



Friends of Flora Newsletter

SPRING EDITION No 133, December 2025



Photo credit – Peter Olorenshaw

In this spring edition

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From the Chair

Sandy Toy

2025 has brought major challenges for Friends of Flora. The unpredicted, but widespread mast fruiting of red and mountain beech trees in the autumn resulted in a lot of seed on the ground. Our fears of a rodent irruption, followed by an increase in mustelid predators were enhanced by the mild winter. With little snowfall and few frosts, a winter knock-down did not materialize. The floods that devastated the Motueka Valley directly impacted many FOF volunteers. And both road access routes to the Flora were severed. Access via the Cobb was restored after three months, but we anticipate repair of the road to the Flora car park is still months off. The FOF Committee worked up a plan to enable the highest priority work to be completed, based around multi-day team events. The commitment shown by our volunteers has been extraordinary – we achieved way more over the last few months than we dreamed would be possible:

- The entire trap network (1348 double set stations) was serviced every six weeks.

- The network of tracking tunnels in the forest was set in November to monitor rodent levels. The results confirmed what we're seeing in the trap catches, that there is a significant rodent irruption underway.
- The effort to control ferrets was ramped up with the discovery of a further three ferrets in the Flora.
- Monitoring our alpine lizards has started for the season with the alpine tracking tunnels set.
- 249 five-minute bird counts were completed in November. These confirmed that the bounce-back of tītīpounamu/rifleman following DOC's last 1080 drop has continued. Most gratifying, counts of yellow-crowned kākāriki were higher than they have been since bird monitoring started in 2005.

I am incredibly proud of what the team has achieved, and my heartfelt thanks go out to all who contributed to making it happen.

It was a huge pleasure to celebrate the launch of *Caring for Kahurangi. The inspiring story of Friends of Flora* with around 100 friends and colleagues at the Motueka Library. Although they didn't realise it way back in 2001, Maryann Ewers and Bill Rooke initiated a community group of which Michael Szabo said '...their intrepid and inspiring nature restoration project has been an innovative trail blazer that would make Ed Hillary proud.'

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/birds-new-zealand-magazine-published/>

The new year brings the Bug of the Year contest organised by the Entomological Society of New Zealand. The FOF Committee has decided to take the unusual step of supporting a species that doesn't occur in the Flora – the avatar moth (see below). This is because our wild places and unique wildlife are under extraordinary pressure from recent legislative changes. Too often we are presented with a choice – either we have economic development or we look after nature. The reality is that unless we look after nature, we will not have a future. Fast tracking projects like mining Denniston Plateau, the home of the avatar moth, for relatively short-term gain is not sustainable. FOF is also supporting the blue damselfly and the weird double-spined stick insect both of which make their home in the Flora.

Thank you to all FOF volunteers, supporters and funders, and to our colleagues in the Department of Conservation. Enjoy the holidays and look forward in hope to a bright New Year for the Flora.



Photo Credit – Thomas Schwarzenbach

Road closure – Silver Lining

Peter Olorenshaw

With the road up to Mount Arthur being washed out since July, getting the traplines done has been quite difficult. We have had people going up there for multiple days to do multiple traplines.

And here is where it is interesting. Normally you just see and become very familiar with “your own” trapline and don’t really see much of anything else in the park other than when doing other events like footprint tracking tunnels. But with this constraint, we are doing each other’s lines and seeing country we have never seen before and that has been great.

Recently I did T and H lines. T is up above Balloon Hut heading towards Lake Peel and predominantly above or right on the bush line and H has to be one of the most potholed/tomo’d lines we have. Whilst tiring and at times challenging, both these lines opened my eyes to the huge range of country we have in the areas under our watch.

Some of the interest is historical too. Like how did they get these glazed clay pipes way up into the back country and where were they made? And on T line the excavated channels gold prospectors dug to bring water to slicing operations.



The treasures and sights you see when trapping.

A Friends of Flora Thank you.

Chrissy Kaneen

On behalf of FOF, I would like to pass on a huge thank you to all our sponsors, supporters and volunteers who enable us to work in & for the flora and fauna in an amazing part of New Zealand.

If you have ideas, tips, questions, stories, or photos to share for our next newsletter please feel free to email me @ chrissy2410@gmail.com

From the Department of Conservation



Jim Livingstone

Tue, Dec 2,
2025

[DOC's acknowledgement of FOF's exceptional input in continuing activity since the Graham Valley Road washout:](#)

Acknowledgement and Recognition of Friends of Flora

Friends of Flora (FOF) continues to set the benchmark for community-led conservation.

Since the Graham Valley Road washout, FOF has not only adapted to challenging conditions but has completed almost all planned tasks, demonstrating resilience and commitment to protecting our native species.

This achievement involved considerable input of **67 nights spent up the hill - equivalent to 160 volunteer days**.

Such dedication reflects the extraordinary effort and passion of FOF volunteers, who have worked tirelessly to maintain predator control networks, monitor species, and ensure the ongoing success of restoration projects.

Their perseverance under these circumstances underscores the strength of community conservation and the vital role volunteers play in safeguarding biodiversity.

The Department of Conservation acknowledges and deeply appreciates this remarkable contribution, which continues to make the Flora a place of thriving native wildlife and birdsong.

[Cheers,](#)

Jim Livingstone
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Bug of the Year 2026

Sandy Toy

Each year the Entomological Society of New Zealand hosts the Bug of the year contest to raise awareness of our tiny critters. FOF has decided to support three beasts this year. Voting opens on 1st January.

The **avatar moth**, *Arctesthes avatar*, is a little day-flying moth with a big story. It lives only on the Denniston Plateau – a windswept part of the South Island’s West Coast rich in endemic species. Its beautiful pale orange-yellow hindwings contrast strikingly with the earthy tones of its forewings. It lives in ephemeral wetlands on the plateau and its future is precarious. Classified as Nationally Critical under the New Zealand Threat Classification System, the avatar moth is a bulldozer away from extinction. The moth was discovered in 2012 by lepidopterist, Brian Patrick, during a bioblitz run by Forest & Bird. Its’ name – *avatar* – echoes the fictional world of the film *Avatar*, where the Indigenous people and a unique ecosystem face destruction from a mining company. Sadly, the parallel is real: Bathurst Resources has applied for fast-track approval to mine coal on the Denniston Plateau, an area equivalent to 1,700 rugby fields.



iNaturalist.nz image 208608009,
© Brian H. Patrick, Hamish J.H. Patrick, Robert J.B. Hoare.



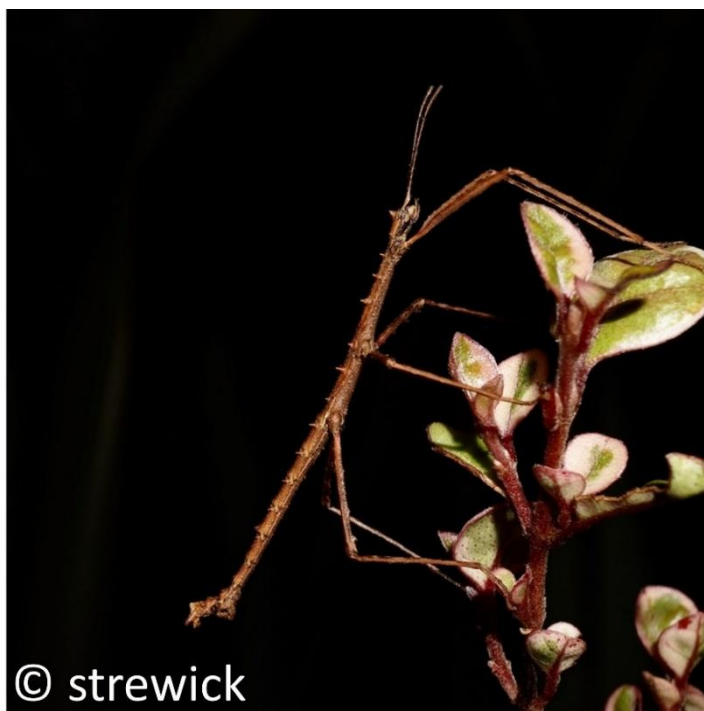
© Caiden B

The **blue damselfly** *Austrolestes colenisonis*, can be found flying elegantly around the high-altitude tarns on the Tableland with transparent wings. It is Aotearoa’s largest damselfly and the only blue one. Males are bluer than females, and bizarrely, in both sexes colour intensity is influenced by temperature. They look comparatively dull on a cool morning and more vividly coloured on a sunny, warm afternoon. The young, called naiads, live in the water and are ferocious predators. The adults are also predators feeding on mosquitoes and midges – another reason to love these little dancers.

iNaturalist.nz image © Caiden B

The double-spined stick insect *Micrarchus hystriculeus*, is our final pick. It's name is derived from the Latin word "hystriculeus," meaning "bristly" or "spiny," referring to the insect's spiny body. It is one of our smallest stick insects and uses a combination of camouflage and large spines to avoid being eaten. They feed on plant leaves, primarily eating manuka, ribbonwood and lacebark. It can tolerate very low temperatures and winters in the Flora are no problem for it. It can't fly so moving around is a slow business. It may lack the beauty of the other two picks but has character galore.

iNaturalist.nz image © strewick



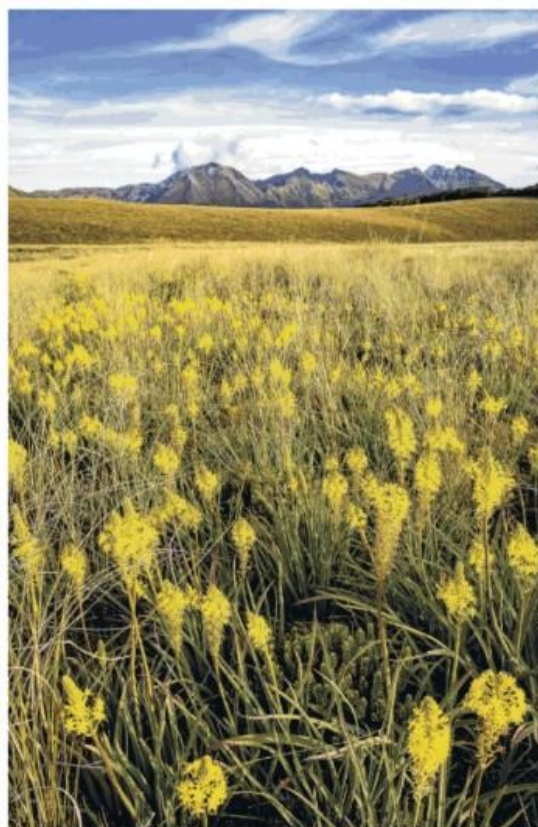
© strewick

Go to <https://bugoftheyear.ento.org.nz/2026-bug-of-the-year-nominees/> for information on all the nominees and don't forget to vote.

Caring for Kahurangi book review – As published by the Otago Daily Times

By David Barnes

Permission received to republish



Golden pathways of Māori onion thread through waving tussock, marking damper seepage lines across the tableland of Kahurangi National Park. The Arthur Range dominates the skyline.

PHOTO: RUEDI MOSIMAN

Volunteers' care inspires

CARING FOR KAHURANGI
Sandy & Robin Toy
Potton & Burton

By DAVID BARNES

The Flora Stream is a tributary of the Takaka River, which drains the slopes of Tu Ao Wharepapa / Mt Arthur in Kahurangi National Park.

This excellent book tells the tale of Friends of Flora, arguably one of the most successful local volunteer trapping and biodiversity groups in the country, and in doing so introduces the reader to the natural wonders of its patch.

Sandy and Robin Toy are British ecologists who have lived in Motueka for 15 years and have been actively involved in the group for all of that time.

The group was founded by Maryann Ewers and Bill Rooke, who had noticed a serious decline in bird numbers, particularly whio/blue ducks, in the years leading up to 2000.

The Department of Conservation was supportive of their proposal to start trapping stoats, but expressed reservations about the ability to sustain the work. The initial success of this work enabled whio bred elsewhere to bolster the dwindling local population and, most importantly, for their chicks to survive to adulthood.



The result was a population increase from one to 60 in the protected area.

The next project was the reintroduction of roroa/great spotted kiwi.

The first part, and probably the most challenging, was capturing birds from other parts of the park.

Once in the Flora area, these birds were closely monitored, with tracking devices needing to be checked and changed regularly.

Naturally, kiwi do not particularly care whether they are somewhere easily found by humans, and so this work involves some difficult terrain.

I was astonished by a sequence of photos of Robin Toy disappearing into a burrow, with one shot showing only his boots visible from a hole maybe 50cm wide.

That's dedication. After five years, they were

satisfied the population was thriving and could leave them be.

It is clear the group's philosophy extends well beyond "put out a heap of traps and hope that every dead pest helps", and their work is guided by an enormous amount of high quality citizen science and data.

This has enabled them to identify other species in need of protection and support.

As well as other bird species, these have included mistletoe, wētā, geckos and Powelliphanta carnivorous snails.

An absolute highlight of the book is the photography, mostly by Friends member Ruedi Mosiman.

I hadn't encountered Mosiman's work before, but it is outstanding.

His active involvement with the group has enabled him to capture the work in many different environments and conditions, as well as take some fantastic images of the fauna and flora that are what underlies the group's mahi.

As the subtitle says, the story is inspiring. My local trapline check this week will be done with a greater spring in my step, and my itch to return to Kahurangi will need to be scratched soon.

David Barnes lives in Lower Hutt and is a former member of the New Zealand Conservation Authority

Volunteer in the spotlight

Most of our volunteers are the head down do the work people, but they all deserve to be recognised. We will be introducing one of our volunteers in each newsletter so you can see who the amazing people are behind Friends of Flora. Our Volunteer in the spotlight is another person that everyone will have met before, especially as he previously looked after and trained our new volunteers. He has also been a past co-chairperson as well as wearing many other hats for Friends of Flora – **Gerald Bruce-Smith**

As a 1950s baby boomer, my belated conservation awareness was triggered by a 2004 move to Arthur's Pass Village, coinciding with a DOC Canterbury Conservancy push to monitor and enhance protection for the local *roroa*/great spotted kiwi population. This quickly became the catalyst for a broader APNP protection for multi species taonga - including kea and whio. The BNZSTK guidance for this from Michelle Impey and Wendy Sporle, together with DOC's Nicola Toki and Wayne Costello, was greatly valued by the small alpine community which, with local Graeme Kate's IT skills, laid the foundations for today's expansive Arthur's Pass Wildlife Trust - visit www.apwt.org.nz.

Prior, in the late 1960s, I had commenced my tramping days with the Tararua Tramping Club whilst at Wellington College, later venturing frequently on to the Maunga Taranaki alpine slopes. My last alpine climb was a winter crampon summiting of Mt Ngauruhoe in 1977 just prior to moving to Papua New Guinea for twelve years working in the agricultural - primarily coffee - sector. I greatly enjoyed my time there and the opportunity to upskill national staff and contribute to their country's economic development. Moving to Brisbane in 1990 I enjoyed frequent tramping excursions into Lamington NP and the more challenging Mt Barney/Border Range country with a kiwi friend, as well as fitness enhancement climbs on the Sunshine Coast Glasshouse peaks. My brother Michael and I relished a guided Copland Pass traverse in February 2003 which served to reinforce my kiwi roots and led to that return to NZ a year later - to Arthur's Pass.

My latest/last? - move was to Motueka in 2015, promptly joining the Friends of Cobb and checking their line from Chaffey's Hut to Round Lake, which I never tired of. Thereafter followed a gradual transition to the neighbouring Friends of Flora, with increasing workloads, rewards, and a chance for my boots to cover new territory - and contribute to their transformative project/s.

Having done a bit of a full circle, we should be very thankful that we don't have to worry about crocs, snakes, leeches, and ticks!



Kea nest update

Chrissy Kaneen

With the past two seasons at the kea nest not producing chicks (we are hoping they were using another nest instead), we had our fingers crossed when we put out our cameras in June. Little did we know that mother nature was going to send us a curveball. With the devastating floods, late June & early July a lot of homes and roads around the Motueka valley and surrounds were affected. One of these roads is still impassable and is making excursions into the Flora difficult.

The Graham valley road up to the carpark is closed due to a slip which makes getting to the kea nest to change the batteries & SD cards a multiple day event. After installing the two cameras at the start of June, we were unable to retrieve them until the 19th September. Amazingly the batteries were still going but that was an ominous sign as normally by September when nesting is taking place, there are hundreds of videos each month to look through. The cameras are triggered by movement, the more visits to the nest, the more videos there are, so we had expected the batteries to have run flat. With only having 931 videos for around 3 months we were hoping they may have just been starting late this year.

We were expecting to see Ironman, our resident male kea and the female from the last few seasons getting the nest sorted and doing all the necessary activities to welcome new additions. Unfortunately after viewing the footage and also the following months footage that was kindly collected for us, we still don't know what on earth is happening.

We have footage of Ironman & the female at the nest at times but not as often as they should be. The female has been taking bedding into the nest but then is not seen for days. A juvenile has been visiting, we believe this is one of the previous chicks from the nest, possibly the one who had some fun with our cameras a couple of seasons ago. Then there is another twist, with what look to be another pair of kea turning up in the last few days before the last SD cards were retrieved. Check out our Facebook page for videos of all the different kea visiting the nest.

There have also been numerous videos of a rat entering the nest on multiple occasions. We have a kea proof trap situated close to the nest, so hopefully this unwanted pest is dealt with soon.

We will be back up to the nest as soon as possible to retrieve the SD cards and change the batteries, with luck the footage will shed some light on what is happening. We still have all our fingers crossed for positive news.



The Juvenile



Ironman with his leg bands



The female

Mothing Diversions

Robin Toy

Of course, to moth, is not a verb, but moth-trapping, the term most people adopt, jars with me. When we go mothing, we don't trap the moths, we just attract them to a light, and they settle on a bedsheet that we've strung up behind the light. We then photograph them and let them go. So, we've coined the term, mothing.

Sandy and I are newcomers to mothing but find it addictive — you just never know what might turn up. Our interest developed after FOF invited Ryan Bauckham to come and do a survey in the Flora (Newsletter March 2025). Spring was a good time to share our new passion with other FOF volunteers, and we'd planned to do this at Flora Hut. Unable to do so due to the washout on the Graham Valley Road, we've held a couple of mothing sessions at Brooklyn Domain.

For those who don't know it, the Brooklyn Valley is 30 km from the Flora, on the edge of the orchard belt around Motueka. The bottom of the valley has paddocks and orchards, but the hillsides and the top of the valley have native bush. The Domain was donated to Tasman District Council in 1984 and includes remnant lowland forest the council has deemed "significant", including a hillside of tawhai raruiki | black beech. We thought it might have some interesting moths!

We managed two sessions before the nights became prohibitively short, dusk too late for social mothing. Six of us hung out around the Lepiled light for a couple of hours after dark, and just like the teddy bear's picnic, we had some big surprises! The biggest was undoubtedly this ghost moth, *Dumbletonius characterifer*. A female's wingspan can reach 95 mm, a monster among Aotearoa's moths. It featured in FOF's December 2023 newsletter when Sandy observed a kea digging up one of its soil-burrowing caterpillars, but this was the first time we'd seen an adult moth. A short-lived beauty, the moth has no mouthparts so doesn't live long.

Dean Carroll mothing at Brooklyn



Dumbletonius characterifer



We use iNaturalist to identify the moths we see. iNaturalist uses AI tools to suggest possible identifications but for this moth none of the options it suggested looked right. We posted it anyway so that others could make suggestions. Help came from a 10-year-old, who suggested *Scoparia phalerias*. We checked that out and it looked right. We think iNaturalist was confused because it doesn't hold many records, so doesn't have much to build an image. Subsequently others have confirmed the identification — only the second iNaturalist record for the South Island. Since finding it at Brooklyn, we've also found it in the Flora as well, and someone else has found one down south in the Cragieburn Forest Park. So probably widespread if not common.

Scoparia phalerias



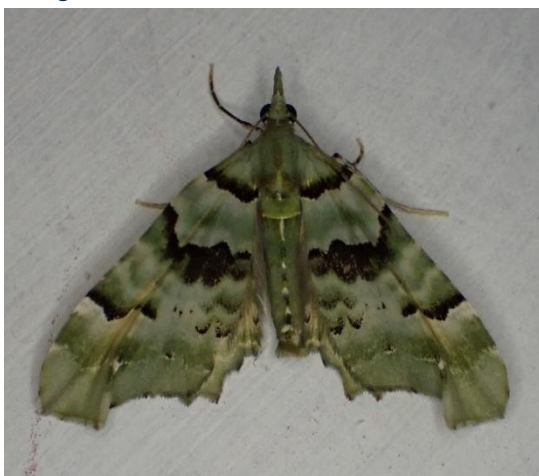
Glaucocharis interrupta



While trapping in the Flora these last months, we have carried the mothing gear around and continue to build a contemporary moth list for the Flora. In the last year we've seen 193 species. Perhaps the most surprising find was *Glaucocharis interrupta*, that was last recorded in the Flora in 1889!

It's hard to have a favourite among such a list, but we do have a soft spot for these two, *Elvia glaucata* and *Mnesarchella acuta*. The latter is only a few millimetres across, so able to fit comfortably in the pink lid of a pottle.

Elvia glaucata



Mnesarchella acuta



Photos from the front line



Rocky outcrops are dotted around the park.



Above is **Beech strawberry** (*Cyttaria* sp.), a native parasite of beech trees causing a cancer-like growth (gall) on branches and forming yellow golf ball-like fruiting bodies that are eaten by pigeons and other animals.



Evening sunshine looking towards Mt Arthur from Salisbury lodge.

All photos were supplied by Peter Olorenshaw