

THE REMU-TALKER

A Wild Gift this Christmas

*"On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me.....
a wild kiwi in Wainui!"*



Forget undies and socks this year, sponsor a wild kiwi and receive:

-  A personalised certificate
-  A photo of the kiwi
-  Info about the kiwi
-  Annual kiwi update
-  Trust newsletter subscription
-  Tax donation receipt

It costs just \$50 a year to sponsor a kiwi. This helps us to care for and track them. It also assists us in training and equipping our volunteers.

Contact sponsors@remutaka.nz to order by Wednesday 18th Dec and receive your pack by Christmas.

For other sponsorship options check out www.remutaka.nz/

The Big Question - Why?

In this edition of Remu-talker you will read a fascinating and amusing item written by Susan Ellis. Susan is a long-time member of the Trust and our Committee. Susan is our resident expert on acoustic monitoring, and the placing of cameras, and is a regular participant when it is time to venture into the park to catch these elusive creatures.

Before we read the article it may be timely to remind ourselves WHY we are doing this work.

About 100 years ago, kiwi numbered in the millions. The most recent estimate is around 68,000. An average of 27 kiwi are killed by predators EVERY WEEK. That's a population decline of around 1,400 kiwi every year (or 2%). At this rate, wild kiwi may disappear from the mainland in the lifetimes of our children and grandchildren.

Approximately 20% of the kiwi population is under management. In areas where predators are controlled, 50-60% of chicks survive. In unmanaged areas 95% of kiwi die before reaching breeding age. 70% of these young birds are killed by stoats or cats. Only a 20% survival rate of kiwi chicks is needed for the population to increase.*

We have brought kiwi back to the wild in Wellington. Ours are the only truly wild kiwi on the mainland between Cook Strait and Taranaki. They are a hybrid group of mixed origins, and we are responsible for them. Somewhere around 120-150 kiwi now live in the park, a number that has grown substantially from the 32 released in 2006 and 2009. They are protected by a regularly maintained trapping network of over 2,000 traps covering 7,000 hectares of bush.

Our success so far could not have happened without the dedication of our teams. This year, 2019, is a mast year, which means that the dangers to our young kiwi have increased exponentially and we have had to intensify our efforts to improve the chances of this summer's young chicks surviving to adulthood. We therefore acknowledge and really appreciate the efforts of everyone involved in this difficult, but rewarding, task.

*With thanks to www.kiwisforkiwi.org for these figures

Night Time Ramble

Written by Susan Ellis

In May 2019, the Trust contracted certified kiwi handler Pete Kirkman to try to catch and affix transmitters to some adult male kiwi in the Turere stream region to add to our existing tracked birds. Since Pete had never been up to our kiwi area before, Melody asked me to accompany him on his first night-time excursion. The kiwi group were particularly keen to recapture Tohe, Rush, Jacek and Mr Baggins, since we knew their territories and that they were breeding males, and we had been monitoring them remotely using acoustic recorders.

Night-time kiwi capture involves walking into the bird's known territory in the dark during the breeding season (when they are at their most territorial). I had previously observed other certified kiwi handlers so I had some idea of what I was getting myself into! However I had never met Pete before. I parked at the end of Sunny Grove at around 4pm in the afternoon and watched nervously as a tall, fit and lanky guy climbed out of his truck. With my artificial hip and a middle-aged stride about half the length of Pete's, I imagined I would be spending the night frantically trying to keep up with him! I needn't have worried however - not only did Pete turn out to be extremely nice and easy going, he also waited politely for me to catch up whenever I fell behind, often finding some convenient insect or plant to admire as an excuse so I didn't feel pressured!

We headed up Sunny Grove track and onto the Whakanui Track. We reached Tohe's ridge just on dusk, and walked down to about the middle of his territory. We could already hear another male (Eddie) calling from the Whakanui track above us. I had brought a small blanket along to hunker underneath and keep out the cold. I imagined (somewhat fancifully) that if Tohe walked past me I could quickly spring out from under the blanket and grab him. I say fancifully because, although I am certified to handle kiwi, I am not known for my fast sporting reflexes. I judged Pete to be much more talented and tried not to get in his way.

Tohe did not call, but another male (Rush?) called from across the Turere stream. Suddenly there was a loud crashing noise and something moved past down the ridge on our left. Was it Tohe? We never found out, because he never called and didn't come closer. But it's possible he was checking us out and got suspicious about these strange-smelling tall birds with shining lights



Strange-smelling tall bird aka Pete Kirkman



Strange-smelling small bird aka Tohe

Continued next page...

We decided to keep going down the ridge in search of Rush. Tohe's ridge is quite pleasant to bush bash down, even in the middle of the night, but it ends in a near-vertical cliff that drops off into the Turere stream. Luckily at this point I remembered that we volunteers had previously marked a route down to the stream at that location and so we managed to cross relatively easily and headed up into Rush's territory



Rush and his mate Yme hang out on a little knobby ridge that sticks out into Turere stream. Like Tohe, Rush came from Little Barrier Island originally.

Rush and Yme had been duetting when Pete and I were across the stream, but now had fallen silent. By now it was about 10pm. We moved on.

Photo: Rush

Not far up the ridge, we entered the territory of another male kiwi, Elvis perhaps, who started calling. He was coming quite close. Pete headed for a small bank, where we hunkered down with red lights on. He whispered to me, that if the kiwi came walking past just below us, he was going to leap down and chase him, while I stayed with our gear.

There is nothing quite so exciting as waiting, hardly daring to breathe or move, while you hear the sound of a kiwi approaching through the bush. Especially when you are planning to catch him. The rustling sounds were furtive and the bird moved around us. Just as he got to the area in front of the bank, from which Pete was getting ready to jump, he broke into a run - he must have got spooked, maybe by our human smell.



Photo: Kiwi at night

It was getting pretty late and starting to rain so we decided to call it a night. We walked up the ridge to the McKerrow Track, then down the Boys Bridge track, in case Mr Baggins was close by, but he may have been a long way off the track as we heard nothing. We got back to the cars at around 1am. While we hadn't caught a bird that night, Pete now had a better idea of the lay of the land and where the birds were. In a subsequent trip he managed to catch Rush's mate Yme, and eventually found Rush (with help from kiwi contractor Jo Sim and the certified kiwi dogs).

I learned a lot from the night out with Pete, and it's always a privilege to be out in the bush at night. The sound of kiwi calling in the distance is pretty magical, especially when you feel a little bit proud for being part of the group that brought them back to the Remutaka Ranges. One observation that Pete made, after a couple of weeks trying to catch our male birds, is that the Remutaka kiwi seem to spook more easily - and be less aggressive - than many other North Island Brown Kiwi in other parts of the country. They are a challenge to catch, but I also felt quite proud of our kiwi, for being so canny!

Spotted in the Park...

Miria and John, from Camp Wainui, and their Grandchildren kicked off **Conservation Week** by planting native trees in the Remutaka Forest Park.



Miria and John are continuing to sponsor both kiwi and native trees this year. They are shown above planting Miria's sponsored Northern rata. John chose a mighty Totara, which he planted with the help of two enthusiastic Grandchildren.

Spotted after dark...

Rimu the Remutaka Conservation Trust mascot supported his feathered friends at a fundraiser held at the Lowry bay Yacht club on Saturday 20th July to benefit Kakapo Recovery.



As part of the fundraiser, Justin and Margaret Reed of the Music Warehouse Lower Hutt organised a ukulele strum attended by 100 enthusiastic players, some dressed as kakapo.

AGM 2019 - October 30th

As well as reporting on our activities and finances, we also had a chance to recognise twelve long-service Trust volunteers. We have acknowledged the following people with framed certificates for 10 years plus of dedicated service:

- 🦜 Meg Shaw
- 🦜 Rochelle Andrews
- 🦜 Ros Read
- 🦜 Mike White
- 🦜 Rosemary Thompson
- 🦜 Kevin Alekna
- 🦜 Lianne Beckett
- 🦜 Kelly Anso
- 🦜 Ned Bruno
- 🦜 Frank Cook (12 years)
- 🦜 Andrew Porter-Ritchie
- 🦜 Susan Guscott
- 🦜 Peter Hodge

Grant Watt retired from the position of Trust Secretary. He has provided 7 years of great service to our community group in this role.

We were pleased to welcome two new committee members - Esther King and Linda Olsen - both well-known to the Trust.

The AGM was followed by a superbly informative and amusing presentation from Stephen Marsland, Professor of Mathematics and Data Science, VUW. His topic for the evening was: "*Cryptics and Cross Words: Spying on Kiwi*". Stephen does a lot of work analysing birdsong, with the aim of automatically recognising bird species and inferring population densities from this information.

Volunteer Profile: Grant Watt

Grant joined the volunteers in 2011 as Trust secretary. During his seven years in this role, he was the glue that held the organisation together. His regular emails to members, his administration of Trust business, his expertise with our computerised database system, and his ability to get things done, have all contributed to the smooth running of the organisation during his time in office.



It hasn't all been admin work - here he is (far left of pic) with his band of merry men, his trap testing team, known as the "Rat Pack".

Each team member has a title and Grant goes by Captain Courageous, or "CC" for short.

While Grant has retired as secretary, he will continue to help manage our database system and support our trap network with the rest of the Rat Pack.

Take that, Rat



One of our volunteers, David, provided the photo above and commented:

"While doing our East Whakanui trap run we don't see much evidence of the A24s having made many kills. Therefore some of us haven't been all that convinced of their effectiveness. But in September we came across 4 dead rats very close to an A24. They looked quite fresh so must have been killed over a fairly short time. Seeing is believing!"

Maarten Vink sent us the following picture and explanation:



"The picture shows a pile of rat corpses under the A24 at JA5 (on a spur above the Turere Stream). 5 rats can be seen with the tail of a 6th sticking up from under the group on the right. At another site next to the Turere Stream (MTS 3) I saw the remains of 8 rats and two mice. Extraordinary!"

Catchpool Restoration

The big news from Peter Cooper recently was the arrival of the digger on the Old Logging Road to open up access to the Wetlands (and hillside) restoration zones in late September. The work has now been completed and the objective of enabling easier access for vehicles, tools and volunteers to the site was achieved. He reports that the feeder stream inlets, outlets and existing culverts crossing the roadway were preserved.



Before... This was the best preserved section of the old road remnant – in most other locations, no path was still visible and restoration site access was extremely difficult, even on foot.



After... Almost one kilometre of roadway has now been cleared and levelled to approximately 5 metre width, with 2 slips removed and all drains unblocked and cleared of debris and weeds.

Key Sponsor Renews Support

We are pleased to confirm Village Accommodation have renewed sponsorship of the trust for a further three years at an amazing \$5,000 p a. Many of you will be familiar with our very popular “Keep Kiwi Wild” T-shirts, funded by Village Accommodation. These have been an important part of the previous sponsorship and a valuable source of income for the trust.



The new sponsorship will be linked to the Astelia Apartment Hotel. The Hotel, part of the Village Accommodation Group, is currently being refurbished with the aim to make it one of the first carbon neutral hotels in Wellington. This includes a living wall, in the reception, which is growing as we speak. We are very excited to be associated with such an endeavour and look forward to working with the Hotel over the next three years.

Sponsorship such as this is invaluable to the trust in enabling us to continue our work and we ask that in return should you be in need of an hotel in Wellington or making recommendations to friends and family you consider the Astelia Apartment Hotel or other Village Accommodation properties.

Our Sponsors/Supporters

Thank you to the following businesses and organisations as well as all of our kiwi, transmitter, trap and tree sponsors for their new and continued annual support.

Special Mention

We would like to thank Barry Spooner of Eastbourne Village Meats for generously offering his time and expertise. Barry stepped up to help us portion up donated rabbit carcasses for use in our trap network. We are using the rabbit meat on selected DOC200 traplines to lure the stoats.

