



Oho Mai Puketi

www.puketi.org.nz

Issue 13 : November 2008

Newsletter of the Puketi Forest Trust
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Patron: DAME KIRI TE KANAWA

Message from the Chairman, John Dawn

I didn't expect to find myself in this role, but now that I'm here I'm keen to give it my best. The Trust has ambitious goals but they are achievable. Since joining the Trust two years ago, I have been most impressed by how much has been done in a relatively short time. Only five years since formation of the Trust, pest control is now sufficiently well established to begin re-introducing the depleted wildlife. It might not look much on a map, but once you start walking across the Trust's pest control area it immediately becomes clear that 5000 hectares is a seriously large patch of bush. It is magnificent bush too. Although it has been disturbed in places, there are large areas of untouched forest which are a delight to walk through. I enjoy the excuse to get into the forest that comes with the Trust's work.

I am also impressed by the wide support that the Trust receives. We have almost 500 contributing members, and from talking to people around the district it is apparent that the Trust is well known and approved of in the local community. It is this support that makes it all possible. Thank you all for your contributions. The trustees have set clear goals in the second five year plan and with your continued support I am confident that we will meet them. Already we are enjoying increased birdlife in the forest, but this is just the beginning.

The job of chairman is not onerous because we have a great team of trustees, volunteers and contractors. Gary Bramley of course remains an active trustee and continues to make a vital contribution. At the moment he is working on the proposal to re-introduce North Island robins in 2009, a Herculean task involving much paper work and consultation.

Ian Wilson also does an enormous amount of work for the Trust. One of his recent achievements has been the organisation of kiwi aversion training for pig hunters' dogs. It is significant that Ian managed to get 67 dogs through the aversion course with minimal publicity – just one small article in the local paper. This great response indicates that many pig hunters are aware of the risk their dogs pose to kiwi and are keen to get their dogs trained. Pete Graham, the kiwi aversion trainer from DoC Whangarei, will be available again in the New Year when further training sessions will be arranged.

DoC Bay of Islands are also planning a kiwi advocacy day early in 2009 for publicity, education and enrolment of dogs for aversion training, which the Trust will support. With this concerted effort and the positive attitude of many responsible pig hunters, we hope to get much better management of dogs in the forest.

This is important. The Trust has been trapping stoats for 5 years now and we should be seeing signs of an increasing kiwi population. Annual call monitoring indicates that the previous decline has been halted, but we have yet to see a sustained increase in call rates. Avi Holzapfel, national Kiwi Recovery Group leader, tells us that a 1% increase in adult kiwi survival (main threat dogs) is equivalent to a 10% increase in kiwi chick survival (main threat stoats). Dog control is now the main target.

Aversion training does not make dogs 'kiwi proof'. The accompanying education of hunters is just as important. The dog management we want will be achieved through publicity, education, aversion training, making kiwi aversion training a condition of hunting permits and then enforcing the permit system. This must be implemented systematically so that we get buy in from the pig hunting community. DoC staff cannot police every hunter in the forest and we will need peer pressure from responsible hunters to help bring recalcitrant and novice hunters into line, with the occasional prosecution of worst cases by DoC staff as an ultimate sanction.

Transporting and releasing birds is always a risky business, but it is a great disappointment to all of us that the first female kokako brought back to Puketi did not survive. Most disappointed will be the DoC staff and volunteers who prepared the aviary, transported, fed and monitored the bird. We can have confidence in the dedication and abilities of Steve McManus and his team and that they are getting the best advice available from experts in the Kokako Recovery Group. The lessons learned will inform subsequent releases and we can expect success in the end.

Profile of Our New Chairman – John Dawn

John and his wife Seok have lived in Waipapa since 2005. They have one son, David, who lives in Auckland. John grew up and went to school in Kerikeri during the 1950's and early 1960's. To a young boy in those days, Puketi was a mysterious forest where pig hunters often got lost. In 1966 he left for university and subsequent work as a civil engineer in several parts of New Zealand, Singapore and Brunei.

While living in Galatea next to Urewera National Park in the 1970's he gained a deeper appreciation for New Zealand bush, encountering birds he had not seen in Northland such as rifleman, whitehead, bellbird, robin, blue duck and long tailed cuckoo. To escape the urban environment while living in Singapore he joined the Malaysian Nature Society (similar to New Zealand's Forest and Bird) and took part in several scientific expeditions to initiate state parks in Endau-Rompin (in the Malaysian state of Johore) and Belum-Temengor (Perak). There he honed map reading skills while establishing walking tracks and guiding scientific survey parties and acquired an interest in forest ecology from enthusiastic university researchers. The vibrancy and diversity of undisturbed tropical rainforest contrasted with his experiences of the almost silent modern New Zealand bush, and made him reflect on what our bush must have been like before human disturbance. In Brunei he worked for the government Housing Development Department and found more fascinating forests to explore during weekends and annual leave.

John retired from engineering in 2005 when he and Seok moved to Waipapa. He is kept busy developing a small orchard on their Waipapa property, finishing off the house and garden, managing their forestry plantation west of Whangarei and fishing and diving whenever time permits. Seok is also a keen fisherperson.

John has been a member of Forest and Bird since 1987, though he says he has not been very active. He joined the Trust because Puketi is now his local forest and he feels some obligation to help care for it, as well as enjoying the opportunity to spend time in it. His first involvement with the Trust was in 2007, when he helped to prepare rat traps and organise their transport into the forest by helicopter. He has since helped with monitoring, organising the volunteers who service stoat trap line 10 and updating the website.

John's father (John senior) has lived in Kerikeri since 1940 and has been an active member of the Forest and Bird Far North branch for many years. He still looks after the Forest and Bird's Arethusa Lodge at Pukenui and is well known to many conservation people in the north.

Characteristics of Rats

Rats are significant predators in their own right. They are also food for stoats and cats and allow these higher level predators to occupy an area and decimate bird populations. Rats are extremely successful pests and have spread around the globe as passengers with humans. They have several features that contribute to their success.

Smell. For their size rats are among the top ranking "sniffers" in the animal kingdom. They have ten million olfactory cells and smell in stereo. In Tanzania a species of rat has been trained to detect the scent of explosives and they are used to locate land mines. They have also been used in laboratories to sniff out diseases. In one laboratory rats are used to identify TB in saliva samples. They can check 300 samples an hour and have a high level of accuracy.

Reproduction. Female ship rats come into heat every 4-6 days and can produce a litter every 32 days. Up to 10 young, born after a three week pregnancy, are weaned at 3-4 weeks of age and are sexually mature 2-3 months later. Left unchecked a pair of rats could theoretically produce 15,000 descendants in a year. (In reality a female ship rat,

in the forest, produces between 5 and 6 young in a litter and a total of 16 young during her life time).

Controlling rats with poison. Rats are designed to evade deadly dinners. They have a cautious and complex approach to dining and eat only small portions of any new food they encounter. If it makes them sick they will avoid it in future. They are also more likely to eat new food if they have smelt it on another healthy rat's breath. In addition to this behavioural avoidance, rats can evolve physiological defences to some toxins over time (e.g. warfarin). Due to their rapid reproduction rate it is not long before poison-resistant rats become common in the population.

Pest controllers know that it is important to feed rats with non-toxic bait for several weeks before adding the toxin to it. The other alternative is to use a toxin that does not make the rat feel unwell for a week or more so that they will have consumed a lethal dose before they start to feel unwell (these are known as second generation poisons). Brodifacoum is just such a poison, and it is also effective against other pests, but brodifacoum use is prohibited on DoC land (except one off island eradications) because it accumulates in animal tissue and soil over time.

Trapping or Poison – What is best for Long Term Rat Control?

On first thought, many people assume that poison is more convenient and cost effective than traps for long term rat control. The Trust considered this question carefully before beginning rat control in the core area. After receiving information from the kokako protection project in Urewera National Park where traps are also used for rat control, comparing cost estimates and considering the risks of secondary poisoning, trapping was selected as the preferred method. We are asked from time to time why we use traps rather than poison, so it is good to review this decision periodically.

The best poison for rats is brodifacoum. It does not affect rats for about a week by which time they have consumed a lethal dose. It also kills mice and possums as well as anything that eats them such as stoats and cats. Unfortunately if insects eat brodifacoum or the carcasses of animals which have eaten it, they take up the toxin and pass it on to the birds that feed on them. This persistence in the food chain and the fact that it takes many months if not years to break down in the environment has many people concerned about the long term effect. (Years after it was used in one operation, pigs that had not even been born at the time the poison was laid, had traces of brodifacoum in their livers.) However brodifacoum is being used very successfully by a number of trusts not on conservation land without any apparent side effects. Even if we wanted to use brodifacoum, it is not an option for us because DoC does not allow its use on conservation land.

While brodifacoum can be used without prefeeding, all other toxins require prefeeding to achieve good results. Recognised best practice (required by DoC on conservation land) calls for four rounds of servicing each time poison is laid (two prefeeds, one to lay toxin and one to recover unused baits).

The initial setup costs of traps or bait stations are similar but on-going costs differ. The annual cost of servicing and maintaining 2200 traps in the Trust's 700 hectare core area, including trap replacement, bait and labour (12 rounds per year) is approximately \$34,000. Using toxins to maintain the same consistently low rat population would require at least six doses of toxin per year. For this the cost of toxin and prefeed would be between \$6,000 and \$20,000 (depending on the type of toxin used) and labour for servicing would be approximately \$50,000 per year. That works out at, at least, twice the cost of trapping.

Cost and possible environmental effects are not the only considerations. Effectiveness is paramount. An operation similar to ours had been achieving good results for a number of years using toxins. When rats stopped taking one toxin a new one was used. This worked for a short time but two years ago bait shyness became such a problem the managers were advised to spell the area for a year or two until bait shy rats had died off. This has obvious consequences for the native animals. One of the reasons that we chose trapping as our preferred method is that we still have poison use in our arsenal should it be required.

The regulations governing poisons are becoming more stringent all the time and many of the toxins that give good results require certified handlers for distribution. Those that can currently be used without certification are likely to require certified handlers in the future. This markedly reduces the number of volunteers available to fill bait stations and to tender for contracts, which is likely to increase the cost even more.

Each pest operation has different goals and budgets and what works well in one area for one pest may not work well in another area or in the same area for a different pest. We believe we have the formula for pest control at Puketi right and are committed to continuing with trapping. However the Trust remains open to the possibility of using toxins in future, if a population of trap-shy rats should develop (there is no sign of this yet) or if cost effective, long lasting toxic baits that do not require prefeeding and do not cause secondary poisoning become available. We regularly monitor our efforts and have a contingency plan if trapping fails to achieve the results we need.

Interference with Traps

When the Trust started putting out traps we were somewhat apprehensive about the possibility of having traps stolen or vandalised, as happens in some areas. Good publicity about the Trust and the reasons for trapping has meant theft and interference of the traps has been minimal. In fact over the last five years only two or three a year have gone missing out of 3,500. We have only had traps interfered with twice and they were not damaged.

Recently DoC had about 40 of their possum traps stolen and a number of signs and board walks at Puketi vandalised. TV One ran a story about this on their evening news. Unfortunately by the time the story made it to air it sounded like the theft and vandalism were of the Trust's assets rather than DoC's. On a positive note however, the news item did highlight some achievements of the Trust, and you can rest assured that we are not facing a crisis because of vandalism or theft.

Puketi: reflections on a 25-year acquaintance with a remarkable forest

The guest speaker at the Trust's AGM, Dr Peter Bellingham, first became familiar with the Puketi Forest in the early 1980's. Working for the Forest Service he spent two years studying the effect of logging on kokako in Puketi Forest. Peter then went on to gain a PhD in rain-forest dynamics in the Caribbean and worked in the Jamaican rain-forests. Sixteen years ago, after a spell in Japan, he returned to work for Landcare Research at Lincoln as an ecologist. Part of that work involves ongoing studies in Puketi.

From his time spent in the Puketi Forest Peter shared many interesting facts and observations some of which are outlined below:

Puketi is a rich and diverse forest:

- Ranges in altitude from nearly sea level to 540 m.
- Includes very infertile ridge tops, more fertile gullies and the very fertile flood plains.
- Special habitats (bluffs, stream courses).
- Experiences frequent natural disturbances (cyclones, floods).
- Some areas have been affected by past human disturbance (logging, fire).

Puketi has a diverse flora:

- 368 species of vascular plants.
- More than half the country's total fern flora including 18 species of filmy fern.
- The rare fern *Loxoma cunninghamii* which is a genus confined to New Zealand and its only relatives are in Costa Rica.
- Puketi's unique fern, *Davallia tasmanii* subsp. *crispata* which was discovered in 1984 and is confined to about 1500 m² on a bluff.
- A rich diversity of conifers. Puketi has nine conifer species in a single stand and is the stronghold of the northern conifer, monoao (*Halocarpus kirkii*).

Puketi has tropical affinities:

- Forests on the poorest soils have strong floristic overlap (at the genus level) with rain forests on poor soils in New Caledonia, New Guinea and Borneo.
- Maire tawake or swamp maire (*Syzygium maire*), New Zealand's only member of a rich tropical genus, has a buttress trunk and breathing roots which are tropical features hardly found in New Zealand.
- Makamaka (*Ackama rosifolia*), only found north of Whangarei, has relatives in Queensland
- Aka kiore (*Metrosideros albiflora*), only found north of Tauranga, is a Pacific genus.

Puketi has frequent flash floods:

- Steep-sided side-catchments and high rainfall lead to frequent flash-floods that scour the river channels.
- Rheophytes, flood-dependent plants, are a specialised flora that grows on steep river banks periodically swept by flash floods. Puketi is the national stronghold for some species. The most well known is *Hebe acutifolia*.

Other interesting facts:

- The Waipapa River is one of the few rivers left in northern New Zealand surrounded by old-growth forest for most of its length.
- The wood rose (*Dactylanthus taylorii*) was discovered recently after many years of searching. Many years ago short-tailed bats, which pollinate it, were found with its pollen in their fur.
- Seed dispersal is an important concern in the rain forests of Puketi. 25% of the total stand basal area consists of four tree species – karaka, puriri, taraire and tawa and these can only be dispersed by native pigeons (kukupa). Two other species – hinau and kohekohe – are dispersed by kukupa and kokako and constitute another 9% of total stand basal area.

Changes over 25 years include:

- The decline, due to possum browse, of once-dominant or common trees: northern rata, tree fuchsia (kotukutuku) and raukawa. Raukawa (*Raukawa edgerleyi*), is a small tree with beautiful fragrant leaves. It was common in the 1980s but is now very rare.
- "The most spectacular collapse of a kokako population yet documented". From over 100 birds in 1984 to 4 birds in 1994.
- Extinction of kaka and kakariki.
- A reduction in the number of well-maintained tracks which has led to large parts of Puketi being inaccessible and "off the radar" to the general public.

Kiwi Aversion Training

The course involves the dog being fitted with an electric collar and taken along a track where two (dead) kiwi have been placed some distance apart. When the dog goes to investigate the first kiwi it is given an electric shock. If it takes an interest in the second bird it gets another shock. A second shock is seldom necessary as the dog associates the smell of kiwi with pain and almost always goes around the second bird. The course is repeated after six months and annually after that.



All contractors working for the Trust are required to have their dogs kiwi aversion trained. Shown from the left are Dave Wilson, Phil Kennedy and Scott Candy who service the trust's traps, Pete Graham (DoC) and local farmer and pig hunter Scott Sturge at a kiwi aversion course organised by the Trust.

Community Support for the Trust.

This year has seen an increased response from the Northland community to the work of the Trust.

Earlier this year the Kerikeri helicopter company, **Heliops**, raffled a scenic helicopter flight at their open day. The raffle raised \$550 which was donated to the Trust. **Heliops** has also given the Trust a very generous discount when it has flown traps into remote areas of the forest.

Kerikeri cosmetics company **Living Nature** recently had a promotion around World Environment Day where 5% of online sales were donated to an environmental cause chosen by the customer. The Puketi Forest Trust was a popular choice and we were grateful to receive \$1000 from **Living Nature** for our capital fund.

Three people caught fishing in marine reserves in the **Northland Conservancy of DoC** and were ordered by the court to make a donation to a conservation charity. We have received \$1500 from these people.

A group of students from **Springbank School** have gone to a lot of effort to support the Trust. (See following article by James Richardson).

We look forward to these positive community relationships continuing and are grateful to these individuals and companies for their generous support.

When all 2000 hectares that are available for sponsorship are sponsored the Trust will be self supporting. We are not quite there yet and rely on grants to meet the shortfall in the cost of trapping and to fund one-off expenses such as translocations. We are very grateful for the continued support of the following:

- **New Zealand Lottery Grants Board**
- **ASB Community Trust**
- **BNZ Save the Kiwi Trust**
- **Pub Charity**

Puketi Forest Trust BP Community Project – Springbank School

More than a year ago in a Springbank School enterprise lesson the Branching Out group was formed. The group members Keegan Rumble, Mike Roberts, Olivia Manning, Hilary Derrick and James Richardson had decided to enter the BP Community Project Competition. Groups had to choose a charitable organisation, complete a project for that organisation and submit a detailed business plan for judging. We chose the Puketi Forest Trust as our organisation and, after meetings with Gary Bramley, decided to create an informative sign to promote the trust's work in the Puketi.

Branching Out ended up winning the competition for the best business plan and enjoyed our prize, a trip to Wellington and all of its attractions. All of this was really the easy part.

Creating the sign was a long and involved process. We needed to do fundraising, get sponsors for materials, meet with sign writers, make up drafts of the sign, have meetings with DOC staff, make a mounting board for the sign, get the sign printed, and install mounting posts.

The sign was finally unveiled at the Manginangina boardwalk on the 15th of August 2008 for everybody to enjoy as they make their way around the stunning Kauris.

Special thanks to Helen Ough Dealy for help with sign text and design, Gary Bramley for keeping us on track, our parents for all of their running around and everybody else who helped make this project happen.



Students James Richardson, Olivia Manning, Keegan Rumble, Hilary Derrick and Mike Roberts with their sign at Manginangina.

Trapping Results

When the Trust began trapping stoats it was generally accepted in the north that salted rabbit was much more effective at catching stoats than eggs. Because there are not large numbers of rabbits in Northland (our trapper uses almost 2000 baits a month during the summer) but possums are readily available we decided to try using salted possum instead of rabbit. Our decision was also influenced by the fact that stoats in the forest are unlikely to have come across rabbits but would be familiar with possum. A recent trial carried out in Whangarei has indicated there is no statistical difference between the two. However, preliminary results of a trial carried out by the Trust over the last two years comparing salted possum with eggs indicates eggs are more effective than possum during the winter. Therefore this winter we used eggs in all traps except those involved in the trial. (Many thanks to **Robert Luxton** who provided most of the 2500 eggs we needed free of charge). The winter of 2007 the Trust caught 13 stoats on possum bait but this winter 45 were caught with eggs.

Each month the trapping results are entered onto the website – www.puketi.org.nz. The totals are looking impressive: 590 stoats, 34 weasels, 2 ferrets, 99 feral cats, 6911 rats, 330 hedgehogs, 935 possums, and 190 mice.

The Department of Conservation installed a ring of traps around the core area last December and over the last eleven months have caught 366 possums.

Rat Monitoring

Our aim is to keep rat tracking in our tracking tunnels below 5%. For the past two years we have been consistently below that. Rat monitoring in October gave a result of 1.4% - only one tunnel out of 70 was tracked by rats.

Kokako Re-introduction – A beginning

On 23 October 2008, The Bay Chronicle reported as follows:

Big date for lonely male

The lonely ‘hut bird’, Puketi Forest’s last remaining kokako, is to get a mate at last.

A female kokako is to be introduced this week from Auckland Zoo.

More than 120 birds lived in Puketi in the early 1980’s with the number dwindling to seven males in 2003.

Four years ago, to stem the critical decline in numbers, the Department of Conservation decided to capture and transfer the remaining Puketi birds to Mauimua Island for a breeding programme but they never managed to capture the hut bird and his lonely call has gone unanswered since.

Now, after intense predator control by the Puketi Forest Trust, a core area of the forest is sufficiently clear of predators for the national Kokako Recovery Group to approve re-introduction of kokako.

The female bird was bred at Tiritiri Matangi in the Hauraki Gulf and handreared in Puketi. Because she spent time at Puketi, she will have the local dialect, an important factor in the successful breeding of kokako. Birds from different regions have different dialects and they usually don’t mate with a bird that sings differently.

She will travel north this week to be released into an aviary for acclimatisation before being released into the wild about 10 days later.

DOC biodiversity officer, Steve McManus, says, “This is quite exciting for all those who have been involved in the project over the past five years. The reintroduction of kokako to Puketi would not be possible without the work of the trust, the generosity of contributors and the goodwill of iwi groups involved, particularly Ngati Toro.”

A second female bird – offspring of the first, bred at Auckland Zoo and now at the Mt Bruce Wildlife Centre – is due to follow her mother to Puketi about a week later.

The aviary has been relocated comfortably into the hut bird’s territory.

Monitoring shows an 85 percent increase in bird numbers as a result of the pest control campaign. Also on the rise is the population of kiwi in the forest, two of which have been heard recently near the aviary.

The pest control management has been audited by DOC habitats ranger Nigel Miller.

Kokako populations require sustained low levels of rat and possum numbers in order to survive and they only flourish in areas where the forest is in a healthy state.

A young kokako pair presently in Hamilton will be given a year to attempt breeding. If breeding is unsuccessful, they will be taken from the zoo and also brought to Puketi.

The bird from Auckland Zoo was transported to the aviary in the forest on 28 October and was due for release on 6 November. Sadly, she was found dead in the aviary the day before she was to be released. DoC staff report that the female had settled well and was taking food the day after the transfer. Problems began when the resident male was encouraged, with the use of lure tapes (recordings of kokako song), to come to the aviary. This had an unexpected adverse effect on the female which resulted in her injuring herself. A post mortem examination has been carried out and results are being reviewed by members of the national Kokako Recovery Group. Transfer of the second female from Mt Bruce has been postponed until the review has been completed and will probably take place later in November

Birds Benefit from Stoat Control

Research in New Zealand by John McLennan and others has shown that 90% of kiwi chicks are killed by stoats before they are a year old. Stoats are also responsible for severely reducing, and even eradicating, populations of yellowheads.

Yellowheads are particularly vulnerable because they live in beech forest and build their cup-shaped nests in holes high up in mature trees. Beech trees do not produce seed every year, but instead they produce very heavy crops of seed every three to five years (a phenomenon known as masting). The massive amount of seed is ideal rodent food and leads to an explosion in the number of rats and mice when masting occurs. Rodents are a staple of stoat diet and well fed stoats produce larger litters in mast years.

For the hole nesting yellowhead, with no way of escaping a stoat whilst incubating, this is a disaster. Even kaka, at three times the weight of a stoat and with a powerful bill, cannot defend itself while it nests in hollow trees. Only the female kaka incubates, so she and her young are most at risk. In one central North Island study only one kaka in seven was a female. Parakeets and kingfishers are also cavity nesters and are likely to be vulnerable to stoats while nesting.

After it was reported in the Trust's newsletter (issue 10, October 2007) that the only native animals to be caught after 1,500,000 trap nights were 8 kauri snails a supporter commented, "Wouldn't it be better if birds were so numerous catching the occasional bird was unavoidable".

Since 2003, Puketi local Ian Candy, managing director of Adventure Puketi, has commented on the significant increase in the number of kingfishers (among other birds) in the forest. Pukeko numbers on farmland at the forest edge have exploded and Ian and June Wilson's farm is now known locally as "Pukeko Farm". After 2,556,000 trap nights since 2003 we are saddened to have to report a kingfisher has been caught in an SA cat trap and a newly hatched pukeko chick forced its way into a stoat trap on the edge of the forest next to the Wilson's farm.

Perhaps one Trust supporter will see these deaths as a good sign. However we are a little disappointed that our record is no longer unblemished. We are satisfied that the design of the boxes that contain the stoat and rat traps are about as bird proof as we can get them and we will now trial a slight modification to the SA cat traps in an attempt to make them less likely to catch birds.

On a brighter note, one "intelligent" pair of kingfishers used a hole in the dead host of a large northern rata as a nest earlier this year. At the base of the rata was a stoat trap and the young successfully fledged in early March.

One of the advantages of using traps is that we know exactly what effect they are having on wildlife which is not the case with toxins where victims are unlikely to be found.

Native Pigeons Increase in Number – June Wilson reflects

In the early 80's pigeon poaching was rife in Puketi. In 1980 Ian and I bought a farm situated between the Puketi Forest and the Puketi Scenic Reserve. From time to time we would see native pigeons (known locally as kukupa) flying between the two areas of forest but after a year or two we seldom saw a pigeon. After the formation of the Department of Conservation several very committed staff members decided to put a stop to poaching. Their determination and effort paid off and a number of poachers were apprehended and prosecuted. Unfortunately we noticed no increase in the number of native pigeons at that time.

At the same time our flock of 40 tumbling pigeons rapidly reduced to a dozen – there were no poachers here, but eventually the culprit was found. One day a nest had two chicks in it, the next a stoat, fast asleep with a belly full of pigeon! A hammer ensured that stoat never awoke – and the pigeons stopped disappearing. What a difference a (dead) stoat makes.

And two years ago we started seeing kukapa again. In July, August and September pigeons fly from Puketi Forest during the day to the Puketi Scenic Reserve where they feed on the berries of taraire which are abundant in the reserve, particularly along the river flat. Because memories are short and unreliable I decided to make a note of the number of pigeons I saw each morning while I was out shifting stock. Last year during the July to September period the average number of pigeons seen in the morning was 2.3 per hour. This year it was 2.9 per hour.

Just before sun down all birds still in the reserve head back to the forest for the night. Last year the most recorded in the last hour was 11. This year it was 28. It is wonderful hearing the whoosh, whoosh, whoosh of their wings as they fly overhead, sometimes only a few metres above the ground. What a difference the trapping has made.



Our thanks to Frank Greenall and The Bay Chronicle for permission to use this picture.

Report from the Department of Conservation

Dan has been religiously checking and maintaining the perimeter possum trap line around the kokako area monthly through winter. Dan and Darran have also installed a new trap line in Omahuta Sanctuary exclusion zone and bat nesting area. They remain on standby for when the kokako are released, ready to initiate additional intensive possum control should they start nesting.

A number of permits have been issued for trappers to trap possums for fur over winter to help reduce possum numbers in all parts of the forest. We are only days off receiving permission to use cyanide throughout the whole forest (a 5 year consent) and plan to have a possum fur day in January to run through the requirements for using toxin on conservation land prior to issuing permits for this activity in the various blocks. With the sign off of this consent we will prepare the tender documents for control in the Omahuta Forest Kauri Sanctuary Block which is due for treatment this financial year. We anticipate goat control to be tendered late this year and contractors to begin work in the New Year.

Visitors to Puketi are appreciating the light and bright welcome at the campgrounds now that the old pines have been felled at the start of the Puketi Nature Trail and Waipapa River Track. The felling has really opened up the area, allowing more sunlight into the Trampers' Hut, and pretty views across the valley from the hut deck. In an effort to reduce the fire risk, the campground barbeques have been resited – away from trees – and one has been reduced in size.

The Pukekohe Stream track has been recut and marked, adding another track for bush-lovers, and it's hoped the Mangahoreore and Onekura Tracks will be open and marked again before long.

New signs will soon make life even easier for visitors: 10 signs have been made by a Whangarei company and the team will be installing as many as possible before the summer season really gets into full swing.

Did you see Wiremu Williams and Ian Wilson talking about Puketi on TV 1 news a couple of months ago? Visitor Assets programme manager Katrina Upperton completed the trio who spoke about the vandalism that has been happening in the forest. The topic might have been somewhat negative, but the positive messages came across really well.

The Trust wishes to acknowledge the following businesses and organisations which have made significant donations or have contributed goods and/or services to the Trust since the last newsletter.

Living Nature
Heliops
Springbank School
Robert Luxton
Department of Conservation

ASB Community Trust
BNZ Save the Kiwi Trust
Lion Foundation
New Zealand Lottery Grants Board
(Environment and Heritage)
Pub Charity

STOP PRESS

Thursday, 20th November - At 11.15am the female kokako from Mt Bruce arrived at Kerikeri Airport. It was transferred to a helicopter and 15 minutes later was at the release site. Trust supporters **John & Lynne Coombes and Di McFadzien** paid for the helicopter transfer to reduce the stress on the bird and to give it an extra three hours to settle down and feed before night fall.