



*Photo credit: Melissa Boardman*

## Autumn Newsletter

Kia ora Sarah

Welcome to our new newsletter!

We are so glad to have you with us.

Whether you've been a long-time supporter of Kaharoa Kōkako Trust or you're just discovering the work we do, this newsletter is your new home for updates, stories, and ways to get your hands dirty (in the best way possible). Our efforts focus on nurturing a kōkako stronghold through predator control and habitat preservation efforts in the Kaharoa Forest. This quarterly newsletter is our way of bringing that mission directly to you.

## What to Expect

We'll be sharing a mix of:

**Action Alerts:** Upcoming volunteer and event days

**Field Notes:** Updates on our current restoration and protection projects

**Local Spotlight:** Seasonal stories about the unique flora and fauna that call Kaharoa Forest home.

Thank you for being part of our community and for caring about the future of the kōkako of Kaharoa and the entire forest ecosystem. Our journey is one of passion, perseverance, and the power of collective action.

In this edition.....

- More kōkako sightings and song - results of recent census
- Upcoming dates for your calendar
- February volunteer work morning
- Successful rat control - latest pest-op results
- Freshwater monitoring programme
- Expansion of our trapping network
- New admin assistant
- Re-vamped Website
- Notes from the Canopy - Kōkako in Autumn
- Tiny Taonga of Kaharoa - NZ Giraffe Weevil
- Focus on Flora - Kohekohe

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## More Kōkako Sightings & Song



*Photo credit: Melissa Boardman*

In Spring 2025 a census of the kōkako population in the Kaharoa forest was undertaken. The survey is an extensive operation that involves the whole forest being assessed over several weeks by a team of expert kōkako surveyors.

In total, there were 81 territorial pairs and 8 single birds. A key finding was lots of juvenile birds which will disperse and may turn up outside the management area.

Visitors to Kaharoa are noticing a tangible difference with more kōkako being heard and seen!

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## **UPCOMING DATES FOR YOUR CALENDAR**

**April 18th - RTI card collection. Great day to bring your kids**

**May 2nd - Autumn pest operation. Pindone into bait stations**

**May 30th - Untaken Pindone removed from bait stations**

**June 6th - Post- op RTI cards**

**June 7th - RTI card collection. Great day to bring your kids**

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# February Volunteer Work Morning



Thank you to the 14 volunteers (aged 6 to 60!) who arrived with big smiles, ready to get stuck into some great mahi for the forest. Fantastic to see 4 new faces too! (Must have heard about the home-baking!)

The range of tasks included weed clearing (mainly blackberry and honeysuckle) and light track maintenance in the Ruato to keep tracks clear ready for pest-ops. Also, the last of the possum excluder base plates were installed in bait stations in the Onaia West.



## Successful Rat Control

For the second year in a row, we hit the magic 0% rats at our post-operation measure of rat tracking index (RTI).

This has been essential for kōkako breeding success.

The effective pest control we have been able to achieve is as a result of the commitment and hard work by the KKT Trustees and volunteers.

For kōkako protection, the targets are <2% at 1st November and then an average of less than 5% through the breeding season; which is a big ask as the breeding can extend to three back-to-back nests and each takes about 7 weeks. So, we carry out a 6-week post-op, and 12-week post-op assessment to represent two clutches.

At 6 weeks ship rats were back up to 3.3% and by 12 weeks had climbed to 24.4%. So, the first clutch at least, should have been fairly free from rat interference. These results highlight two facts. Our forest has abundant food for all species including the rats; and that ship rats breed like crazy.

We get a big tick of success for the initial 0%, but for the average over 12 weeks (9.2%) it reminds me of every school report I ever had " Must try harder". In this case I am not sure there is much we can do, bar a mid-summer pest-op, and I don't want to go there!! But anyone visiting the ngahere over summer will have seen young birds of all species in abundance and there are plenty of fledgling kōkako around.

Graeme Young- KKT Chairman

[Learn More about Rat Monitoring](#)

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## Freshwater Monitoring

Over the past 4 years, Bay Conservation Alliance were carrying out water quality monitoring for the Onaia Stream. We will now be continuing this valuable monitoring with the help of a small team of volunteers.

The core objective is to track water quality and biodiversity while evaluating how upstream land use impacts the stream's health.

The plan is divided into two distinct phases to move from "baseline" understanding to "long-term" maintenance:

- Phase 1: Baseline Establishment (First 12 Months)
  - Goal: Define "normal" seasonal variations and ecological thresholds.
  - Full Assessment: A comprehensive SHMAK testing (Stream Health Monitoring and Assessment Kit) every three months.
  - Monthly Checks: Frequent testing of clarity, temperature, *E. coli*, conductivity, nitrate, and phosphate.
- Phase 2: Long-Term Maintenance (Post-12 Months)
  - Frequency: Sampling scales back to quarterly.
  - Contingency: Frequency increases if "abnormal" results are detected.

**If you are interested in helping with this project please get in touch.**

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## Extension of our Trapping Network

We have added 20 new DOC200 double set stoat traps to areas of the forest prone to reinvasion of mustelids. Volunteers carried the traps to their new locations during this month's work morning.



New  
Admin  
Assistant

If anyone has noticed that I look less stressed this year, you can look no further for the reason than Dawn Williams. From a funding initiative from Bay Conservation Alliance (BCA), we have funding from Bay Trust and TECT for a part-time administration assistant for the next 3 years. Dawn was a clear standout for the role, and she started at the beginning of the year with immediate impact for me!

Among her tasks are managing volunteers and work events, assisting with our education programme, as editor for our newsletters, and the thousand and one jobs it takes to liaise with all of our contacts and supporters. She is already making our Trust more efficient and our communications more-timely, which I am sure the regular volunteers will have noticed and appreciate. Dawn has been volunteering with KKT since 2009 (work mornings and adopt-a-track maintenance) and then with particular impacts in trapping (with her partner James Christer since 2020), and with pekapeka-tou-roa/long-tail bat monitoring (again with James since 2022).

She is also the Rotorua Facilitator for Trees for Survival, an environmental education charity.

We owe huge thanks to BCA for enabling this appointment, and to Dawn for saying yes when we asked her if she would take it on.

Graeme Young- KKT Chairman

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## **Re-vamped Website**

You'll now find the story of Kaharoa Kōkako Trust, meet our Trustees, and learn about how you can get involved.

WEBSITE

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## **Notes from the Canopy** **Kōkako in Autumn**

March generally signifies the end of the breeding season for kōkako. They've spent lots of energy through spring and summer courting, nesting, egg laying, incubating eggs, brooding nestlings, feeding chicks at their nest, after they fledge, and also while they encourage their juveniles to be independent, lots of work!

Kōkako (and other forest birds) will be moulting their worn feathers and growing new ones before winter to help keep them well insulated, warm, and able to glide beautifully! So you may see birds with uneven or missing wing or tail feathers, or perched, spending time preening their feathers in the sunshine.

Kōkako will be feeding earnestly in the next few months to help with new feather growth, to gain weight and improve condition. In Kaharoa Forest young kōkako might stay with their parents, or other adults for months, learning how to find different foods, how to behave and how to interact with others, so you may encounter family groups of 4 or 5 feeding together. Adult kōkako are also singing a lot more, now they're not having to be so sneaky during breeding.

You might hear strange 'warped' sounding kōkako song, this is sub-adult birds practicing their own song, which they learn and develop from hearing their parents and neighbors songs.

Teenage kōkako often hanging-out together in small groups – they're noisy and a bit clumsy, and as they mature and start singing the males need to find a 'patch' of forest to have as their own and attract a female to. This is how a pair forms their territory, which they hold and defend indefinitely, staying together throughout the year. Male kōkako are slightly larger than females, and are the dominant territory holders, defenders and singers. It takes a year or more for birds to be mature enough to find, hold, and breed in their territory, but once adults, and if they're lucky enough to live in a healthy forest with good pest control, they may live 20 or more years!

Autumn is when kōkako will be eating lots of fruit and foliage.

Enjoy and care for our forests,

Carmel Richardson - Founding Trustee

# Tiny Taonga of Kaharoa

## New Zealand Giraffe Weevil

*Lasiorrhynchus barbicornis*



*Photo: Christina Painting. Creative Commons License*

I was delighted to see this bizarre-looking insect on one of my trap boxes recently. It turns out they not only look incredible but their behaviour and life-cycle is amazing too. Unlike the name suggests they actually have short necks. It is in fact a rostrum (snout-like projection) and in males it makes up half its' total body length.

This makes flight very difficult!.

Females are very different anatomically. They are half the size of males and use they're much shorter rostrum to drill holes in dead/dying trees to lay one egg in. Once hatched the young spend two years in that hole, feeding on fungus and growing. When adults eventually emerge they only survive for a few weeks, and spend that time desperately trying to mate. They are active in the day and most likely to be seen in February

With a body that looks like a miniature, bark-textured boat, the giraffe weevil is aptly named Tūwhaipapa after the Māori god of waka. It's also called pepeke nguturoa. Pepeke comes from the word for "jumping," and nguturoa (a name it shares with the kiwi) means "long-beaked."

To secure mating rights, male giraffe weevils engage in high-stakes "sword fights" using their oversized snouts. The duel is a battle of leverage: each male attempts to wedge his nose beneath his rival to flip him clean off the tree. The loser is often sent tumbling into the air to be carried away by the wind—certainly a dramatic, if not slightly humiliating, exit in front of a potential mate.

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## Focus on Flora

### KOHEKOHE

*Didymocheton spectabilis*



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As you make your way into the green shadows of Kaharoa forest during Ngahuru/Autumn or te Hotoke/Winter keep an eye out for the strange sight of starry white flowers or round green pods bursting directly from smooth, lichen covered tree trunks.

This is a phenomenon called *cauliflory*. Here in Aotearoa it only occurs within one species; the gorgeous Kohekohe, one of our important canopy trees.

The presence of Kohekohe signals to us that our landscape was once much warmer - *cauliflory* may be rare here, but it is common in tropical forests. It also signals that in Kaharoa our wonderful volunteers are

doing great work keeping pests at low numbers. Possums especially *love* to eat the flowers, fruit and leaves of Kohekohe, and in many parts of Aotearoa this lovely species has disappeared completely as a consequence.

That's a big shame, because plants like Kohekohe which provide nectar, pollen and berries throughout the colder months are really important for our manu/birds, pēpepe /moths and other forest-dwellers.

Thanks to our volunteers though, you and your whānau can enjoy the sight of *cauliflory* by day, or enjoy the sweet perfume of Kohekohe flowers by night. Ātaahua! You might even be fortunate enough to spot a tūwhaipapa/giraffe weevil or two as you observe, as this is one of their favorite trees for laying eggs, and battling!

Sky Smale - Educator and Volunteer



### **Kaharoa Kōkako Trust**

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