REMUTAKA CONSERVATION TRUST
Regenerating our natural habitat

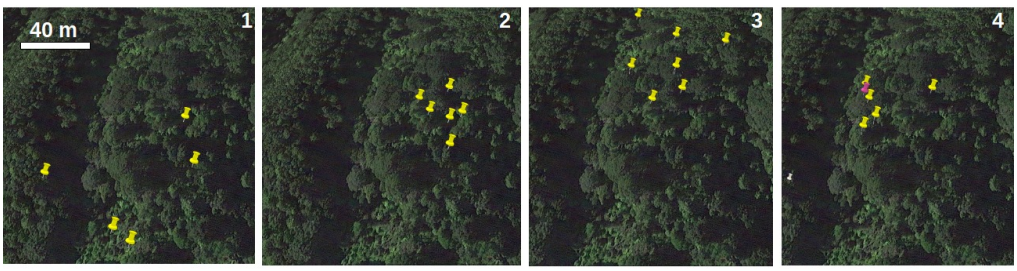
THE REMU-TALKER

Riki and Mata Welcome Spring Chicks

Riki (male) and Mata (female) are a kiwi pair located near the Solomon and Sledge tracks in the Remutaka Ranges. These are third or fourth generation kiwi descended from our released birds in 2006-2009. Recently we managed to find Riki's 2023 incubation burrow and set up a trailcam at the burrow entrance. From footage collected, **we're thrilled to announce that Riki and his mate Mata are proud parents of TWO baby chicks!**

(left) the burrow entrance; (middle) the first born chick returning to the burrow after a nightly adventure and (right) a brief daytime foray.

Riki and Mata are completely wild kiwi which means they don't have a radio transmitter attached. The pictures below summarise how we managed to find the burrow with acoustic monitoring. We found from previous experience that males often call not far from the incubation burrow during breeding season. Therefore we set up acoustic recorders to pinpoint Riki's first call every evening. Once we were near the area he called from, we back-tracked his footsteps and searched around until visually sighting the obvious kiwi burrow (purple pin on the figure). We then set up a trail cam pointing at the burrow entrance to monitor his breeding and captured the subsequent chick hatches.



Location of Riki's incubation burrow September-October 2023
Yellow pins show acoustic recorder locations during progressive honing in on loud male kiwi calls and footsteps (time periods 1 to 4). At the end of time period 4, the burrow was located (purple pin). For reference, last years burrow (across the gully) is shown by the small white pin in (4).

Worryingly, the trail cam has also picked up a stoat hanging about (see pg 5). Fortunately Riki is still there protecting his chicks and will keep a close eye on them in the early weeks even after they leave the burrow. It is in the following months that the young kiwi are most vulnerable to stoat predation.

AGM Report

The Trust AGM, held on Wednesday 18th October, was very well attended with 54 people present.

President Gerry Brackenbury kicked off the meeting by thanking the committee for their hard work over the past year and for their collective help during his first year involved with the Trust. He also commented on the considerable effort of those who dedicate their time to attending our traplines to keep our kiwi safe. He noted that our trap audit has been completed and that we should be implementing our trap replacement plan over the next three years. Gerry acknowledged the support we receive from Taranaki Whānui, DOC, Hutt City Council, Pharazyn Trust, Asmuss Foundation, Placemakers Seaview, and Save the Kiwi, as well as two personal individual bequests received during the year. As a final comment, Gerry highlighted that our Five Year Plan includes an objective to enhance the biodiversity of the forest. He is confident that we are managing our kiwi population well and he will be encouraging the Trust to start thinking about what other species we might consider for future reintroduction.

Karen Baker, Treasurer, presented the Financial Statements for the year ending 30 June 2023. It was a good year financially, with some unexpected income. However we will need to continue to manage expenditure carefully as the trap replacement plan will require significant funds.

Certificates acknowledging long service were presented to some of our members. Receiving certificates for 20 years service were: Susan Ellis, Maarten Vink, Alan Thompson, and Melody McLaughlin. Those receiving certificates for 10 years service were Winifred Long, Alison Stephenson, Sue Day, and Dennis Wood.

Nominations were sought for the Management Committee for the 2023/24 year. Sufficient nominations were received and were elected unopposed. Gerry will continue in his role as President, supported by Malcolm Arnot (Vice President), Fanny Leduc (Secretary), Karen Baker (Treasurer), and Geoff Cameron, Paul Falloon*, Sean Gurr, Alan Peck, Peter Simpson*, and Rosemary Thompson (Committee Members). (* denotes new member).

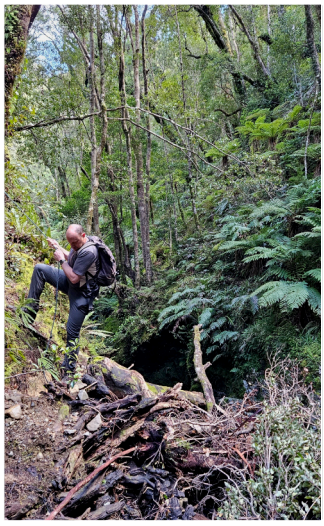
On completion of formal business the gathering was entertained and informed by two speakers.

Winifred Long presented "Insights from nearly 20 years of trapping records". Winifred (pictured right with Peter Simpson) is passionate about data and administers our trapping database as well as leading the Trust's triennial diurnal bird survey.

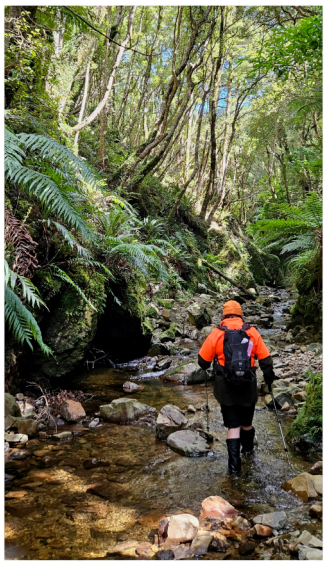
Winifred provided a very interesting potted summary of 20 years trapping data and showed a selection of well presented graphs which clearly demonstrated how what we do is having a positive impact on the forest. You can read more about this on page 4.

Gary Sue from Hem of the Remutakas gave a presentation on the excellent work that he and his team are doing for conservation in the area on the coast side of the Remutakas. He explained how this work was not only enhancing conservation, it was also providing worthwhile employment and training for a number of young people. The programme is financed through the Jobs for Nature fund set up by the government as a Covid response. This funding is due to cease in April 2024.

Many thanks to all those who were able to attend and we look forward to the year ahead.



Mike descending by rope into Turere Stream



Angela negotiating the Turere stream

Mike throwing a 'rat discus'

A Saturday on the Trapline

By Angela Gilbert

October is our turn to clear the Upper Turere Stream (UTS) trapline in the Orongorongo valley. We had made grand plans for the weekend, booking a hut in the valley with some friends and maybe introducing some of the more hardy experienced ones to what the traplining experience was like. But plans changed to a regular day in the bush with me (Angela) and my partner Mike, who was recovering from flu and still a bit rough.

We dropped in at our Team Lead Sean's place on our way as he had an A24 GoodNature trap that needed replacing along our trapline. I told him we'd be there, wearing our All Blacks shirts since it was the NZ SA World Cup Final this weekend. He opened his front door wearing his South African jersey and I did enjoy seeing that.

We started from Sunny Grove at 9am on a glorious day. We have quite a distance to walk up and along the Whakanui Track just to reach our trapline. It usually takes 15 mins to the first junction and one hour from the car to the top junction.

Given Mike's post-sickness lung power I was quite surprised when we were only 10 mins behind our fastest times when we got to the top of the hill. The easier gradient beyond there to the top of the Upper Turere Stream trapline was good for Mike and his coughing dropped off. We had only seen one person at this point - a young man passed us, going quick with a daypack, as we neared the gorgeous goblin forest at the highest point of the track.

We got to the spot where we leave the track, and headed down a spur to the start of our trapline. It always takes longer than I think to get down. Probably 500m or so through fairly clear paths with bits of pink ribbon and tape. 2 hours and 35 minutes after leaving the car, we were sitting at UTS11, our first trap to check.

We had a wee bite to eat before re-baiting the first trap. Then down to the rope into the stream - there has been a bit of washout on the hillside here. Once in the stream, it was pretty plain sailing. All up, 3 rats in the UTS line. A few rats under the A24s. Some loose netting, a broken trap and a new A24 installed.

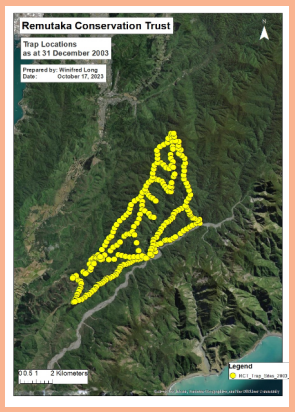
From UTS1 you are probably only 50m or so from the McKerrow ridge track and super close to the junction with the Whakanui. We were making great time back (it says 1.5 hours to Sunny Grove - but it is more like 40 mins) when Mike discovered the satisfaction of clearing out the wooden water gutters across the track. When I was here last in the rain they were overflowing and causing track damage. The last 6 or 7 gutters on the Whakanui are now very clear!

Back at our car just after 3pm. 6 hours 30 mins or so. I thought it would be much slower. So yay for Mike being amazing with a cough. He was mighty.

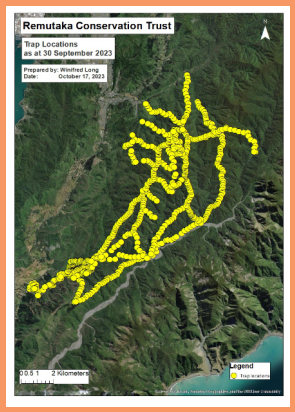
I loved doing the trapline. It was such lovely weather. The birds were all out and happy. The stream was clear and looked very inviting. Makes you happy to be out there. And we accounted for some rats.

Are We Winning?

Over the past 20 years we have seen the Remutaka Forest Park trapping network grow and evolve as illustrated by the maps and comparisons below. In her role of collating and analysing the trapping data over this 20 year period, a common question Winifred is asked is "ARE WE WINNING?"



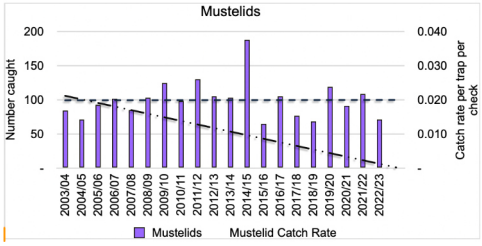
2002/2003
18 traplines
246 traps (DOC only)
2,300 trap checks



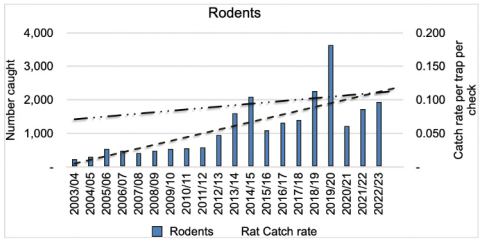
2022/2023
41 traplines
950+ traps (DOC, rat, possum, A24)
17,300 trap checks

For three of the predator types: mustelids, rodents and hedgehogs the answer varies:

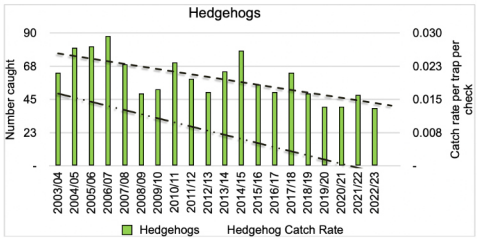
Mustelids: We are holding the line! The number of stoats and weasels caught varied considerably from year to year, with the average trend ever so slightly sloping upward. However as the number of times that traps have been checked per year has increased by 652% from 2,300 in 2003/4 to 17,300 in 2022/3, the catch rate per trap per check shows a strong downward trend.



Rodents: Unfortunately the same cannot be said. Both the numbers of rodents caught and the catch rate both show a strong upward trend. This appears to be fuelled by the two beech-mast events, one in 2014 and the other in 2019, which resulted in very high seed-fall and consequential increase in rat populations due to increased food supply.



Hedgehogs: We appear to be winning as both the annual total and the catch rate are trending strongly downwards. To illustrate, in 2006/07 88 hedgehogs were caught across 6,760 trap-checks, a catch rate of 1.3%. In 2022/23 only 39 hedgehogs were caught but the number of trap-checks at 14,500 was much higher in 2022/23 resulting in a catch rate of 0.2%.



The insights from 20 years of trapping data also inform current questions facing the team such as: Does trapping need to be intensified in certain areas?; Is intensification required for beech mast events?; What is the impact of poisoning operation and what research is needed is needed e.g. lure effectiveness.

For Winifred's full presentation to the 2023 AGM: CLICK HERE

A24 in Action

The photo below was taken by Maarten Vink in October at MSR4 trap 2. At first glance he thought that the rat had rabbit ears due to the position of the leaf! The neighbouring DOC 180 trap had nothing in it, so Maarten figures that this rat had found the A24 a more interesting place to check out than the DOC trap.

For those unfamiliar with the trap types, The Goodnature A24 Rat & Mouse Trap automatically resets itself, uses toxin-free paste and is certified humane. The A24 Trap is powered by a CO2 gas canister. This is how it automatically resets after each strike. One gas canister can kill 24 rats and mice before it needs replacing.

Of the 16 traps sites checked that day, 3 had rats under consecutive A24 traps along the trapline. Maarten says this is quite a rare occurrence.

Caught on Camera

The screen grab below is from the trail cam set up outside Riki and Mata's burrow. A stoat, who was passing by, smelled the incubation burrow and decided to check it out. Luckily since Riki is in the burrow, the stoat thinks better of raiding the nest. Adult kiwi are too big for stoats to take on, but the chicks are vulnerable.

Trapline Q&A

Melody was asked these questions by curious trappers as part of the trapline audit project - we know our readers are curious too!

1. **How many traplines are there now?** 48 traplines
2. **How many teams are there trapping?** 25 trapping teams
3. **How many traps are there?** Over 950 traps - A combination of DOC200, A24, rat and possum.
4. **What does the Trust do with the data collected and how does this inform any changes to our trapping practice?**

   The data provides us with a picture of pest numbers year on year plus areas in the trapping network where pest numbers are particularly high. We then add more traps to that area. Reduce the distance between traps from 100m to 50m. Provides us with information on traps that may not have caught for a while, helps the fixit team to identify faulty traps and numerous other analysis.

5. **Are there any traps that are the most 'popular' for rats?**

   Not really. There are some "hot traps" that will catch more than others but that is due to a combination of factors rather than the trap type.

6. **Is it a good thing to find lots of rats? Or is that not so good?**

   Yes and No. There is a whole lot of research out there about predator/prey balance in NZ forests, and much debate. We want some rats to feed the mustelids but not so many that they clutter the traps and eat their way through the forest. Autumn winter is usually a high catch time for rats as they get hungry. We will never eradicate rats until we are predator free across the north island. They breed too fast! Our network is set up to target mustelids and rats are seen as a bi-kill, we would need to reduce the spacing between traps substantially to be any where close in the managing the rat numbers. We also have big boundaries of continuous forest, farmland etc so re invasion of any pest species is pretty high.

A Southern Collab

The Brook Waimārama Sanctuary in Nelson were looking for an exciting new system to demonstrate to visitors the different bird calls you might hear in their Sanctuary.

Inspired by the audio players in the Remutaka Forest Park they approached the RCT for advice.

RCT member Alan Thompson agreed to build five bird call players for the sanctuary. He describes the players as a bit of classic "number 8 wire" engineering to meet a rather unique need. PVC plumbing pipe for a case, some wooden brackets and a handful of components from the local electronics shop put together in his basement workshop.

The bird calls initially featured will be the tūī, korimako/ bellbird, kererū/NZ pigeon, pīwakawaka/fantail, riroriro/ grey warbler, ngirungiru/South Island tomtit, kākāriki karaka/ orange-fronted parakeet, kakaruai/South Island robin, ruru/morepork and the kārearea/NZ falcon.

The million dollar question is... do the Brook Waimārama Sanctuary bird calls have a Southern twang?

20 Year Service Awards

We are proud to recognise the long service of four volunteers.

Maaten Vink - Maarten started trapping in 2003 on the first traplines set up in preparation for the 2006 kiwi release. He helped with the kiwi project planning and has a great wealth of conservation knowledge (nab him for your next quiz team!). Maarten is very fit and bush savvy and does some of the challenging traplines. A valued supporter of the volunteer functions, he and Anja enjoy socialising with other volunteers.

Susan Ellis - Susan started trapping in the Catchpool area in the early 2000s and helped set up the present trapping network. A key person on the Kiwi Project, Susan worked with DOC and the Ornithological Society and attended many of the early organising meetings. Susan trained in long distance tracking and kiwi handling and was part of the team who went to Hautura (Little Barrier Island) to collect the first 20 kiwi. As a scientist she has been invaluable in planning and organising operations. Susan served on the committee and now looks after the kiwi monitoring using acoustic recorders and data analysis.

Neil Robert Hutton Photography

Melody McLaughlin - Melody was part of the first deployment of traps in the Park. She played a major role in the Kiwi Project and organising the translocation from Hauturu. Melody trained in distance tracking and kiwi handling and subsequently trained others. She was part of the team that went to Hauturu and liaised with the Wainuiomata Marae for kiwi releases and blessings. Melody has shown excellent skills in advocacy and building relationships with key stakeholders and volunteers, as well as fundraising.

Alan Thompson - Alan was brought into the Trust for his technical skills. He was part of the kiwi project subcommittee, trained kiwi trackers in the use of equipment, helped with helicopter deployment of traps, set up radios, invented the kiwi spy and purchased and set up PLBs. Alan set up the satellite dish and monitor at the Wainuiomata Marae in 2006 so people could see the kiwi release. Over the years he has saved the Trust a lot of money by repairing and maintaining equipment. Alan also invented, made and voiced the bird call players at Catchpool.

A Very Kiwi Christmas Gift

$50 will:

- Help fund the constant requirement for bait for our traps. Without frequent fresh baiting, our 2,000+ traps would be ineffective.
- Help fund the purchase of the native trees and plants we need to continue our habitat restoration work.

$100 will:

- Help buy equipment we need to monitor the health of our native wildlife
- Help purchase safety equipment needed to keep our volunteers safe

$200 will:

- Provide and set up a trap to keep stoats and rats away from our precious kiwi and other native birds.
- Provide predator control for an entire year over the area needed to sustain a kiwi pair.

How to donate

Please email sponsors@remutaka.nz with your donation amount and contact details. You will receive a receipt and we are a registered charity (CC37211) for tax deductible claims.
Deposits can be made directly to Rimutaka Forest Park Charitable Trust 38 9024 0505274 00

Thank you to the following key sponsors as well as all of you who sponsor kiwi, transmitters, traps and trees for your continued annual support