



THE REMU-TALKER

Remutaka Kākā

Volunteer trappers were excited to spot a pair of kākā near Mt McKerrow at the beginning of summer. Native populations of boisterous birds have been absent from the Park for a long time and we hope this signals their permanent return.

There has been a further report of three mischievous kākā harassing a smaller bird in the Ōrongorongo River area recently. The smaller bird landed by the river and turned out to be a juvenile native falcon - shaken but unharmed.

The birds have likely travelled from the Wellington population initially established at Zealandia. These sightings reinforce the success of wildlife sanctuaries and community trapping groups who were actively removing predators from kākā habitat.



Kia ora,

This edition of Remu-Talker comes to you during the second week of our national lockdown due to Covid-19. We have a wonderful community of supporters - from our committee to our trappers and trackers; our sponsors to our corporate volunteers; our nursery workers to our fix-it team and all of our newsletter readers. We are thinking of you all as we all adjust to the current reality.

The Trust is following the lead set by the Department of Conservation. Read more [here](#). We know that some of you will be going through withdrawal and will be anxious about traplines and ongoing projects. Please stay away from the park. Your health, and the health of the nation, is more important at this time.

Now could be a great time to refresh your existing backyard rodent traps. We've heard of people running marathons around their fence lines and climbing Mt Everest up their stairs. How many loops around your backyard would make up the equivalent of an average Remutaka trapline or track?

Stay safe, stay at home and stay healthy. Kia kaha

Kiwi Tracking

Jo Sim and her Conservation Dog Rua have been busy tracking and monitoring kiwi through this past year. Rua and Jo recently found an adult wild-hatch male weighing 1760g! This kiwi has been proudly named 'Rua', in respect to the clever doggo who found him.

Colin, Rush and Mr Baggins, kiwi who previously lost their transmitters, were also found healthy and thriving in the Park.



In this picture Jo is holding a juvenile, wild-hatch kiwi who, when found, was a great weight of 975g.

The weight that kiwi are generally safe from predators is 1100g.

VIP (Very Important Passenger)

Written by: Alan Peck

It was Sunday afternoon and I was anticipating a nice relaxing evening with the latest home brew sitting in the fridge waiting to be sampled. Just before four o'clock my phone rang. It was Melody, our resident kiwi expert. How would I fancy a quick trip to Pūkaha/Mt Bruce, she asked. When? Now, she said. Why? We have a kiwi chick that needs to be taken there straight away. After some hasty recalibrating of my plans for that evening, I agreed.

It turns out that our kiwi pair of Marcel and Hemi had hatched a second chick about two weeks after their first one and this little fellow had been deserted in favour of his/her older sibling. He was about 5 days old and in need of care.



Melody duly delivered him to my house, where he was seen with open-mouthed awe by some of my grandchildren.

Then it was off to Pūkaha National Wildlife Centre, Mt Bruce in the Wairarapa with the chick in a kiwi container safely strapped in the back seat of my car. Take it easy and no hooning around the corners, were Melody's final instructions.

On the way the "Kiwi chicks onboard" sign in the back window attracted a few toots and waves.

I duly arrived at Mt Bruce and was met by Jess, who has been at the kiwi hatchery for about seven years. I waited while our little one was examined and weighed, and then placed in a nice warm home where he will remain for a few days before being released into the creche. He will stay there until he reaches about 1.2kg, which is fighting weight when it comes to defending himself against stoats. He will then return to the Remutaka Forest.

But that's not the end of the story, while Jess was examining our little one we looked through the window to the adjoining incubator room only to see a new chick hatching and breaking free of its egg.

The new arrival was cleaned up and weighed before being placed in a nice warm dry cabinet. That's not something you see every day. The new arrival looks exhausted in the photo, but he was pretty feisty and full of life once he was picked up.

Many thanks to Melody for asking me to make the trip, and thanks to Jess for letting me hang around for the new hatching. It was a truly magical evening and a real reminder of just how important all our chicks are, especially in this mast year.



Don Millward

We remember and celebrate the life of Trust volunteer Don Millwood who passed away in December.



Don first joined the Rimutaka Forest Park Society (as it was called then) around 1989, a year or so after it was formed. Don was one of several enthusiasts who led public relations efforts and track clearing. Around 1992-93, Don and others refocused the purpose of the Society and he was elected President at the 1993 AGM. Don retired as President in 1995 (to be succeeded by Bill McCabe) and he later became Treasurer for two years before retiring from this role in 2003, and from the Committee in 2011.

Memorably Don displayed a pair of his old prosthetic legs on top of his letterbox so you knew you exactly where he lived - handy for when he hosted committee meetings.

Don was a cheerful and humble trapper and who had an endearing love of beautiful forests. In this regard, Don was a keen supporter of the Society's extensive pest trapping work that provided a basis for the introduction of brown kiwi - now our flagship programme. Don has made a large and enduring contribution to forest conservation in the Remutaka Forest Park, and beyond.

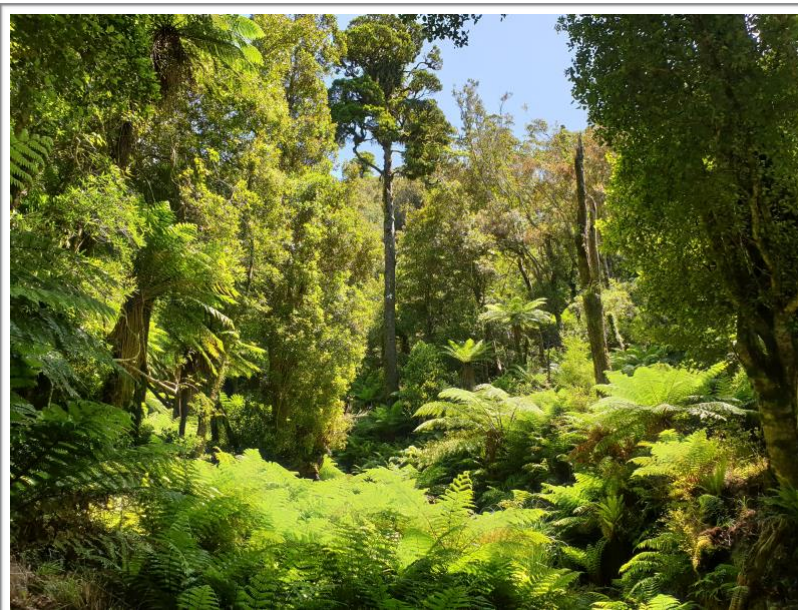
Predator Control 2020

Our predator control programme consists of an extensive trapping programme utilising volunteers to clear and re-set the 900+ manual traps within the park targeting mustelids, rodents, hedgehogs and possums. In addition to these manual traps, we also employ Goodnature A24 and A12 self setting traps.

The current COVID-19 Level 4 is preventing us from checking and clearing the traplines. Our trappers will be chomping at the bit to get out along their traplines once restrictions are lifted. We will all be interested to hear what they find.

Pre-Covid19 saw the start of a trial focussed on stoats using rabbit meat in DOC 200 traps. The rabbits for bait use came from the Catchpool Valley which has the added bonus keeping their numbers down. A small group of non-squeamish volunteers were on skinning and chopping duties to provide the trappers with bags of bait. Thank you to the amazing volunteers and trappers for the extra effort involved in the weekly trap checks and messy fresh bait.

The stoat numbers caught this year to date have not increased from previous years with other groups experiencing the same in the Wellington area. This is possibly due to the excess food in the forest so stoats are not hungry yet and looking for food in the traps. As the fruit and seeds start to rot and germinate a decline in the rat population forces the stoats to look elsewhere for food - hopefully towards our baited traps rather than native wildlife.



Catchpool/Wetlands

Our restoration focus in 2020 will primarily be upon riparian and wetlands restoration. This area includes the Catchpool and Graces Streams and the wetlands area across the stream from the Catchpool Centre.

DOC had been ready to mill the remaining pines and was anticipating going to tender at the end of March. However, even before the current level 4 restrictions, Covid-19 had a drastic and negative affect on pine log sales and the industry generally. The process will be restarted once restrictions are lifted and the logging market restarts.

Corporate volunteer groups from MBIE, VUW, ACC, IAG and ANZ have been cleaning up the streamlines from the ford & fish-ladder down to the entrance gate and removing woody weeds like buddleia, gorse, blackberry, acacia, eucalypts and wilding pines from the wetlands.

Kiwi Research

Last year a research group, *The Whakapapa of North Island brown Kiwi*, applied for permits to sample blood from kiwi from a large number of locations including Remutaka. Our original kiwi were translocated to the Park from Little Barrier Island. Analysing the small number of captive birds of known, mixed origin that were released in the Remutaka Forest Park in 2006 should help them tease apart the consequences of hybridisation and also of local adaption. The group hopes to use their findings to contribute to future revised guidelines for how, where and when to translocate kiwi.

Seeking Catchpool Lizards

Written by: Meg Shaw

In 2018 I was asked to help coordinate a lizard monitoring project in the Catchpool as part of measuring the effects of the intensified trapping in the Eco Hotspot. We set up 50 sites to try to detect the presence of skinks and geckos in the area. A small team of volunteers has been doing twice-yearly checks during which they check all sites every day for a six day period.

In November 2019 we finally found a Northern Grass skink! But excitement waned quickly as that was our only find in that period, and in the first 4 days of the most recent one. Then, just as we were giving up hope again, we struck gold! Cherie found a Ngahere Gecko under one of the foam tree wraps! These beautiful little things are classified as 'At risk: Declining' and, like all lizards, are very vulnerable to rodent predation.



So, although the lizards are currently few and far between, it's great to know that there are indeed resident populations in the Catchpool and I look forward to seeing the difference we can make within the Eco Hotspot. Thanks to volunteers Sean, Jess, Maddie, Summer and Cherie for their help and patience!

New Traplins for Eco-Hotspot

New traplines have been installed in the Catchpool Eco-Hotspot area and a team of volunteers had started checking and clearing the traps pre 19 March. They are mostly A24 traps which we aim to rebait every 4 months but gradually more DOC 200 traps will be added. Some of the lines are quite demanding as they sidle steep slopes but we are lucky to have some fit volunteers who enjoy the challenge.

Hutt Mana Supports Kiwi Avoidance Training

As a non-profit community group the Trust relies on grants, sponsorship, donations and volunteer hours to run our projects. Long-time supporter the Hutt Mana Charitable Trust has provided us with a \$2000 grant which will go towards Kiwi Avoidance Training for dogs.

The smell of kiwi is very attractive to inquisitive doggos. All visitors who enjoy the Remutaka Forest park with their canine companions should complete the course every 1-2 years to ensure that you are not putting kiwi at risk. With kiwi being re-established by many groups across the country, it means you can explore dog-friendly trails on your road trips with greater peace of mind.

With Hutt Mana’s assistance, we can train 70 – 80 dogs in one weekend. The next training weekend was scheduled for the weekend of 9th & 10th May 2020 but this is subject to Covid-19 restrictions. Please email kat@remutaka.nz to register your interest and we will be in touch closer to the time. In addition to their grant, Hutt Mana have profiled us on their website: click [here](#) to read.

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.

