



March 2015

With this being the first issue of *The Rag* for 2015 we wish all our members, volunteers, sponsors and other supporters a belated Happy New year.

Trapping

The trappers are continuing to do great job of checking and re-baiting our trap network. In 2014 we captured a total of 152 stoats, 1512 rats and 44 hedgehogs. Some of our teams continued with the summer roster during the winter months due to the high number of rats being caught. To date in 2015 we have caught 57 stoats, 313 rats and 25 hedgehogs.

We will continue our summer roster through to May to monitor these high numbers rather than change over in April.

“Joining the Dots” (JTD)

Work has continued on the “Joining the Dots” programme which has been undertaken with the grant received from the DoC Community Conservation Partnerships Fund, and we have now rolled out 118 self-setting traps (manufactured by Goodnature Ltd) on new trap lines. These trap lines are on the Logging Road and Bakers Track, plus three new lines within the GWRC water catchment area and one along the Moores Valley Ridge. Further track clearing and trap deployment is planned in late March along the Orongorongo River with the generous help of the Orongorongo Club.

As part of the JTD Project Melody McLaughlin has been meeting and consulting with numerous community and neighbourhood groups, also the Hutt City Council and Greater Wellington Regional Council. We are pleased that the Wainuiomata Bush Fire Force has come on board and as a team will take care of the traps within the water catchment area.

A well-attended workshop for RFPT volunteers and members was held on Wednesday 18th March to discuss the expansion and intensification of our trapping network and the aims and objectives of this project. We welcome

feedback and comments from anyone who feels that we can make further improvements to the pest control arrangements being introduced now.

Melody continues to work on and lead the Joining the Dots Programme and with the help of a steering committee is working on the application for the next round of funding and planning ahead for the future.



A view looking south along the Orongorongo River from the new Bakers Track – Photo: Peter Cooper

The Dawn Chorus

The Dawn Chorus trappers have all been out actively checking their trap lines throughout the summer. The bird life seems to be increasing and many plants are growing well. Fantails, tui, and wood pigeons often follow the trappers around and they are also accompanied by the call of the grey warbler ringing through trees.

Several trappers report sightings of the tiny copper butterflies, cinnabar moths, which were introduced to attack ragwort and magpie moths.

Whilst cooling his feet off in Grace's stream one afternoon in early January Martin's toes came into contact with a couple of baby eels.

The Dawn Chorus has also deployed a number of the Goodnature self-setting traps and these have had varying degrees of success along their trap lines.

The Restoration Project

The Restoration Project, led by Peter Cooper has continued working with community and school groups carrying out some gorse and weed clearing, replanting and nursery work.

A nursery "busy bee" evening was held in February to prepare seedlings grown in root trainers for repotting. This was followed by another evening in March about repotting these plants ready to be planted out during the winter months. A team of volunteers has been formed to carry out nursery work under the guidance of Jonathan Bussell of Orongorongo Nurseries. The RFP nursery is located behind the DOC centre and anyone who is interested in participating in the restoration project on a regular or casual basis can contact Peter for details – p.cooper@clear.net.nz or phone 021 111 5630.



The team from Westpac December 2014 – Photo: Peter Cooper

An Update from the Committee

Aside from the regular meetings the Committee also held a workshop in March to draft a short, medium and long-term strategy for the Rimutaka Forest Park Trust, from 2015 to 2040. It was an opportunity to review what has been achieved and where we might go over the next 25 years.

Outcomes from this planning workshop will be circulated to members for comment before the next AGM.

The committee is also organising some social events throughout the year to give members and volunteers a chance to meet other team members and volunteers. These include a movie night at the Lighthouse Theatre in Petone on 30th July, a pub night in September and the Catchpool BBQ in November.

Details will be circulated closer to the time.

Membership

Just a reminder that we are always on the lookout for new members, and we encourage volunteers to become members and enjoy voting rights in the society.

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to those you think might want to join our society. We particularly value people becoming financial members as financial support will enable us to do more work for the forest park. Anyone is able to join the Rimutaka Forest Park Trust.

To find out more information just visit us online at www.rimutakatrust.org.nz or www.facebook.com/RFPTrust or email us info@rimutakatrust.org.nz

Our annual membership fees are:

\$20.00 Individual membership

\$35.00 Joint membership

\$45.00 Association and Corporate membership.

Congratulations

Congratulations to Ian Armitage whose nomination resulted in him winning the Environment Category of the Wellingtonian of the Year Awards for 2014 (Welly Awards). The awards ceremony was held at Te Papa – National Museum in mid-November.

The citation for the award reads: "**Ian Armitage** is a keen member of 'Birds New Zealand', involved at local and national levels to support the study and enjoyment of New Zealand's birds and was for the past six years the President of the volunteer Rimutaka Forest Park Trust, which recently celebrated 25 years of success. The Trust has developed into a substantial and experienced group of forest conservation volunteers. Its most well-known project involves returning North Island kiwi to the forest park."





The Trust from time to time employs the services of Joanna Sim of 'DabChickNZ', to track with her dogs some of the more reclusive kiwi, newly hatched kiwi chicks and those [kiwi](#) that have dislodged their transmitter.

Joanna's face book page is:

www.facebook.com/dabchicknz

We recently spoke to Jo about her work and her dogs Maddi and Rua

Photo courtesy of Joanna Sim

What led you into your business?

"I was formerly a Dept. of Conservation (DoC) ranger and I needed a dog for a monitoring programme that would reliably locate brown teal (pateke). After some frustration in trying to find brown teal without a dog I got my Labrador, Maddi, specifically for locating and indicating this species and she is excellent for this task. Later, my dogs helped me to find nesting seabirds and North Island brown kiwi.

After working for nearly nine years with DoC and working earlier with several other conservation agencies I decided to 'try my hand' as an independent ecological services contractor".

How do you use your dogs?

"I use them to safely find and indicate the presence of various threatened bird species, including kiwi, black petrels and brown teal".

What are the dogs' names and ages, breed, what age did you "recruit" them and what temperament are you looking for?

"Maddi is a pedigree Labrador who initially started locating brown teal, followed by black petrels, kiwi and other seabirds. She is nearly eight years now and I have had her since she was a puppy. I bought my second dog, Rua, a Labrador/German short-haired pointer/collie cross as a puppy. He is two years old now.

Both dogs have an obedient and compliant temperament and have a keen hunting instinct. Dogs need to be trainable – and most dogs can be trained – but it takes considerable time and patience. Both Maddi and Rua are excellent for locating birds".

How do you train your dogs and how long does this take?

"I commence with basic obedience training when they are young. Once the dogs are really obedient I introduce them to finding feathers of a kiwi/seabird placed in a sock and get them to sit when near it – never being allowed to touch it – then being rewarded for showing me but not touching the feathers. Often training requires

fitting a check cord to each dog to ensure that it stops before getting too close to the sock holding the feathers. After repeating this training routine, a dog quickly learns to stop before reaching the target. It takes about one year to 'get them up to speed', but like other teenagers they need experience and firm discipline to develop their skills. It is hard to reward dogs without them becoming too excited, but they love hunting and they like working in a forest all day with me.

I like to do refresher courses - especially when they are not working so much. When we are busy the dogs becoming more and more skilled at locating birds".



Maddi and Rua – Photo: Joanna Sim

How do your dogs indicate when they are on to something?

"They are trained to sit when they are near a bird or a burrow. Maddi's tail starts wagging extremely fast as well! Rua usually becomes very intense, or focused, and stares toward the bird".

We know that you track Kiwi for the Rimutaka FPT – do you do kiwi work for other groups?

“Yes, I have been lucky enough to work for the East Taranaki Environment Trust and the Mount Bruce/Pukaha National Wildlife Centre looking for kiwi”.

What other species and groups do you work with?

“Other species I have worked with are brown teal and various seabirds including black petrel, Cook’s petrel,

Rimu’s Diary

The last months of 2014 were very busy for Rimu and the Trust.

Conservation Week ran from the 9-16 November and we had stands at the opening event, also an open day at the Catchpool Centre and at ‘Pestfest’ on the 16th November. Rimu the kiwi made an appearance at both events and as always was very popular with children. Also popular were the activities at our stands where children could make a kiwi from pinecones and paint an egg. The painted eggs are then used as bait in the traps, and these two days led to 500 eggs being painted – a great achievement for all involved!



BBQ November 2014 – Photo: Peter Harvey

Our annual Christmas BBQ was also held in November had we enjoyed a good turnout and again it was a good opportunity to catch up with members, volunteers and sponsors, as well as being a splendid opportunity for the Trust to show it’s appreciation for the commitment and support of everyone throughout the year.

grey-faced petrel, fluttering shearwater, Hawaiian petrel and the New Zealand storm petrel. I have been engaged by Auckland Council, Auckland Zoo, Department of Conservation, Wildlife Management International Ltd, Ecoworks NZ Ltd, Kiwi Wildlife Tours (NZ) Ltd, and several small private sanctuaries and Trusts.

My work has involved travelling with my dogs to several Hauraki Gulf Islands and also two trips to Maui, Hawaii.

Rimu also attended the Eastbourne Carnival, the Wainuiomata Hub open day and once again participated in the Wainuiomata Christmas Parade.



Rimu at Eastbourne Carnival – Photo Peter Harvey

In February Rimu and the Trust had a stall at the inaugural Wainuiomata Water Festival, where once again egg painting attracted a lot of children to our stand.

The first of our social events for this year was a Quiz Night on the 10th March at Speight’s Ale House in Petone. The Trust entered five teams. It was a good night where everyone enjoyed a lot of fun and a chance to meet other members and volunteers. It was such a good night that it has been suggested that we make this a regular event.



Wainuiomata Water Festival Stand – Photo: Matthew Russell

For Your Diary

July 30th

Movie Night: September 18th

Pub Night: November 15th

Catchpool BBQ