful they are doing their thing but just at another nest.

So, from viewing the massive amounts of footage from the first couple of years to the confusingly small amount the last two, I know which I would prefer.



*Ironman & his partner from 2022 season (trail camera picture)*



## The Flora roroa Robin Toy

It's 15 years since we translocated the first roroa| great spotted kiwi into the Flora. At the time, FOF hoped that haunting kiwi calls would become a feature of an overnight visit to the area. Based on experiences this summer, it seems that dream is becoming reality. Visitors camped near Lake Peel reported hearing kiwi, and Sandy and I have heard calls from Flora Hut, below Arthur Hut, above Deep Creek and in Ghost Creek. The highlight for me though was during a night search for moths and other critters on the Clouston Mine track. Sandy and I were crouched by the path trying to cajole a moth to sit still while we took its photo, when out of the darkness came an air-shattering male kiwi call. Ooh, it must have been so close! We switched off our torches, the moth would have to wait, and sat silently in the darkness ... but heard no more. It was elating knowing the kiwi was out there, so close. It was even more exciting because it's outside the known established roroa home ranges.

More evidence is turning up on trail cameras that we have put out to get a better idea of pest pressures. These cameras are motion-triggered and record welcome residents like kiwi, as well as unwelcome visitors like stoats, rats and deer. Over the last months cameras at four separate locations have recorded roroa, a spectacular result.

*Its hard to see it but there is a metal band on this kiwi's right leg, identifying it as one of the translocated males. The camera that took this shot is on the edge of a known territory, so this is probably Tai Tapu.*



*With its beak hidden behind the tree and its legs hidden in the brash, it's not possible to identify this kiwi as male or female. From its location, it's most likely Hoire or Poai or one of their offspring.*



*This is a female translocated roroa, (band on the left leg) walking right past the camera. From the location, she could be Totaranui or Te Rae.*

*These two kiwi were recorded on the same camera at different times and they are different individuals. The one on the left is a male and, from the location of the camera, we think he's probably Whitu. The one on the right is a juvenile, almost certainly Whitu's offspring.*





## Forest Ringlet Butterfly threat status review Sandy Toy

FOF has been monitoring caterpillars of the beautiful but elusive forest ringlet butterfly for three years. We used the results to inform a submission to the technical panel who are reviewing the threat status of Aotearoa's moths and butterflies. It was a pleasure to collaborate with others working with the butterfly to compile a joint case. The evidence indicates that the butterfly meets the criteria to be listed as Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable. We hope that recognition of its status will highlight the need for a landscape-scale tool for non-native wasp control, which would also benefit a host of less glamorous forest invertebrates.

*The Flora. Photo Ruedi Mosimann*

