

THE REMU-TALKER

Call of the Wild (Kiwi)

In this year's acoustic data we have detected a male and female calling near the Clay Forks turnoff close to the Orongorongo Track.

While we've picked up a few distant kiwi calls from the Orongorongo Track in previous years, these are within 100m of the recorder. Susan suspects that they are probably not paired off yet as they were calling at separate times and the male sounds quite young.

Postcards from Pukaka

The sweet chick was in need of TLC when she arrived at Pukaka Mt Bruce in February. She had been abandoned by kiwi pair Marcel & Hemi and was dehydrated. The team hooked her up to some IV fluids and a few days later she was on the path to good health. She is now thriving at over 1000g and can return home to Remutaka Forest Park soon.



Kia ora,

What a year! Our previous newsletter was during Level 4 lockdown and we have since returned to the park and enjoyed a few months of near normality. However 2020 hasn't finished with us yet as we adjust to the implications of community transmission and further Covid-19 restrictions. In level 2 we can enjoy the park safely and while following Government [guidelines](#).

We hope you enjoy the following updates on our kiwi, the park and the hard work of our volunteers over the last few months.

Kiwi Breeding Season

In the Remutaka Forest Park some of our monitored male birds have started their first clutch for the season. Last season our kiwi population, like many across NZ, only had one clutch rather than the usual two - with the exception of Lorenzo of course!

We were fortunate not to lose any of our monitored adult birds to drought this year. However, further north kiwi were struggling to survive in the very dry conditions.

Quick facts:

- 🦜 Remutaka Forest Park has an estimated 150+ kiwi from a founder population of 24.
- 🦜 1st & 2nd generation Remutaka birds are breeding with 7 breeding males currently monitored.
- 🦜 Kiwi only have one mate at a time.*
- 🦜 The nest is in a short burrow, rock crevice, hollow base of a tree, or in a hollow log.*
- 🦜 Clutch size is 1-2 eggs.*
- 🦜 When more than one egg is laid, they are normally spaced apart by about two weeks.
- 🦜 Our kiwi males incubate the egg - as do most other kiwi except the Tokoeka where family groups are involved.
- 🦜 The kiwi breeding season generally runs from June to March when food is most plentiful.*

* Robertson, H.A. 2013 [updated 2017]. North Island brown kiwi. In Miskelly, C.M. (ed.) *New Zealand Birds Online*

Trapping Post-Lockdown

On top of all the social and economic disruption caused by Covid-19 this year, there was concern that our pest control programme would be negatively impacted during lockdown. Finally, on the 14th of May, we were able to resume most of our usual activities in the park including checking traps.

Our data analyst Winifred Long has provided us with some insights into the trapping results for May 2020 compared with May last year. She reports that the catch tallies for the first post-lockdown check were somewhat patchy as some of the traplines recorded more than usual but others showed little or no difference compared with 2019. Many of the traplines have now been checked 2-3 times and the catches on the second check were often similar to, or greater than, the first check tally. Winifred proposes that the rats and stoats found in the first check were killed fairly early on in the shut-down period and then the bait deteriorated and didn't attract anything for the last half of the eight weeks. The fresh baits put out during the first post-lockdown check then attracted a second wave of pests.

Here are some snippets from the trappers themselves on what they found along the way:

- * *Lovely day on Sunday saw a couple of families of NZ falcons, with one lot giving a great aerial display.*
- * *12 of the DOC200 boxes had been turned over/kicked/displaced, sometimes several metres away from their usual spot. As there was obvious pig rooting all along the ridge I'm assuming the trap shenanigans are down to them.*
- * *We had a guide for several minutes near the top of Sunny Grove track - a black and white, smelly, billy goat. He casually wandered on ahead, then waited whenever the track curved to ensure that we had not lost the track.*
- * *A small little bit of excitement was after checking either trap 19 or 20. I heard what I thought was something bush bashing about 20-25 metres further away in the bush. To my surprise it turned out to be 2 or possibly 3 wild pigs crashing through the fern & Supplejack. On sighting me they quickly high tailed.*

This is the first time, since trapping for the kiwi programme commenced back in 2002, that we have experienced such a high rate of interference from pigs. A local pig hunter tells us: "*They are smart animals, they have sussed that the boxes contain lollies, such as eggs and rats*". In addition, there is some serious competition between the pigs for food. In the past we have had the odd trap messed with, even a kiwi burrow, but nothing on the scale currently being seen. This is concerning for us as it draws hunters who may not have had their dogs kiwi avoidance trained into kiwi populated areas. If their dogs are regularly going through kiwi avoidance training this reduces the risk to the birds, as does only hunting during the day while kiwi are hiding out in burrows.

We have also seen an increase in feral cats in the park. They are very effective killing machines and our native birds are easy prey. These predators are difficult catch as they have adapted to the bush over multiple generations and are very wary. One of the volunteer trapping teams is currently investigating the best method of catching feral cats and consulting with other conservation groups.

The Trust is currently reviewing the trapping network and looking to add some traps to certain areas. The team has also been experimenting with different baits. Egg mayo has already been identified as an attractive lure and we are trialling it to see how long it lasts.

Thank you to all the volunteers and sponsors involved in the Trapping Network. If you would like to Sponsor a Trap please click [here](#) for more information.

Kiwi Project Funding

Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful in our application for funding from Kiwis For Kiwi this year. We had sought significant funding to monitor a number of adult males and chicks over two years in order to assess the impact of the recent mast year on our kiwi population. The scale of the project was too big for us to handle with our own volunteer resources so the funding was required to enable us to contract specialist help.

We will now be dependent on our acoustic monitoring and trail cams to get an idea of how our kiwi are managing. We do understand that DoC is taking an increasing interest in our kiwi and may be undertaking some monitoring themselves.

Our Management Committee will convene a strategy meeting soon to look at how we will manage our kiwi in the future. We will need to look at what we can achieve with our normal levels of funding. Any suggestions from volunteers and members would be welcome. Email news@remutaka.nz

Creating Better Habitats

Surviving pockets of native bush in the gullies of the old pine plantation provide a wonderful source of seeds for reforestation work in the Catchpool Valley.



Volunteer Profile: Fixit Team

Mike White outlines the three groups within the Trust's Fixit Team and what their roles entail:

1. Trap re-furbisher repair and recondition any broken traps at home. The two members pull them apart, clean them up, replace bits, re-assemble them and then twist and bend various bits to get them firing between 80 and 100 grams. These refurbished traps can then be re-deployed in the field.
2. The 6 or so foot soldiers who walk many kms, carrying a number of refurbished traps and a good set of tools. These folk go to the traps that have been reported as faulty and they then carry out repairs onsite or swap out the broken trap with a refurbished one. Typical faults are: "won't fire"; "bait gone, trap hadn't fired"; "trap fired, no catch"; "rat caught on way out"; "mesh damaged"; "box damaged".
3. The 4 members of the "Rat Pack" walk one complete trapline in a day or 2. They test the firing weight of every trap and clean, wire-brush and lubricate the traps and carry out minor repairs where possible. They also re-ink the pink markers. Any faults found are added to the fixit database, to be attended to by the foot soldiers. This group aims to get around the entire network of 45 traplines about once every 2 years.

When we go out on fixit missions, our standard approach is to clear any catches from the traps that we pass, resetting the traps and reporting any catches to Winifred and generally copying in the trapline leader. To have a well functioning and successful trapping network, we rely on the trappers to be aware of their "cold traps" i.e. no catch in the last 6 months. Someone in the trapline team should weight-test the entire trapline, but especially the cold traps at least twice a year, to ensure that the traps fire with a 110 gm weight. Any traps that don't fire at 110 grams, should be reported to the fixit team (fixit@remutaka.nz), so that we can attend to the trap.



Mike Blackman and Ross Gilmour checking a trap



Trap with a damaged killbar wire loop

Catchpool Restoration Project

Since 2009, the Remutaka Conservation Trust has been revegetating the Catchpool in an attempt to restore the original biodiversity of the area and to provide plenty of food and a healthy habitat for our kiwi and other indigenous species of birds, lizards, invertebrates and fish.

Over the last few months our focus has been on riparian restoration along the Catchpool stream banks and in the newly opened up wetlands restoration zone. Groups have cleared huge swathes of woody weeds like buddleia, gorse, blackberry, acacia, eucalypts and wilding pines whilst also removing infestations of Old Man’s Beard, Pink ragwort and Tradescantia. The work has taken place on both sides of the stream from the ford and fish ladder down to the southern end of the campground.



Xero volunteers planting in the sun



All “hands” on deck for digging

A good number of new and returning organisations have volunteered for restoration work so far this year, including Xero, MBIE, VUW, ACC, IAG and ANZ.

The winter months are the best time to plant out the native trees and plants we have grown in our nursery. On July 4th, Mike Rees and volunteers relocated 200 plants from the nursery to sites along the Orongorongo Track, Catchpool Loop Track, Catchpool and Graces Streams and the start of the Nga Taonga Trail.

Catchpool Eco Hotspot



Within the Catchpool Valley there is a designated area called the “Catchpool Eco Hotspot”. Over the past few years this area has been the focus of an intensified pest control programme to develop an area where native birds and lizards can thrive. The map clearly illustrates how intensive the trapping network in the Eco Hotspot is. Each one of those dots represents a predator trap - checked, cleared, re-baited and maintained by teams of volunteers.

Supported by the DOC Community Fund, we have contracted Meg Shaw to add monitoring lines for lizards and pests as well as introducing additional traps into this area. Ground-dwelling native lizards are particularly vulnerable to pests so monitoring them can tell us a clear story about the conservation health of this area. Our monitoring results will help guide us towards the optimal density of traps in the pest control operation. We are waiting on advice regarding the next steps for this project, specifically the best spacing for the traps to protect the lizards.

Winifred Long has agreed to do a restoration plan for the Eco Hotspot. This will be invaluable as a template to potentially develop other hotspot in the Upper Ture area. It is a future goal to have two areas of intensive pest control to help all lizard and bird species thrive in the park.

Acoustic Project Gains Seed Funding

The Remutaka Conservation Trust is involved in a project "Practical solutions for outdoor localisation using acoustics in conservation" which successfully secured seed funding from The Science for Technological Innovation (SfTI) Fund.

The principal investigators are Dr Stephen Marsland (Victoria University and a RCT volunteer) and Dr Yusuke Hioka (University of Auckland- School of Engineering). Another RCT volunteer, Susan Ellis, is involved as an associate investigator.

The 2-year project will apply new tools in sound localisation in natural environments to citizen-led conservation projects. The research will first establish a reliable algorithm for accurate sound source localisation, which will then be used in three different practical applications: estimation of bird abundance from their calls, localising incubation burrows of North Island brown kiwi, and localising Matuku/bitterns from the male booms. The research will ultimately lead to improved monitoring procedures of endangered NZ avian species.

The RCT part of the project will be to host (and eventually benefit from) the North Island brown kiwi detection trials. The project will explore the use of sound recorders to pinpoint kiwi incubations. We have already conducted a pilot study and were able to locate two kiwi incubation burrows using only remote monitoring with microphones and trailcams.

Kiwi Acoustic Survey 2020

Written by: Susan Ellis on behalf of the Kiwi Acoustic Recorder Team

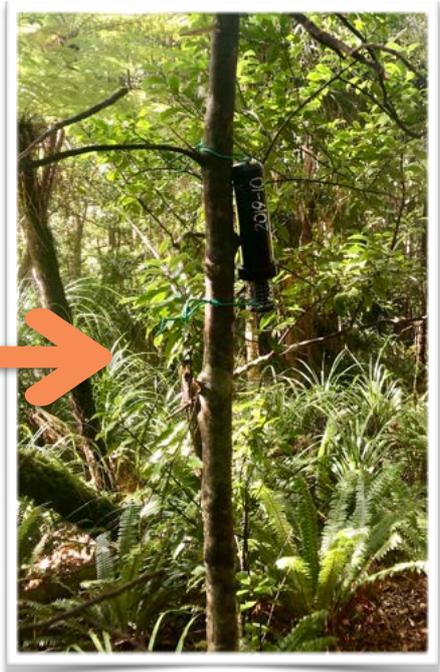
This year's kiwi acoustic survey is about halfway completed for 2020. This is the fourth major survey to estimate the spread of North Island Brown Kiwi in the Remutaka Ranges through time (earlier surveys were completed in 2011-2013, 2014-2015, and 2017-2018).

So far we have detected kiwi calls from the Sunny Grove track and Sledge Track in the North, through the main kiwi area (McKerrow and Whakanui Tracks) to about halfway down Clay Ridge track. For the first time we have detected a kiwi pair hanging out along the Big Bend track (near trap BB14) - so you may hear kiwi duets in that region if you are staying in nearby huts. The recorders are presently out along the East Whakanui track and Turere Ridge, before moving to the Greater Wellington water catchment area.

The survey has been enabled by a keen group of volunteers and we would like to thank them for their help putting out recorders in often challenging weather conditions! We are also benefiting this year from an increase in the available pool of recorders, thanks to funding from the DOC Community Fund, plus the loan of extra equipment from Victoria University.

Once the data is downloaded, it must be processed to detect kiwi calls (male/female) and to estimate the call density (average number of calls per hour) so it will take a few months before we have the final result. You may see some of the recorders out along tracks when you are trapping or kiwi tracking - but don't worry, they only switch on at night so they won't be recording you!

Can you spot the acoustic recorder in the field?



DOC in the Park

By: Angus Hulme-Moir & Robert Ashe

It has been a crazy few months and we have been fortunate to oversee a large stimulus spend in the Remutaka – in the region of \$300,000. This was thanks to the Government's post-Covid stimulus package for the forestry sector. Here's a snapshot of what has been achieved:

- * Trap track maintenance for RCT and MCT - cutting new lines and maintaining existing ones
- * Installed 3 new lizard monitoring lines in the Eco hotspot
- * Upgrading and resurfacing DOC managed tracks including Nga Taonga and Orongorongo tracks
- * Wilding pine control including an aerial operation and ground control covering 90ha
- * Re-opened the mid height forestry road for contractor access
- * Successfully avoided dropping gums into Peter's wetland
- * Successfully raised Winnie's ire for chopping too many Pungas
- * Extracted a large Rimu which had fallen on the road. This was gifted to the Waiwhetu Marae
- * Bowled an exceptionally large number of Tasmanian Blackwoods – extremely satisfying

The work will be ongoing for the next few months with track maintenance and wilding pine control.



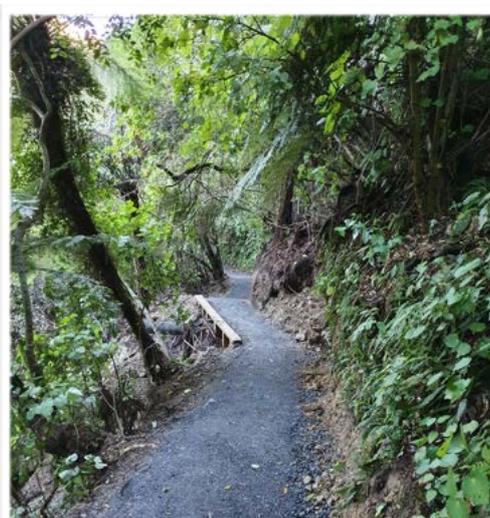
Wilding Pine Operation



Pinch gate, Orongorongo Track



Felled Rimu



Nga Taonga Track

Event: Kiwi Avoidance Training for Dogs

For all doggos who regularly visit the park, the next avoidance training is being held on Friday 28th, Saturday 29th & Sunday 30th August at the Catchpool Centre, Remutaka Forest Park. Register by emailing kat@remutaka.nz

RCT Partner Introduces Greenwall

Something a little special has happened at Astelia Apartment Hotel – welcome to our living and breathing greenwall!

In keeping with our focus on the environment and minimising our carbon footprint, Astelia is proudly showcasing her brand new foliage to welcome our guests as they check in for their 4 star stay.



Like all Village Accommodation Group properties, Astelia is operating our Village Safe Place programme, ensuring that we are adhering to the highest levels of hygiene and sanitisation standards.

Check them out at www.villagegroup.co.nz

Our Sponsors/Supporters

Thank you to the following businesses and organisations as well as all of our kiwi, transmitter, trap and tree sponsors for their new and continued annual support.

