



Friends of Flora Newsletter

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Photo credit – Peter Olorenshaw

In this bumper spring edition

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Thank You!

From the Chair - Sandy Toy

Spring is here, and the associated winds bring change in the Flora and for FOF.

Firstly, a full year after the devastating storms took out the Graham Valley Rd and access to the Flora car park, the road reconstruction is complete. Thanks to all our volunteers for their commitment in continuing to service the entire trap network (1,342 double sets) monthly, as well as completing most of the planned monitoring work while the road was closed. A shout out to the FOF Committee for managing the challenges, to residents above the washout for their support, and to DOC, TDC and Ferguson's Earthmoving for the robust repair to the road.

An aerial 1080 operation covering 73,846 ha of the Flora and Cobb area, was carried out in late June as part of the Department of Conservation's National Predator Control Programme. FOF welcomed the operation as our tracking tunnel and trap catch data showed a spike in rodents and FOF's trapping is not sufficiently intensive to make any dent in rodent populations.

Aerial 1080 is currently the only landscape-scale rodent control tool available. FOF's monitoring results illustrated the spectacular success of the operation – rat tracking declined from 37% (across 140 tunnels) in May before the operation, to 0 in July after it, with not a single card tracked. Post operation trap checks revealed just one catch across the entire trap network, a rat in a trap in a 1080 exclusion zone near a hut.

Visitors and volunteers alike experience the joy of seeing vulnerable species like kākārīki flashing in the sunlight and Titipounamu flitting up gnarled tree trunks, and we can now look forward to the results of the FOF's five-minute bird count monitoring programme in November without trepidation.

I reported in the winter newsletter on FOF's 25 years of volunteer led biodiversity restoration. Year on year, FOF's activities have expanded. The need is clear and we need to increase FOF's capacity to continue safeguarding our precious wildlife and providing the data needed to underpin management decisions.

I am delighted to welcome Penny Nelson to Te Tau Ihu and to FOF. Fresh from managing DOC, Penny brings support that was previously unimaginable and will help us transform the way we work

Finally, a shout out to our sister group, Friends of Cobb who have just celebrated 20 years of volunteer conservation work in the Cobb Valley to the north of FOF's project area. Their stoat trapping network adjoins that of FOF, and they also have long-running monitoring programmes, notably for rock wren. Together with our neighbours outside the National Park to the southeast, Farmers for Whio, there is a continuous band of stoat trapping across 32 km.

FOF is a part of a much bigger picture. My thanks to all our partner groups, to DOC, to our funders and supporters and most of all to our volunteers.

Introduction from our new committee member - Penny Nelson

I am delighted to be joining the Friends of Flora Committee. My husband Peter and I have recently moved to Nelson from Wellington. We are really enjoying living here. Our sons are still Wellington based but we see them regularly as they are keen trampers and bike packers.

Recently we were walking up the Flora Valley - which we both love - and ran into one of the Friends of Flora Volunteers Martin Howard. We were so inspired by the work being done that we both decided we wanted to get involved. Pete will become a trapping volunteer. You have achieved so much over the last 25 years!

I've had a career across government, science and business. Most recently I was Director General at the Department of Conservation. Currently I am doing a bit of governance work and enjoying having more time to garden and go walking.

I'm looking forward to meeting more of you at some of the Friends of Flora events that are coming up.



Penny with a Petrel on Korapuki island

Kea nest 2026/27 season - Chrissy Kaneen

Kea surveillance has begun for the 2026/27 season. Our cameras were attached to two trees outside the nest on the 28th June and it looked positive from the start with two kea watching the installation process.

The SD cards & batteries were changed out on the 19th August and we have lots of good news so far from the 4418 videos taken.

Number one is that rats have been seen for the last few seasons, a trap has been installed nearby, the last rat seen was on the 30th June.

Coincidence that this was the day of the 1080 drop, we think not! Thanks DOC!

Number two is that we have seen an unbanded female kiwi pass by the nest three times in just over 2 weeks. Because she is unbanded, we know she is flora born and breed.

Number three is that we have kea, lots and lots of footage of kea. Ironman and our female from the last few years have been together since the 2nd July with lots of preening, feeding & we even caught some mating on camera. In the past we have seen both kea at the nest sometimes for the whole day then disappear for a week, this time the female is there constantly so things are looking good.... Fingers are crossed. As they say don't count your kea before they hatch but with the timing of the 1080 drop and the noticeable decline of pests since, we are helping the kea to give it their best chance.

UPDATE!! STOP THE PRESS!!

We have since retrieved our latest footage and have some sad news; it looks like a weka has taken 2 very small kea chicks!! This is heart breaking especially when things were looking good for the kea on the pest front.

Because kea typically nest in deep cavities under logs, in rock crevices, or underground, they are somewhat protected, but a persistent and clever weka can target vulnerable or exposed chicks if the parents are away. In this case it shows that both the female & ironman walked away from the nest before the weka runs past the camera with something white, fluffy & floppy in its beak, it then returns 30 minutes later and runs past with another one.

If there is a positive, and we are always looking for one, since then the female & Ironman are still at the nest together, feeding then going into the nest afterwards, so possibly there might be another chick in the nest. Kea have been known to continue feeding behaviour after a nest failure but our fingers are most definitely crossed.

Stayed tuned to our Facebook page as I will be giving updates on there as well posting videos & photos.



Ironman and the female

Meet Tibio – the Mt Arthur giant wētā – Sandy Toy

Thousands of people walk up the Tū Ao Wharepapa/Mt Arthur ridge each year. Few are aware that there are giants in their midst. This isn't surprising, as the giants are nocturnal and quite small, weighing up to 7g – the weight of a pencil. But they epitomise the spirit of this special place. Like much of the biodiversity of the Flora, they occur only in New Zealand, and indeed, only on a few mountains in Kahurangi National Park. They're cute, but smelly, and when disturbed have a habit of freezing – not a good survival strategy when predators like mice and rats hunt by smell. They've lived on this mountain for millennia, bumbling slowly through the tussock, climbing slender stalks to feed on flowers and seeds in the alpine meadows.

These giants are Tibio. Also known as the Mt Arthur giant wētā, or *Deinacrida tibiospina*. Both these names are a bit of a mouthful, so Tibio is a handy nickname. FOF volunteers made their acquaintance a decade ago. Back then, it was assumed that living high on the mountain they were safe from the ravages of non-native mammalian predators that were munching through our iconic birds and lowland giant wētā. But a retired DOC scientist Ian Millar was concerned that the assumption might be flawed. With Ian's help, FOF set up a monitoring programme for Tibio using tracking tunnels – 100 spread across 3 locations. The tunnels do not disrupt Tibio activity. If they come across one in their nightly wanderings, they walk through and leave an inky signature on a white card. And so do other critters in the tussock. Monitoring is a long game. The most useful results come from trends in abundance. Last summer FOF's data indicated a catastrophic decline in Tibio tracking coincident with a sustained increase in mouse tracking.

FOF's monitoring results have set the alarm bells clanging. Tibio is easily overlooked and is unlikely to have any impact on Aotearoa's GDP. But it is a 'canary in the tussock'. If Tibio is in trouble, other critters that make the tawny tussock of the Tableland home are also likely to be affected. It's tempting to think that we're not responsible for Tibio's plight and it's easy to forget to cherish the natural riches of places like Kahurangi and the 'services' they provide. But we all make choices and I hope collectively we can harness enough knowledge, wisdom and determination to find a way of saving these tiny giants from extinction.

FOF volunteers heading into Tibio country.



Tibio – a tiny giant!

This is a youngster, evident from its smart black and gold colours.

Photos by Ruedi Mosimann

H5 Bird flu wildlife resource kete

Birds infected with H5 bird flu have been confirmed in New Zealand. It is not established here yet – but it is only a matter of time.

We have seen elsewhere in the world, the impact on wildlife which has been horrific at times. Luckily, Aotearoa's relative isolation has given DOC and MPI time to plan and prepare. DOC has compiled this great source of information <https://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/wildlife-health/avian-influenza/h5-bird-flu-wildlife-resource-kete/>.

H5 can infect mammals as well as birds, but the risk of infection of people is low in New Zealand. The virus is spread by direct contact with an infected bird/animal, their faeces or body fluids. So, species most at risk are those that breed or roost collectively, particularly wetland and coastal species or scavengers. Forest birds are less at risk, but we need be prepared.

Key messages:

- If you see three or more sick or dead birds, call the Exotic Pests and Disease hotline [0800 80 99 66](tel:0800809966). Store this number on your phone.
- Biosecurity is key. Please be extra vigilant about cleaning boots, clothing and vehicles before going to the Flora. If you find a dead bird, take photos and record as much information as possible but do not touch.
- Healthy wildlife has a better chance of recovering from infection and building resistance. As always, avoid disturbance or causing stress to wildlife.

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. Next up in our spotlight is a person that is part of the dynamic duo Toy & Toy – **Robin Toy**

I've been engrossed by biodiversity going back to school-days — hats off to an inspiring teacher. That led to a degree in ecology at the University of York, where Sandy and I met.

I went on to a PhD in tropical ecology which involved 2.5 years living in a Malaysian rainforest and six months freezing in Aberdeen. A great training in resourcefulness; rigorous science, not so much. So, after a brief postdoc, I reinvented myself as an ecotoxicologist reasoning that working in a lab would plug the gap. I thought I'd do six months and go back to ecology. Twenty years later I finally made the break.

During that time, Sandy and I travelled an embarrassing amount and lived outside Houston for a year (amazing birdwatching). We also moved to Aotearoa — second best thing we ever did. We signed up with the Remutaka Conservation Trust within days of arriving, assisted with kiwi translocations and became accredited kiwi handlers. In 2007 I started working as a professional ecologist and still do the occasional bird survey contract.

We moved to Motueka in 2010 and joined FOF. I've been involved in just about every aspect of FOF's activities ever since. Third best thing we ever did.



Lying down on the job — the best way to scan the canopy of tropical forest trees. Robin in 1986.

Camera surveillance project – 4 years on – Warren Kaneen

What's been caught on camera in the Flora?

The Flora's camera surveillance project has had another busy year, with 14 cameras now operating across the area – seven east and seven west of the Flora Stream/Takaka River. Together, they are helping us keep an eye on both our native wildlife and introduced predators.

Since the project began, volunteers have watched an estimated 30,000 videos – a lot of hours spent discovering what goes on in the bush when nobody is watching!

One of the highlights has been increased kiwi activity, including wonderful footage of an unbanded pair chasing and calling to each other on Z line.

Unfortunately, the cameras are also revealing some worrying trends. Cat sightings increased significantly in 2025 and jumped again in 2026, particularly in the eastern zone. Including the Grecian catchment, an important area for Whio.

Stoats continue to feature, including footage of a family group of at least five around H line. Stoats were also recorded around the kea nest in years when chicks were present. The good news is that since the June 2026 1080 operation only 1 cat and a possum have been seen on the cameras and this is in an area very close to the boundary of the drop.

The cameras have captured plenty of other wildlife too – ruru, whio, harrier, hedgehog, tui, ferrets and deer. Most deer are fallow, although six red deer sightings have been recorded since 2025.

The project has also taught us that our surveillance methods need to avoid influencing wildlife behaviour. So, mayonnaise lures which were with some cameras were removed earlier this year after they appeared to be changing the behaviour of weka and mice. Below are some still shots of the camera footage.



Feral cat



Roroa/ Great spotted kiwi



Ferret



Ruru/Morepork



Possums



Whio/ Blue duck

Photos from the front line



The view from the top of Cobb Ridge – photo courtesy of Gerald Bruce-Smith



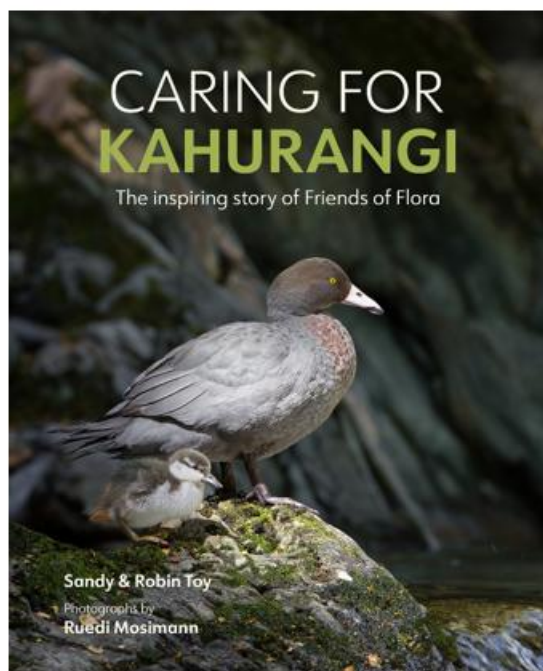
Trapping on F line – Photos courtesy of Kim Starnes



Emily & the Balloon crew – Photos courtesy of Sam Costigan



Christmas is Coming!



Caring for Kahurangi, the inspiring story of Friends of Flora celebrates the extraordinary biodiversity of the Flora area and the incredible story and achievements of FOF. Elise Vollweiler (Motueka Guardian) summed it up: One of the most biodiverse places in the country is right on our doorstep, and its caretakers have compiled a 300-page love letter in its honour.

Peter Laurensen in Backcountry magazine said of Friends of Flora: *Caring for Kahurangi is a graphic demonstration of the power of visionary volunteer conservation ... I'm not the only*



admirer of Caring for Kahurangi. The book won the Mountain and Adventure Heritage Award at this year's New Zealand Mountain Film & Book Festival. Well done FOF — take a bow and draw some strength from your win to help continue your great work.

Looking for a beautiful Christmas present that promotes the mahi of Friends of Flora? *Caring for Kahurangi* can be bought from [Potton & Burton, Caring for Kahurangi](#).

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. Also thank you to those of you who have shared stories and photos to make this newsletter special.

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

