



# OHO MAI PUKETI

## ISSUE 39

### November 2017

#### MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN, DR GARY BRAMLEY

This issue of the newsletter details the latest results of surveys for the kokako released at Puketi from 2012 to 2014, robins released at Puketi in 2009 and 2010 and a review of our kiwi management by kiwi scientist Dr John McLennan. The results are all encouraging and suggest our management is effective for protecting wildlife and restoring the forest in accordance with our vision.

Whilst we are arguably the largest pest control project in Northland, and were one of the first to start, there are now a plethora of community groups carrying out conservation activities in Northland (and the rest of the country). I recently calculated there are more than 30 groups or individuals doing some type of environmental work in the old Whangaroa County ranging from "Plastic Free Kaeo" to the Mahinepua / Radar Hill Landcare Trust which carries out kiwi management near Tauranga Bay. Not bad for a community of probably less than 1500 people. I don't think we are far away from reaching a critical mass with all this work and making a region wide difference. In the vicinity of Puketi there are, among others, the Puketotara Landcare Group working on our borders and Project Island Song working on the islands in the Bay of Islands. Andrew Mentor, Trust supporter and founder of Puketotara Landcare, has recently taken a role as Coordinator for the Kiwi Coast, supporting community conservation groups in the Bay of Islands – Hokianga area. Andy helps projects in the area work together to maximise biodiversity gains and provides advice and traps to new groups setting up on private land. Andy's role and traps are funded by the Northland Regional Council. The Regional Council's support of community conservation is most encouraging. The expanding pest control coverage supported by Andy's work will benefit Puketi by reducing re-invasion. It is really exciting to see all the initiatives now taking place on private land and on public conservation and iwi and hapu controlled land throughout the north.

Being geographically central to Northland, and housing a number of species not found elsewhere, Puketi and the other significant forests of the north (Russell, Warawara, Maungataniwha, Whangaroa, Opua, Herekino, Raetea, Omahuta and the like) will always be critical to restoring the biodiversity of the north because they will act as reservoirs from which these species can spread as management elsewhere allows. Thank you to all of you who have continued

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**SPECIAL THANKS** To the following organisations who have made significant donations or contributions in kind since the last newsletter:

Foundation North

Kiwis for kiwi

DOC Community Fund

Tiny Mighty Power

DOC Bay of Islands Office

Oxford Sports Trust

New World Kaikohe

Norvet Services, Okaihau

to support the trust in the face of increasing options to support conservation elsewhere in Northland. Being part of one of the early projects, I am often asked for advice (and often give it unsolicited as well!) by those starting out, and my advice is usually to do the best you can, over as big an area as you can, monitor it and adapt as you go. I look forward to the Government's Predator Free 2050 initiative being realised, when we will all be able to enjoy New Zealand's biodiversity in our own backyards. Until then I am confident that we are "holding the line" at Puketi and doing our best to contribute. I am hopeful that with the change of government and Conservation Minister more funding will be directed towards conservation in general, Predator Free 2050 and Northland in particular. I will certainly be doing my bit to lobby for more resources for our forests, which by and large have been poorly neglected.

I look forward to seeing some of our members at the upcoming AGM.

### **PUKETI FOREST TRUST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The annual general meeting of the Trust will be held on Saturday, 2nd December starting 10:00am at the Puketi Forest Headquarters trampers' hut (Puketi Recreation Area), off Waiare Road, Kerikeri. Following the meeting, David Seldon from the University of Auckland, Department of Biological Sciences will talk about his work with native beetles and the Ark in the Park conservation project in Waitakere. Dave's specialties are entomology and insect ecology. He described the new species of Carabidae beetle found in Puketi and is a science advisor to Ark in the Park, Hauturu (Little Barrier Island) Trust and the Department of Conservation's Coleoptera Threatened List Advisory Group.

We will finish with a pot luck lunch. Please bring some food to share. We warmly invite all our members, and their friends and family, to attend.

### **LATEST SURVEY RECORDS 20 KOKAKO**

In late winter-early spring, kokako prepare for breeding. At this time they establish and defend territories, sing frequently, and chase off other kokako invading their space. They quickly investigate playback of a recording of their song and often call in response. So with respect to kokako behaviour, late winter-early spring is the best time to find them. However, the usually unsettled weather at this time of year is not ideal. Calm fine conditions are preferred – the kokako are more active, sound carries better and is not masked by wind in the trees, and moving birds in the canopy are more easily seen when the foliage is still.

In late September a suitable weather window was predicted, and Tom Donovan, James McLaughlin, Mark Darin and Grant Adams spent two and a half days on the plateau surveying the Puketi kokako. Tom and James are wildlife contractors who have worked a lot with kokako in Mataraua, and Mark and Grant are volunteers with experience from Ark in the Park, Hunua, Mataraua and Puketi.







Teamwork increases the efficiency of kokako surveying because two people can follow and distinguish two kokako or pairs that are close to each other.

All kokako released in Puketi were banded with different colour combinations, so the surveyors tried their best to see the kokako legs for identification. It is not easy, because kokako spend most of their time in the canopy – a constantly moving silhouette against the sky. Mark brought a digital camera with a big lens and a laptop. Enlarged photos on the laptop screen showed more detail than could be seen in a glimpse through binoculars. The accompanying photos were all taken by Mark.

The weather for the survey proved to be less than ideal, with moderate wind, however the survey was successful with 20 kokako recorded. This included eight confirmed pairs and three lone individuals sighted, and song from another bird or pair southwest of the plateau which wasn't seen. Of the kokako seen, 11 were confirmed banded (from the original release) and four were confirmed unbanded, i.e. hatched in Puketi.

FoxPro electronic game callers from the US were used to play recordings of kokako song. These put out high quality sound, potentially very loud, so have to be used cautiously to avoid stressing the kokako and to avoid calling in more distant kokako and getting them confused with the local pair. The paired kokako were very responsive and only short segments of song were required to attract them. Five kokako were encountered on Friday afternoon on the walk in and several were heard singing each morning without prompting from playback. Pairs were observed feeding each other, singing duets and on one occasion mating – all indications that nesting was imminent. We aim not to disturb birds while they are breeding so were lucky to get the survey done at this time.

In contrast, the three lone kokako all came in quietly to investigate the playback, didn't sing, and moved away soon after. These birds are probably not paired and may be juveniles who have not yet established territories. The legs of only one bird were seen. It was unbanded.

One female bird from Mataraua released in September 2012 (known as 22, after her transmitter channel) was seen with her original mate (34), still in the territory where they first settled. She had not been confirmed alive since October 2013, when her transmitter stopped working. A pair has often been found in their territory but without the female's bands being seen, so these earlier sightings were most likely 22. In 2016 they were accompanied by a juvenile. The tracking transmitters had a battery life of about one year, and a plain cotton link in the harness that should eventually break releasing the transmitter. James clearly saw 22's transmitter aerial though, so the link has failed to break and she has been wearing it for five years with apparently no ill effect. Mark told us that an Ark in the Park kokako was also seen with a transmitter after five years, but it eventually fell off on its own.

Band sightings also suggest that the male transferred from Hamilton Zoo in March 2013 is still resident. He had not been seen or



detected since shortly after release, but was seen this time with a banded but unidentified kokako. If the bands were recorded correctly and it really is him, that's great news because he and his brother (transferred from Lady Alice Island) had a Puketi father and are the only two known kokako left with Puketi heritage. We last confirmed the brother alive shortly before his transmitter expired in March 2014. Hopefully future surveys will find both these birds alive and well and paired with females.

The survey was limited in duration and extent but confirmed that kokako are established on the plateau and are breeding successfully. The kokako discovered are concentrated around the southern half of the plateau. The sound anchoring used during the initial release appears to have successfully encouraged them to settle in that area. Kokako are not easy to find, and there are probably more living around the territories discovered in this survey, and possibly among them.

Two kaka were also seen at the north end of the plateau. It would be nice if they would stay and make Puketi their home, but they are probably visitors from the islands off the east coast of Northland and will go home for the breeding season.

## AN ENCOURAGING ASSESSMENT OF PUKETI KIWI

After the Trust began predator control in 2003, call rates recorded in annual kiwi listening increased to about 4 calls per hour from 2004 to 2011, but have remained at that level since. As described in previous newsletters, the Trustees were concerned that this might not reflect the full potential of Puketi as a kiwi habitat and additional management might be required to support growth of the Puketi kiwi population. Following Lesley Baigent's preliminary survey with her kiwi dog Tohu in autumn this year, (described in the last newsletter), the



John McLennan (centre) with trustees John Dawn and Tricia Hodgson.

Department of Conservation Bay of Islands office arranged for kiwi specialist Dr John McLennan to visit Puketi and meet the Trustees to discuss our kiwi. John has worked for more than 30 years in kiwi research and conservation. He is a trustee of Kiwis for kiwi and several other conservation groups, has published widely on kiwi ecology and conservation and is also a regular technical advisor to DOC and conservation groups.

John visited Puketi with some of the Trustees and DOC staff in September. After seeing the habitat and reviewing our data, John gave an encouraging assessment of Puketi kiwi. His view was that Puketi call rates are high in comparison with NI brown kiwi populations outside of Northland, and although some Northland populations have higher call rates, the available data suggest a good result is being achieved for Puketi kiwi. The steady call rates over the last 7 years suggest that a healthy adult kiwi population is being maintained and there is unlikely to be a serious problem with dog or ferret predation.

Any or all of the various hypotheses that have been suggested to explain the levelling off of call counts could apply, but John thinks it most likely that juvenile kiwi are dispersing out of the management area rather than trying to establish territories in competition with existing adults. John described a project on the Puketukutuku peninsula (750 ha) in Lake Waikaremoana, where similar predator control was installed and the NI brown kiwi population similarly increased and then levelled off. Transmitter monitoring revealed that juvenile kiwi were dispersing across the isthmus, some as far as 15 km. When a kiwi containment fence (not a predator exclusion fence) was put across the isthmus, the kiwi population on the peninsula increased steadily.

Puketi habitat should be capable of supporting 2 – 3 times the kiwi population indicated by the call rates and





the predator control being provided should allow kiwi population growth of 2-3% pa. John suggested that best results for kiwi would be obtained by supplementing the existing continuous trapping in the core area with toxin application across the wider forest every 3 – 5 years to achieve secondary poisoning of stoats and protect kiwi elsewhere in Puketi.

Encouraged by this opinion, the Trustees have decided to investigate breeding productivity in the management area with an intensive dog survey at the end of the next breeding season. An effort will be made to catch about 50 kiwi to get a measure of population age distribution.

Once successful kiwi breeding in the management area is confirmed, expansion of the predator control area would lead to an increase in kiwi population density as juveniles migrating out would be balanced by others coming in from the expansion area.

The Trustees are working with DOC staff to develop a prescription for a more intensive dog survey next autumn. Proposals for expansion of predator control are being explored.

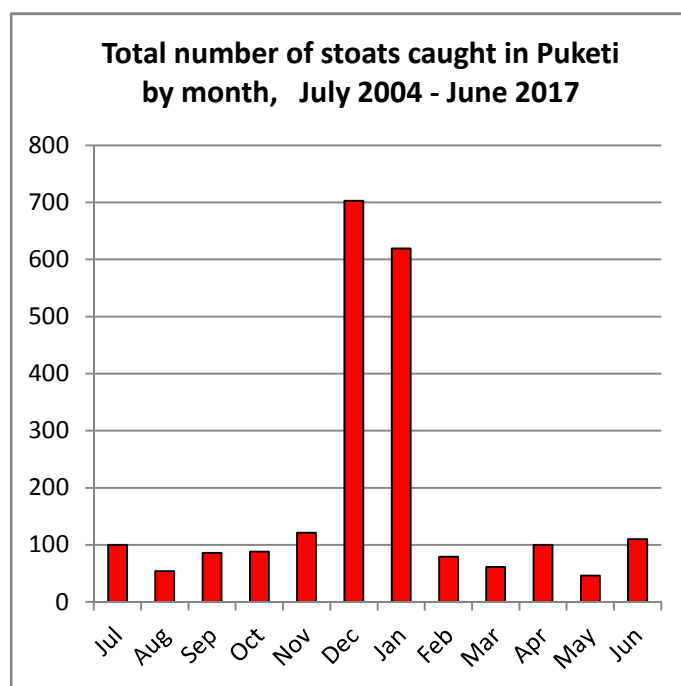
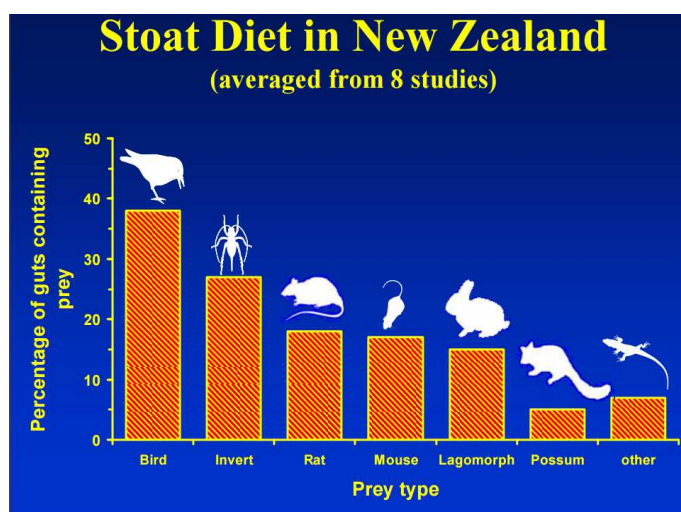
Many thanks to John McLennan for his advice, and to DOC Bay of Islands for bringing John to Puketi.

## STOATS – “KILLING MACHINES”

This graph from a presentation by Craig Gillies of DOC in 2007 illustrates why stoats are such a threat to native wildlife. Although stoats were brought to New Zealand to control rabbits (which they failed to do), birds and invertebrates are their most common prey.

Since the Trust began trapping stoats in 2003, we have caught over 2200. There is no accepted best practice method for monitoring stoats, so we rely on outcome monitoring (kiwi call counts, five minute bird counts) to ensure our stoat control is adequate.

The graph below shows the numbers caught each month from July 2004 to June 2017. More are caught during December and January than in the other ten months combined. This peak is due to the stoat's life cycle. In October / November, about three weeks after the female has given birth, the male stoat serves the breeding female and her daughters in the den. (One 17 day old captive female was mated when she weighed only 18 grams and was still blind, deaf, helpless and almost immobile. A year later she gave birth to 13 kits). The fertilised eggs grow for about two weeks and then stop growing and float free in the uterus for nine to ten months. This is known as delayed implantation. The following spring, in late August - early September, the embryos implant and develop to full term in about four weeks. They are born in late September or early October. The number of young born is closely related to food supplies in the spring. Six to eight weeks later the young accompany their mother on hunting expeditions and in December, at 12-14 weeks of age, they become



independent and disperse far and wide, sometimes travelling scores of kilometres from their natal area.

We don't know whether the stoats trapped by the Trust were born elsewhere and are caught soon after they enter Puketi Forest looking for their own territories or whether they have evaded traps and remain in Puketi after the end of January and prey on our birds, lizards and insects before producing young of their own. The rodent tracking tunnels used in New Zealand were originally developed by Dr CM (Kim) King for detecting stoats. In an attempt to monitor the resident stoats at Puketi we propose to bait tracking tunnels with meat and see whether stoats are detected. If anyone would like to be involved in this interesting project please get in touch with John Dawn (09 4074790) or Ian Wilson (09 4019056).

The removal of stoats from Great Island in Chalky Inlet, Fiordland is providing some interesting information. Great Island is 736 hectares, 80 metres from the mainland at its closest point. 220 Goodnature A24 resetting traps were installed at 100 metre intervals on lines 300 to 700 metres apart depending on the topography. 160 tracking tunnels were also put out. Before the traps were set, 94% of the tracking tunnels were tracked by stoats. The traps were pre-fed several times and then set in early March. Three days later, seventeen dead stoats were collected from under the traps and two more the next week. A further eight stoats were killed over the following six months. Stoat tracking dropped from 94% to 5% and 0.9% over that time. There were probably only about 30 stoats on Great Island to start with, but they walked through 94% of the tracking tunnels. And in just three days over half of them checked out a trap and were caught.

Although the DOC200 is an effective trap for stoats, the weight of a double set DOC200 is a drawback when putting them out in remote country because they are difficult to carry. Thirty A24s can be thrown in a backpack but one double DOC200 is a load in itself. It appears that development of the A24 for stoat control is progressing well, but we understand more work is required to improve the stoat lure. It is good to know another effective weapon is coming to use in the war against stoats. Perhaps some stoats that won't go into a trap-box might investigate an A24, which also has the advantage that a rat entering the trap does not put it out of action. The Trustees are monitoring the price and effectiveness of the A24 traps as more and more are used and the technology develops.

## A NEW TRAP TO CONTROL FERAL CATS

Cats can have a serious impact on wildlife including kiwi chicks, other forest birds, lizards and invertebrates. When Scott Candy was trapping for the Trust, he cut open a freshly caught cat and its stomach was packed full of recently eaten wetas.

To control feral cats the Trust has been using an improved version of the American Coney Bear trap made by Steve Allan, known as the SA cat trap. It is light, relatively cheap, very effective if correctly installed and serviced, and has been certified as humane.

However, most people find it difficult to set and its effectiveness depends to a large extent on the skill of the trapper. When the Timms possum trap was approved for use as a cat trap, we used them to replace the SAs that volunteers service on line 10 and the number of cats caught increased significantly.

Steve Allan has now designed a new cat trap known as the SA2 Kat trap. The SA2 Kat trap recently passed the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) welfare performance test. It is humane, easy to set, does not require any fine tuning and has glowing reports from trappers who have used it. The Trust has just received a grant from the Oxford Sports Trust to buy SA2 Kat traps. We will install these alternately with the existing SA traps on some trap lines for comparative evaluation. If they prove to be as good as reputed, we will buy more to replace the old SA traps as they wear out.



## REPORT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

Recent biodiversity work in Puketi Omahuta has seen monitoring of both the Pua O Reinga/ Wood Rose (*Dactylanthus taylorii*) and Para/King Fern (*Ptisana salicina*) populations. The Para population is thriving while the *Dactylanthus* is not doing so well, but is surviving. More work to look at flowering and seeding is planned for February.

Goat control operations have recommenced, with numbers of goats taken from the usual areas.

Possum control operations are under way in two blocks of the Omahuta key management area and should be completed by the end of November.

Weed control targeting *Aristea* has been undertaken in a number of areas and the main work in the Waipapa River is planned for this month.

Other biodiversity work has included locating flowering white rata (*Metrosideros albiflora*) so that seed can be collected from these at a later date to safeguard against the threat posed by Myrtle Rust. Other Myrtle species will be targeted as the season progresses.

On the recreation side, repairs have been carried out to the toilets at the campground and the team have been dealing with drainage issues compounded by continuing high use of the facilities over the wet winter.

The Te Araroa walking season is now in full swing and camper and van numbers are up on previous years.

At Forest Pools, NIWA have completed removing all the materials from the old river gauging station.

## FUNDING FOR PUKETI



NZ Petrol Refunds is proud to support the Puketi Forest Trust. They will donate \$100 to the Trust for every new client referred to them by Trust supporters.

NZ Petrol Refunds is a Northland company claiming excise duty refunds on behalf of NZ businesses.

Excise duty is the road tax charged by the NZTA on every litre of petrol. It's currently set at 66c per litre. When this petrol is used in off road machinery (quads, chainsaws, lawnmowers, pumps, compactors, commercial vessels etc.) by businesses such as farmers, forestry crews, lawnmowers, oyster farmers, concrete contractors, arborists and many others, the road tax component can be claimed back.

There's millions of dollars every year owed to thousands of eligible businesses across the country that remain unclaimed. Initial claims can be back dated 2 years and claims are placed quarterly from then on. NZ Petrol Refunds process each claim and take 15% out of any refund for their service. The rest is deposited into the client's account every 3 months.

Bernard Coogan, operator of NZ Petrol Refunds and also a trapping contractor for the Trust, notes that he fully appreciates the significance of the project and has great respect for the hard work and commitment of everyone involved. He regards it a privilege to be able to gift money for the continuation of this work. If you would like to donate a portion of your refund, or all of it, to the Trust let him know and he can arrange that.

Contact Bernard on 021 2066719 or email: [bernard@nzpetrolrefunds.co.nz](mailto:bernard@nzpetrolrefunds.co.nz) for more information.

[www.nzpetrolrefunds.co.nz](http://www.nzpetrolrefunds.co.nz)





## OUR ANNUAL ROBIN SURVEY WAS WELL ATTENDED



Even though the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July was cold and blustery with occasional light showers forecast, twenty people met at the Waihoanga Gorge Kauri Walk car park to take part in the 2017 robin survey. Such a good turnout meant we were able to survey 16 kilometres of trap-line. Despite the weather being less than ideal, 30 robins were seen and 18 heard. The trap-lines are 100 metres apart and if birds were recorded at adjacent points on two trap lines, or within 200 metres on the same line, they were considered likely to be the same bird or pair, although home ranges at Mangatutu (where the robins came from) were typically around 50 metres across. Allowing for some birds being found more than once, a minimum of 24 different individuals were located. This works out at 1.51 robins per kilometre of trap line. Last year the number of robins encountered per kilometre was 1.29. Three of the

birds found in 2017 were banded (BO-RM, YS-RM and YB-RM). A few months earlier, and again in October, RR-RM was seen on the plateau, so there are at least four robins from the original 2009 release still surviving and now at least nine years old - three times the average life expectancy of a robin. The annual robin surveys are limited to the area where we first released robins (and which is still intensively managed for robin protection), but robins are reported from throughout the forest and the number recorded is only an unknown fraction of the total population.

## JOBS FOR VOLUNTEERS

Five trap lines are serviced by volunteers. They take between two and six hours to service and vary in difficulty. If you are already on a roster you will be sent an email shortly to see whether you would like to be on next year's roster. If you are not on a current roster and would like to help with pest control please get in touch with Ian Wilson (09 4019056) or Erica Whyte (09 4060514). If you are interested in helping monitor rat and/or stoat numbers or cut trap lines ring John Dawn (09 4074790).

## MYNAS IN PUKETI

Common mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) are numerous throughout human modified parts of Northland, sometimes forming large flocks in roosts or on abundant food sources. They are noisy, conspicuous, aggressive to other birds, and considered a pest by many people. There are reports of mynas reducing populations of native birds in other parts of the world but there has been little research into the impacts of mynas on New Zealand native species. In this context, Dean Baigent-Mercer wrote an article for the Forest & Bird magazine ("No Myna Impact", Spring 2017), which included some comments about mynas in Puketi. Readers of the article could be forgiven for taking away the impression that the "best pest control area" at Puketi is full of mynas and the invasive weeds they have taken into the forest. This is not the case at all.



In the article Dean states "Even inside the best pest control area at Puketi Forest, mynas by day, dawn, and dusk are the most commonly heard bird." The Trust's 5 minute bird count monitoring tells a different story.





The Trust has undertaken five minute bird counts using the standard protocol at 15 sites throughout the core pest control area in Puketi every autumn but one since 2005. In those counts, mynas have always been heard at one site on the forest edge but are seldom encountered further into the forest. Mynas have been recorded only occasionally at five other sites and never at the other nine. The average number of mynas heard per site has ranged from 0.07 to 0.71.

The average total of all birds (introduced and native) heard per five minute count site has gone from 3.7 to a peak of 8.7 (in 2016). Introduced species have generally not fared as well as native birds since trapping began, with the average number of introduced birds per count ranging from 0.73 to 2.1 over the 12 year period, whilst native birds have ranged from 3 to 7.28 per count over the same time. Mynas are not the most commonly heard bird. There is a summary of 5 minute bird count results on the monitoring page of the Trust's website.

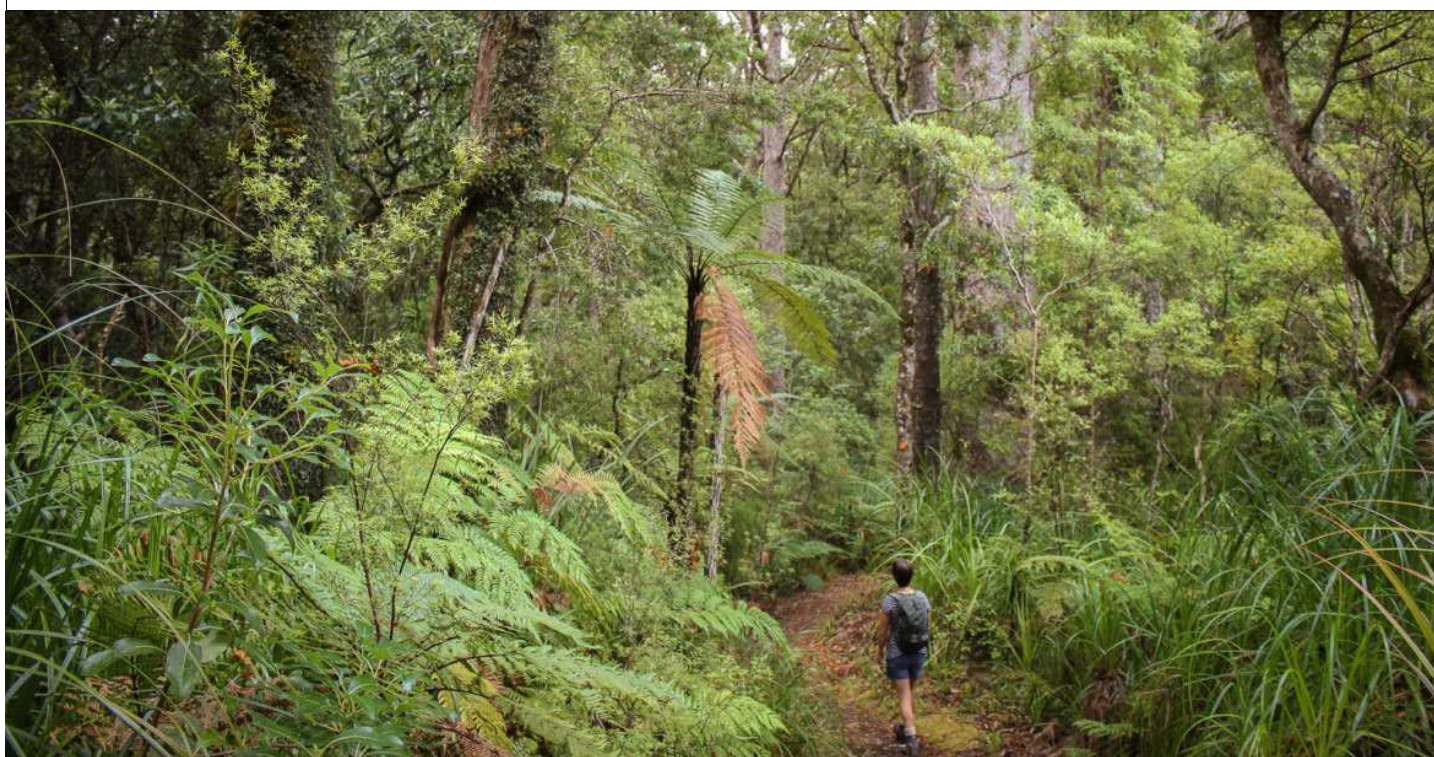
In addition, Dean's statement that "mynas will take seeds of pest plants serious distances into the bush" is misleading. In studies of a large number of myna roost sites, DOC ecologist Tony Beauchamp found only one had evidence of weed transfer by mynas and all were weeds which require high light conditions and would not survive in forested areas. There is no evidence of weed transfer by mynas in Puketi Forest and there is some evidence (based on our call counts), that few mynas penetrate very far into intact native forest. In relation to weeds at Puketi, the Auckland Botanical Society Journal (Volume 72 (1) June 2017) summarising a visit to the Waihoanga Gorge Kauri Walk in Puketi earlier this year, stated that "there were remarkably few weeds to be seen".

Puketi is largely free of bird-dispersed weeds. The most serious weed areas in Puketi are along the Mangapa-Waipapa River which arises outside the forest and carries weeds in, and on the margins of old logging tracks and roads. DOC staff control weeds annually along river and road margins.

Mynas may have an impact in smaller forest remnants or more disturbed forests. As Dean suggests, it would be useful to have more research in New Zealand into the effects of mynas and attempts to control them.

### **KAURI CHALLENGE 2018**

Following the popularity of the first three organised walks through Puketi, the trustees are planning another Kauri Challenge, to be held on Saturday 27th January, 2018. The route and format will be similar to last year. Details and entry forms have been posted on the website. Alternatively, drop in to Cherry Blossom Florist in Kerikeri to pick one up.





# PUKETI FOREST TRUST

## Sponsorship Form

There are several ways you can donate to support the restoration of Puketi Forest.  
Please choose the method most convenient for you.

1. **By Mail:** Complete this form and send with a cheque or credit card details to  
The Puketi Forest Trust, PO Box 257, Kaeo 0448, New Zealand.
2. **By Direct Credit:** Puketi Forest Trust, Account No 03-0351-0165464-00 (Westpac, Kerikeri)  
Please advise payment details by posting this form to the address above or email to [info@puketi.org.nz](mailto:info@puketi.org.nz).
3. **By credit card or PayPal account through the web site:** [www.puketi.org.nz/donate.html](http://www.puketi.org.nz/donate.html)  
(payments are processed through the secure PayPal system).

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I would prefer to receive newsletters by *email* / *post* (select one).

I wish to: Sponsor \_\_\_\_\_ hectares for \_\_\_\_\_ years @ \$50 each \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsor \_\_\_\_\_ kilometres of track @ \$1000 per km \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Donate \_\_\_\_\_ rat traps @ \$10 each \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Donate \_\_\_\_\_ stoat traps @ \$20 each \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Donate \_\_\_\_\_ feral cat traps @ \$25 each \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Contribute to the Endowment Fund (minimum of \$1000) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Donation** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Payment method: **Cheque** (payable to Puketi Forest Trust) ☐.

or: **Credit Card**. (*Visa, MasterCard, American Express or Discover*)

Credit card number: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

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