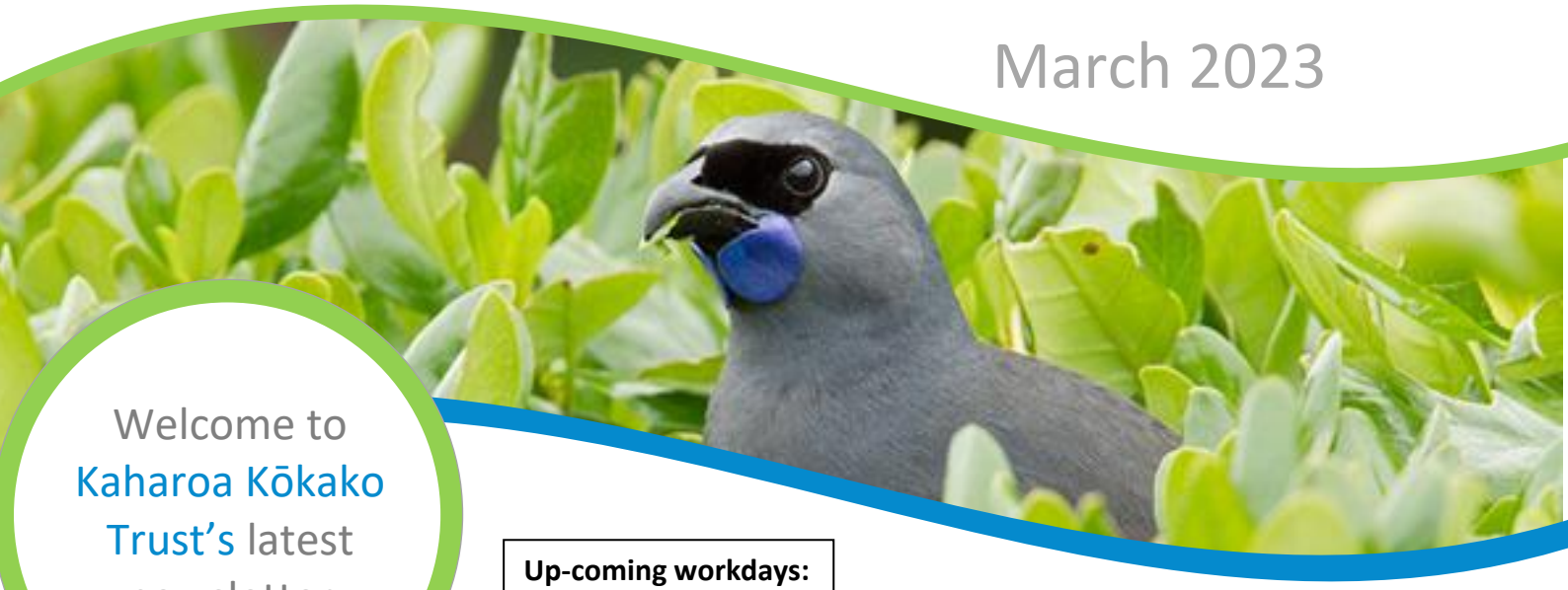
March 2023



Welcome to Kaharoa Kōkako Trust's latest newsletter

Up-coming workdays:
Saturdays
- 22nd April
- 27th May

KKT Volunteers & Adopt-A-Track

Kaharoa Kokako Trust relies solely on Volunteers to help Trustees maintain the series of Bait station tracks and Rat monitoring lines throughout the Kaharoa Conservation Area.

Maintenance of tracks, markers and bait stations is important as it enables the trust, volunteers and contractors to carry out Pest operations, Monitoring (of Pests, Flora/Fauna) and Bird surveys at strategic times through the year.

Adopt a Track is a successful tool that helps the trust with these tasks. A track or a series of tracks are adopted and maintained by a person & or their family. Work on your track is done at leisure, with a focus on having tracks clear and accessible before pest operations.

Work required is generally:

-keeping tracks cleared of windfalls and overgrown foliage
-track marking/remarking
-bait station maintenance - checking stations for cracks, holes chewed by rats, other damage, nails that need loosening as trees have grown.

Full training and a starter pack is available to new track adoptees.

The trust holds work days usually on the 4th Saturday of each month, with a focus on a variety of interesting tasks as designated by the infrastructure manager.

If you are interested in attending a workday as a volunteer or adopting a track, we'd love you to come and join us, please contact us at Kaharoakokako@gmail.com.

Health and Safety

WARNING!!! Onaia Stream – Health hazard

When the BCA Cadets collected water samples from the beautiful Onaia stream, in October last year, as part of their course training, they were not expecting the extremely high E. coli results they got back. Students thought they had "botched" the test, so repeated the sampling a week later, with similar results. KKT have also had water samples tested. It seems E. coli levels are very high after heavy rain, The Bay of Plenty Regional Council have investigated, and it is caused by dairy farm runoff, so they are working to ensure landowner compliance in the near future so this pollution doesn't continue to occur. In the meantime, DOC have placed Health Warning signs near the stream down the Kokako Track. Please don't drink Onaia Stream water or swim in it – especially after rain.

Access and Road Closures

Most of you will be aware that the Department of Conservation have decided that the standing dead pine trees which they asked us to poison about 6-10 years are such a hazard that we cannot use the Loop Track for access to Aislabie block.

Well now Mother Nature has joined the fun. The constant soil saturation in January has resulted in a slip on the edge of Tombleson's track which has also closed that access route.

The road is taped off for vehicles although it is safe enough to walk along.

On a brighter note. Despite many areas of the North Island having catastrophic damage from Cyclone Gabrielle, we couldn't identify any obvious effect in the Kaharoa Conservation Area. DOC did close the area to us for 9 days and no doubt the odd small limb came down and there will be some wind-blown trees but these are a common feature in these days of changing weather patterns.

Biodiversity

Kōkako Census 2022

A census of the kōkako population in the Kaharoa Conservation Management Area was undertaken in September 2022, using standard kōkako census methodology. The 2022 census found 57 kōkako pairs and 10 kōkako singles (124 territorial kōkako), this is decline in numbers from the last survey in 2015, where 77 pairs and 19 singles were found (177 territorial kōkako). Not only do KKT (a charitable, volunteer-based community group) feel shocked and disappointed by these results, we also feel we've been let down over the years by lack of advice from DOC, our partners and advisors. KKT immediately sought specialist advise and have already started actioning a number of things to rectify our kōkako population decline. Basically, our pest animal control needs improving, in particular control of rats and stoats. Things we are doing include infilling more bait stations on existing original lines to improve coverage in the Aislabie Block, where bait stations were about 100m x 100m apart, we now aim for 100 x 50m apart. We are increasing the number of stoat traps, and re-siting many of them. We are also attempting to plan for aerial toxin coverage of hard-to-reach areas in the near future.
KKT will continue with annual pest animal control operations and plan for another population census in 2026.

Pekapeka tou-roa Long-tailed bats

Two keen volunteers have taken on monitoring pekapeka tou-roa in Kaharoa Conservation Area, and are in their 2nd year of developing a monitoring programme. Using specialised sound recorders spread-out through different forest areas in the warmer months, they have already found that bats are picked up in many areas, and in some areas are more concentrated. So far, we have found only the indigenous long-tailed bat (pekapeka tou-roa) in Kaharoa, with the short-tailed bat most probably locally extinct, due to their greater vulnerability to predation, spending more time on the ground and having more permanent large roost sites. Pekapeka tou-roa move roost sites frequently.

Pirinoa (Green Mistletoe) *Illeostylus micranthus* Translocation Project

As there is plenty of Pirinoa fruit this summer, we will again collect ripe fruit in April/May from local plants that we have permission to collect from, and transfer to suitable host trees in Kaharoa forest. Hopefully some seeds get the chance to germinate and grow. We think lots of the fruity sticky seeds we wiped on branches last year were lost to birds finding and eating them!

This project will continue for a number of years, as the success rate for germination and growing is low.

Whio – Blue Duck

Whio used to reside in the Mangorewa (above bridge) and Paraiti (below bridge) Rivers, about 20 years ago (before stoats and ferrets were such a problem). KKT and neighbours, Paraiti Catchment Care Group (PCCG) are keen to start monitoring the river for whio, especially since there have been a couple of fairly recent sightings of a pair. This river should be suitable for whio with its good water quality and forest on both sides. Improved pest control along the river side (of stoats especially), would give whio a better chance of surviving and breeding successfully.

Counting Rats – the measure of how well we are doing.

As most of you will know, before, and after, every pest control operation we measure the numbers of rats using the mean tracking rate in tunnels set on lines in the bush. This Rat Tracking Index, commonly called RTI, tells us how successful, or not, the control has been.

In 2022 we ran two pulses of Pindone. One in September and a second in December. The post-operation RTIs were very similar.

Operation	Aislabie	Onaia West	Onaia East	Kapukapu Rd	Total
Pulse 1 Pre-op	54	60	47	47	53
Pulse 1 Post-op	26	2	7	10	13
Pulse 2 Pre-op	64	18	10	34	35
Pulse 2 Post-op	26	2	3	17	13

We certainly reduced the numbers significantly before and after the Pindone applications, but our target is to get ship rats under 5% so due mostly to the poor results we achieve in the Aislabie block we were well off the overall target. Over the last 5 years or so we have improved the Aislabie bait station coverage but we still have these poor returns for our efforts. This year we are installing new stations between all of the existing ones in that block (increasing the bait station numbers from 264 to over 450)
so they will be only 50m apart instead of the current set up. When the block was initially established GPS units hadn't been invented, and the advice was a 100m spacing. We are actually finding spacing was typically more like 120m. So, look out for an RTI decrease in Aislabie block after this year's improvements.

Trapping.

2022 summary

Possums	Stoats	Ship rats	Ferrets	Weasels	Hedgehogs	Feral cats
113	9	69	3	1	42	1

Our trapping targets possums and stoats, so all other species in the table are really just by-kill. We have increased the number of possum traps, upgraded the stoat traps, and installed some traps specifically for feral cats so we are looking forward to more success in 2023.

Last year we had some retirements from a sustained effort on trapping. Barbara & Phil Tucker have been trapping for us since Pontius was a Pilot. So long, we are not sure how many years, but more than 10. Shannon Napier and her, now teenage, children Dane and Elspeth, trapped for 5 years straight and Shannon maintained the data

which allowed us to do the analysis to progress with a structured network upgrade this last year.

A huge thank you to all of you for a long effort. In the last 5 years alone, the traps killed 1180 pests and predators. The birds, inverts, bats and plants will all also be saying "kia ora"!

KEEP
KŌKAKO ECOSYSTEM EXPANSION PROGRAMME

Kōkako Ecosystem Expansion Programme (KEEP), is a multi-agency group, set up in 2017 to enable Kaharoa kōkako to disperse through safe (pest animal managed) forest areas, mostly on privately owned land, and connect with other managed kōkako populations. The Kaharoa kōkako are a remnant population, saved before becoming locally extinct. This means their genetic material is valuable, and to retain these Kaharoa kōkako genes the population needs to grow rapidly, to become a population of 250 pairs of birds. Kaharoa Conservation Area is about 1000ha of forest and too small to home 500 kōkako. KEEP is working with landowners to help create safe corridors through blocks of forest between Kaharoa and Otanewainuku forests initially, to encourage kōkako genetic mixing, which will help form a larger and genetically robust population. Landowners on the Te Ranga side of the Paraiti River have formed the Paraiti Catchment Care Group, and already have kōkako living in some of their forested areas. Port Blakely Ltd forestry company have plantation and native forest on both the Te Ranga side and Onaia side of Kaharoa Conservation Area, and like PCCG, have kōkako on their property and are also working with KEEP to improve forest quality by carrying out regular pest animal. Tapuika Iwi have just started the huge project of managing their Te Matai Forest Reserve, setting up for comprehensive pest animal control and biodiverse monitoring. KKT thank you all for your passion and effort.
Agencies involved in KEEP are KKT, Department of Conservation (DOC), Bay of Plenty Regional Council (BOPRC), Port Blakely Ltd, Paraiti Catchment Care Group (PCCG), Tapuika Iwi Authority, Otanewainuku Kiwi Trust (OKT), QEII, Forest and Bird (F&B) and others.

PCCG landowners inspecting a newly erected deer fence, to help protect a forest block with kōkako living in.

Financial Support

No organisation like ours can survive without financial support in some form or other. 2022 was a huge year for KKT with a double pulse pest op; a full kōkako census and a survey of neighbouring properties for kōkako spreading beyond the Kaharoa Conservation Area boundaries. These operations involve employing contractors and significant costs to an organisation with very little outside income.

We have a small residual contribution from DOC to help with 3 years of initial pest control in the Kapukapu Road block and an important annual contribution from the regional council which we rely on for day-to-day costs.

Bay of Plenty REGIONAL COUNCIL

Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawbai

But to finance the rest of the pest control operation, and the 2 kōkako counts, we had to approach a number of entities and we are extremely grateful to these supporters for granting us sufficient funds to carry out these essential tasks.

Apart from the DOC Community Fund grant, for the K Rd pest control, for all of the rest of the Conservation Area, we were delighted to have assistance from Aotearoa Gaming Trust and World Wildlife Fund.

AOTEAROA GAMING TRUST

WWF

Pest control is an annual occurrence and is an increasing cost to KKT while being absolutely essential to the work we do.

THE LION FOUNDATION *Here for good*

The neighbours walk through survey for dispersing kōkako was fully supported by Lions Foundation and it was completed ahead of schedule due to a sustained spell of fine weather back in May. Do you remember fine weather spells?

And the Bay Trust and Rotorua Trust matched donations to enable us to carry out the full kōkako census and contributed to some of the subsequently recommended infra-structure improvements.

BAY TRUST Supporting Great Communities

Rotorua Trust MŌ TĀTAU KATOA

We are incredibly grateful for the support from all of these organisations. It enables these types of essential activities to be carried out in this current world of decreasing government funding and support. A massive thank you to you all.
If you are a business and might consider sponsoring any of our work or projects, we have plenty!

Dama wallabies

Wallabies were first released near Lake Ōkāreka in 1912. Since then, their distribution has steadily expanded, and their numbers have significantly increased.
Wallabies are classified as an unwanted organism in the NZ Biosecurity Act, and are definitely "unwanted" in the Kaharoa Conservation Area. The Bay of Plenty Regional Council is actively trying to contain and reduce wallabies in areas where they are established, and eradicate them from areas like Kaharoa where they are not established. Let's try to keep the Kaharoa area wallaby free.

Why are wallabies a problem?

They eat LOTS!
- In a forest environment (like Kaharoa) wallabies eat everything low growing, so, all seedlings, which are the forest's future trees, all shrubs, ferns and ground cover. Over time this would severely affect the whole forest environment. Everything that should live there and call 'home' would have no food, no shelter, eventually no home.
- In a rural/farming environment, wallabies eat pasture plants, so would compete with livestock for the available food. This would affect pasture quality, stocking rates, and income.
- Dama wallabies are nocturnal, cautious, small (not much bigger than a possum), live in small groups, and are 'cute' looking. All factors which make them easy to overlook as a problem, and hard to find and control.
- Females always have a joey in their pouch, so they are capable of breeding all year round.

Please report any wallabies seen – dead or alive to - reportwallabies.nz

reportwallabies.nz

Recent sightings

Coral Fungi

Earth star Fungi

Yellow waxgill