

Revive Rotoiti

Newsletter of the Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project
Issue 27 Spring 2012



Restore Learn Be involved

The Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project is a DOC 'mainland island' ecological restoration project with a strong focus on science and learning. Through control of introduced pests the project benefits native species over 5000 hectares of honeydew beech forest at Lake Rotoiti in the Nelson Lakes National Park. A wealth of information is provided to inform and inspire other species recovery projects. The Friends of Rotoiti volunteers assist by controlling pests in adjacent areas.

Self-resetting traps open for business

The gas-powered self-resetting A24 stoat/rat traps from Goodnature Ltd are now up and running in the Rotoiti Nature Recovery Project (RNRP).

The RNRP hosted the national launch of phase two of the four year project, with Hon. Kate Wilkinson, the Minister of Conservation, Green Party spokesperson for Conservation Eugenie Sage, Al Morrison, the Director-General of DOC and Neil Clifton, Nelson Marlborough Conservator all in attendance.

Craig Gillies, the DOC scientist leading the project, introduced the trial and monitoring methods before joining the visiting dignitaries on a bush walk to inspect some traps in-situ and experience the birdsong of Lake Rotoiti.



Looking at one of the new A24 traps is Jenny Long (ranger), Conservation Minister Kate Wilkinson, Craig Gillies (DOC scientist) and Eugenie Sage (Green Party). The traps are set in boxes to avoid capturing ground birds such as weka.

Pest abundance within the RNRP will be carefully monitored during the two year trial, with stoat abundance in particular being monitored more closely than usual.

This trial, due to run until mid 2014, will record pest captures and the A24's capacity to keep functioning efficiently in our tough alpine environment. It is important that the public don't interfere with the traps – for the trial results and the safety of their fingers.

Although the 815 traps are designed to re-set 24 times before being checked, they will be monitored every three weeks during the trial.

Early results indicate that pest animals killed in the traps are falling clear of the trap entrance, leaving it free for the next pest that comes along. It is too early in the trial for us to draw any conclusions about the efficacy of the new traps or their potential for large scale pest control.

Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



Weka breeding in St Arnaud

Our resident pair of weka have had a busy year. From six clutches of eggs over the past year, they have successfully fledged six chicks. Their parenting skills are improving, with two chicks fledged quite recently, and they've already been seen with three half-grown chicks.

We are still monitoring our local weka population and your assistance would be appreciated. Please report any sightings of weka with coloured leg bands to the staff at DOC Nelson Lakes.



Weka adult and chicks.

Supporter funds help kea

Last year one of three local kea nests failed due to possums getting into the nest cavity so more effort is going into protecting known kea nest sites.

The RNRP has been able to purchase more Sentinel possum traps thanks to a donation of \$600 from the Friends of Rotoiti supporters.

Twelve traps have been placed on the St Arnaud Range and within a month had already caught eight possums within 300m of two kea nests.



Kea adult and chick.

Gouland Downs kiwi chicks arrive

The day of 27 September dawned fine and clear for the release of two great spotted kiwi chicks into the RNRP. Lake Rotoiti School pupils, local iwi and St Arnaud locals joined together to celebrate the arrival of two very relaxed chicks.

The chicks were hatched and raised at Willowbank Wildlife Reserve in Christchurch. This marks the end of a three-year project of the RNRP team removing eggs from Gouland Downs in the Kahurangi National Park.

After a boat trip down the lake, the chicks were released into a specially prepared site. Since then, one chick initially lost a little weight as expected, but is foraging well for natural food and is slowly gaining weight.

The other chick was not feeding and rapidly lost weight. Despite ongoing management it died shortly after. This problem with released chicks not feeding appears to be an issue with some young birds. It may be related to the social behaviour of great spotted kiwi as chicks born in the wild spend at least a year with their parents before 'leaving home'.



(Left to right) Lake Rotoiti School students Cody Gelling and Danielle Ferens, together with Ngati Apa ambassadors Eli Huntley and Kingston Henry, receive our two new great spotted kiwi chicks.

Kiwi breeding update

Two great spotted kiwi chicks were recorded by motion-activated cameras last summer. One chick has not been seen since. Its parents have been using very deep burrows which has made it impossible to confirm whether they have a chick with them.

The other chick has been doing particularly well and gained weight at an extraordinary rate, putting on close to a kilo in six months. Recent radio-tracking confirms that the chick is still hanging around with his dad, Te Matau. Our team was surprised and delighted to discover Te Matau nesting again this season as he was found sitting on an egg in late September.

Our telemetry data also suggests that another pair may be incubating an egg. This is good news for our growing population of kiwi.

Our other RNRP chicks

Ruth Garland

Ruth grew up visiting Lake Rotoiti every summer, following the kiwi tradition of spending time at the family bach. This led to her moving to St Arnaud in 2006, and working in the RNRP seasonally ever since.

Ruth loves spending the winters up at the Rainbow Ski Area as a ski technician and getting out skiing and snowboarding as much as possible. The last six years has given Ruth a depth of experience from checking trap lines to monitoring our kiwi. The sense of pride she feels waking up each morning listening to the vibrant birdlife is a great reward for all the hard work.

Jen Waite

Jen finished her masters degree earlier this year, researching the effects mainland islands can have on plant reproduction. She initially worked in the Waitakere Rangers near Auckland, first on predator control before spending two summers monitoring the recently re-established population of kokako for Forest and Bird.

Before moving to St Arnaud, Jen worked as a pest control and biodiversity contractor around the Auckland area. She jumped at the opportunity to start work here in the RNRP doing a range of field work. Jen loves tramping and trail running around Nelson Lakes and being able to work in her own backyard.

Jo Joice

Jo's connection to Nelson Lakes goes back to the early 1990's when she spent a lot of time here assisting with wasp and kaka research. She then moved onto the Kakapo Recovery Programme on Maud, Pearl and Codfish Islands. The experience gained from several kakapo breeding seasons also took her to Mauritius to work with the rare echo parakeet.

Jo then took on the challenge of starting a family and was happy to return to Nelson Lakes in 2009 knowing the family would love it too. Tramping the hills checking stoat traps and doing other RNRP work seems like 'coming home'.

Jenny Long

Jenny's love of the outdoors led her to work with Scouts and joining university tramping clubs. After studying and travelling overseas, she worked with geographic information systems for an ecological consultancy firm. Following her conservation dream, she then completed a postgraduate Diploma in Wildlife Management.

A project on hares originally brought Jenny to Nelson Lakes, and now she works primarily with the A24 self-resetting traps. She also does other RNRP work such as tracking tunnel monitoring and occasionally kiwi work.

Jenny loves being out in the bush in such a stunning place with a choice team.



Friends of Rotoiti

Friends of Rotoiti captures - December 2001 to October 2012

17,891 pests removed

| Rat | Mouse | Hedgehog | Stoat | Ferret |
|--------|--------|----------|--------|--------|
| 3,135 | 11,548 | 1,167 | 829 | 73 |
| Weasel | Cat | Rabbit | Possum | Bird |
| 48 | 28 | 175 | 888 | 38 |

New website design : www.friendsofrotoiti.org.nz

The Friends of Rotoiti website has undergone a facelift to showcase their conservation work. The goal for the site is to share the success that a group of dedicated community members can achieve by working with and supporting DOC.

Sharing their 11 year pest control story by providing practical information and fact sheets benefits other like-minded groups.

A main feature of the site is the 'News' section which provides a short summary of each trap check, as well as other work the group is doing such as trap building and maintenance.



A screen shot of the 'About Us' page on the new Friends of Rotoiti website.

New members welcome

There are many ways to support the Friends of Rotoiti from actively working in the field, administration, helping with trap maintenance or by becoming a supporter.

If you would like to help out in some way, contact Petr Carter (co-ordinator) on 03 5211 067 or email pccarter@doc.govt.nz.

Rainbow Ski Area stoat and possum trapping

Each autumn, all the DOC200 stoat boxes need to be removed from the ski field road. This is done to protect them during the ski season when they can get damaged during road maintenance.

The other benefit of bringing these traps in over the winter is that they can dry out and any maintenance carried out.

The 68 stoat traps and 12 Sentinel possum traps were put back in position at the end of October.



Friends of Rotoiti volunteers (left to right) Alex Maule, Ray Vibert and Warwick Ward putting out the DOC200 boxes and Sentinel traps on the Rainbow ski field road after the winter. Photo : Peter Hale.

Supporters help with local conservation

The Friends of Rotoiti supporter opportunity started in 2010 and has been instrumental in providing much needed funding to enhance and increase local conservation work.

Over the past three years their funds have been put to good use in a variety of ways :

- Feeding Fen the kiwi dog.
- Purchasing equipment such as kiwi transmitters, a burrow scope and three trail cameras for the RNRP kiwi programme.
- Enabling the Friends of Rotoiti to update their possum traps and buy new rat and stoat traps.
- Protecting kea nests from possum attack with the purchase of Sentinel traps.

Each year a list of supporter options are chosen to reflect the current needs or direction of Friends of Rotoiti and the RNRP.

Supporter slips are available from the Nelson Lakes Visitor Centre or can be printed directly from the Friends of Rotoiti website.

Revive Rotoiti on-line

Help us save printing and mailing costs, contact Petr Carter at pccarter@doc.govt.nz, to receive an email copy.

For previous issues of Revive Rotoiti and RNRP Annual Reports see www.doc.govt.nz

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