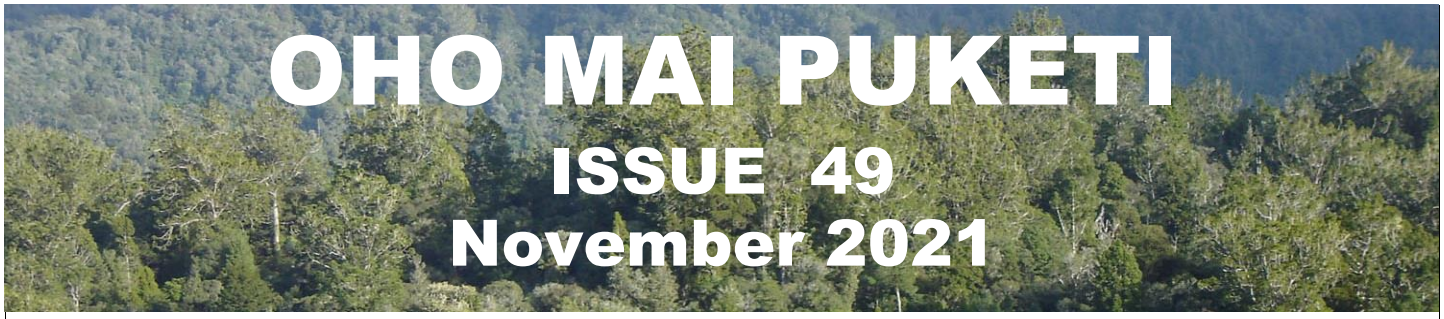

OHO MAI PUKETI
ISSUE 49
November 2021

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON, DR GARY BRAMLEY

Long-time members will be aware that we have been wanting to expand our core area for a number of years, particularly to help our struggling kokako population, but have not been successful in getting funding to do that.

One Saturday a few months ago I was in Auckland airport travelling home from work in the South Island when I was surprised to get a call from Bronwyn Bauer-Hunt, the Operations Manager at the Department of Conservation in Kerikeri. She was calling to tell me that the Trust had been successful with an application to Jobs for Nature and that the Minister of Conservation, Kiri Allen, was coming to Puketi in the near future to announce the successful Northland bids, including ours. We had already made one unsuccessful application to Jobs for Nature, and I hadn't been optimistic that we might be successful the second time either. We had actually made two applications in our second attempt; one to expand the core area and employ a couple of people, and a larger proposal, which was the successful application. We made it clear in our applications that if we were successful with the larger application, we wouldn't need the smaller one.

I am delighted to report that Puketi Forest Trust has received $3 million over three years from Jobs for Nature for a project called Puketi-Omahuta Moemoea (A vision for Puketi-Omahuta). The Jobs for Nature funding is solely for expansion of pest control into the wider Puketi-Omahuta forest and will allow us to engage with a wider range of mana whenua hapū and expand the existing pest control out to about 19,500ha (i.e. the whole forest and some adjoining private land which is forested, provided we can make arrangements with the relevant owners). We will also double the size of the core area to about 1350ha. The new core area will have intensive rat and possum trapping similar to the existing core. The wider extensions will have broad-scale trapping for mustelids and feral cats.

The existing work that we do is not funded by the Jobs for Nature grant and we will continue fund raising as normal and using our current contractors to cover this work. So your regular donations are still important and greatly valued.

The Jobs for Nature grant will allow us to employ 13 people who will deliver the expansion project for us. This includes a project manager, an administrator, two supervisors and nine pest control operators. As well as expanding the pest control, servicing the new trap network and monitoring, the project will also do some wilding pine and weed control and collect seed and propagate native plants for restoration of some of the pine blocks in Omahuta that have been harvested and will not be returned to pine trees.

We will expand the management in stages over three years, beginning with expansion of the core area and extending broadscale control to the north of our current area (towards Whangaroa). This will coincide with the Omahuta Tiakina Nga Manu project located west of our area which is being funded and carried out by the Department of Conservation for this year only, to protect short-tailed bats and kiwi in Omahuta. The Trust will take over servicing of this trap network when the DOC funding ends.

PUKETI.ORG.NZ

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

DOC Community Fund
Jobs for Nature
Foundation North
DOC Bay of Islands Office
Northland Regional Council
Kiwis for kiwi
NZ Environmental Ltd
Baz Reiher

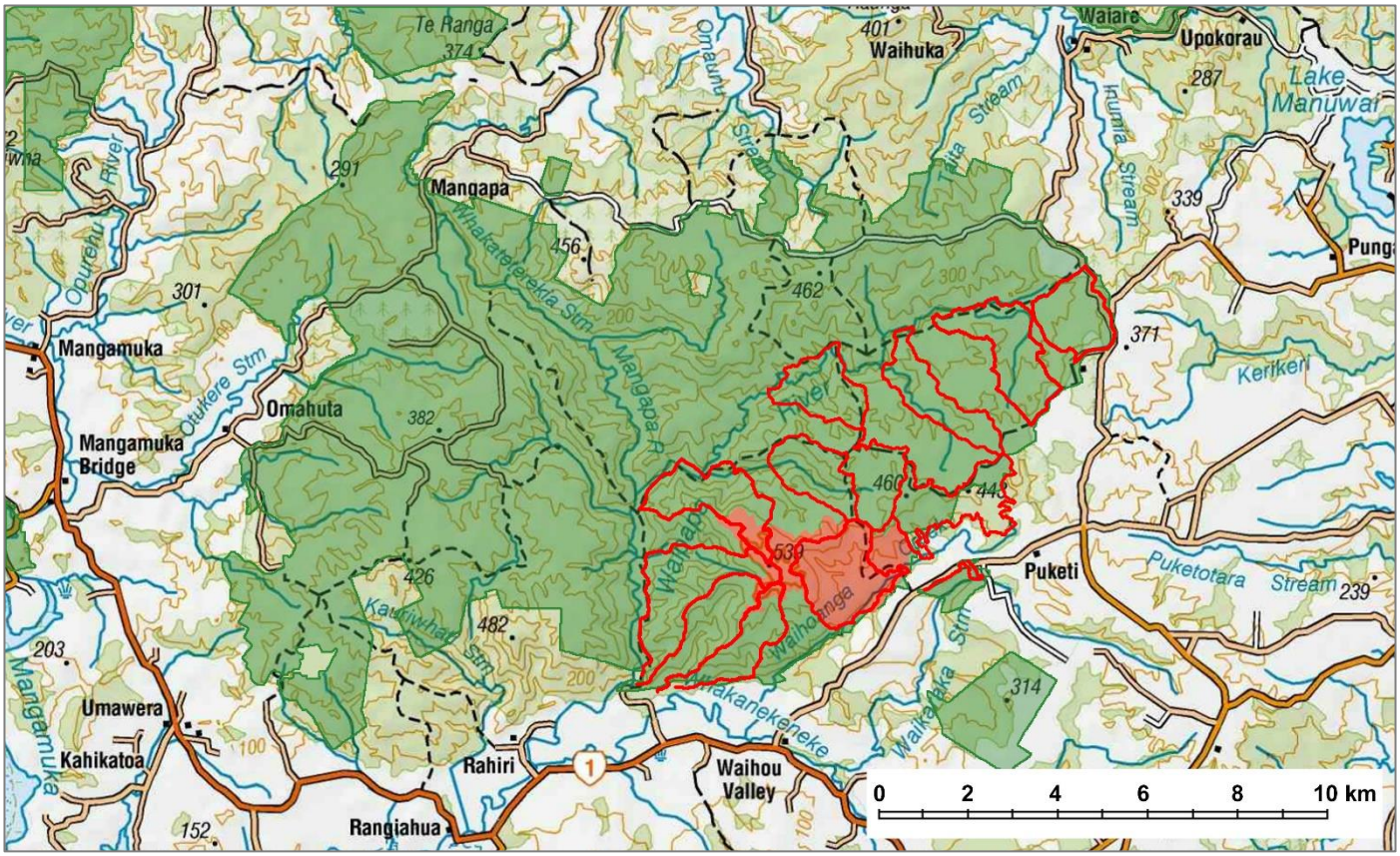
As part of the employment package, Downer Group (the roading and infrastructure company) is helping us to deliver a training package which will equip our trainees for working in the forest and provide them with ongoing pastoral care. Downer have been using this system to mentor and support their own staff for many years and the Department of Conservation are interested in using it for their own recruitment and training purposes, so we are acting as a pilot to see if this approach can work for conservation based jobs. The training package comes at no cost to the Trust, but will add significant value to our employees by helping them gain the skills they need to be effective conservation workers. By the end of their three-year contract with the Trust they should have completed the unit standards for a Level 3 Certificate in Pest Animal Control Operations through Primary ITO, have a future career plan mapped out and have acquired some financial literacy, life and small business skills that would allow them to be independent contractors or seek employment elsewhere.

Minister of Conservation Kiritapu Allen and Northland MP Willow-Jean Prime with trustees at Puketi for announcement of Jobs for Nature grants, 29 July 2021. From left: John Dawn, Gary Bramley, Kiri, Willow-Jean, Aggie Wheoki.

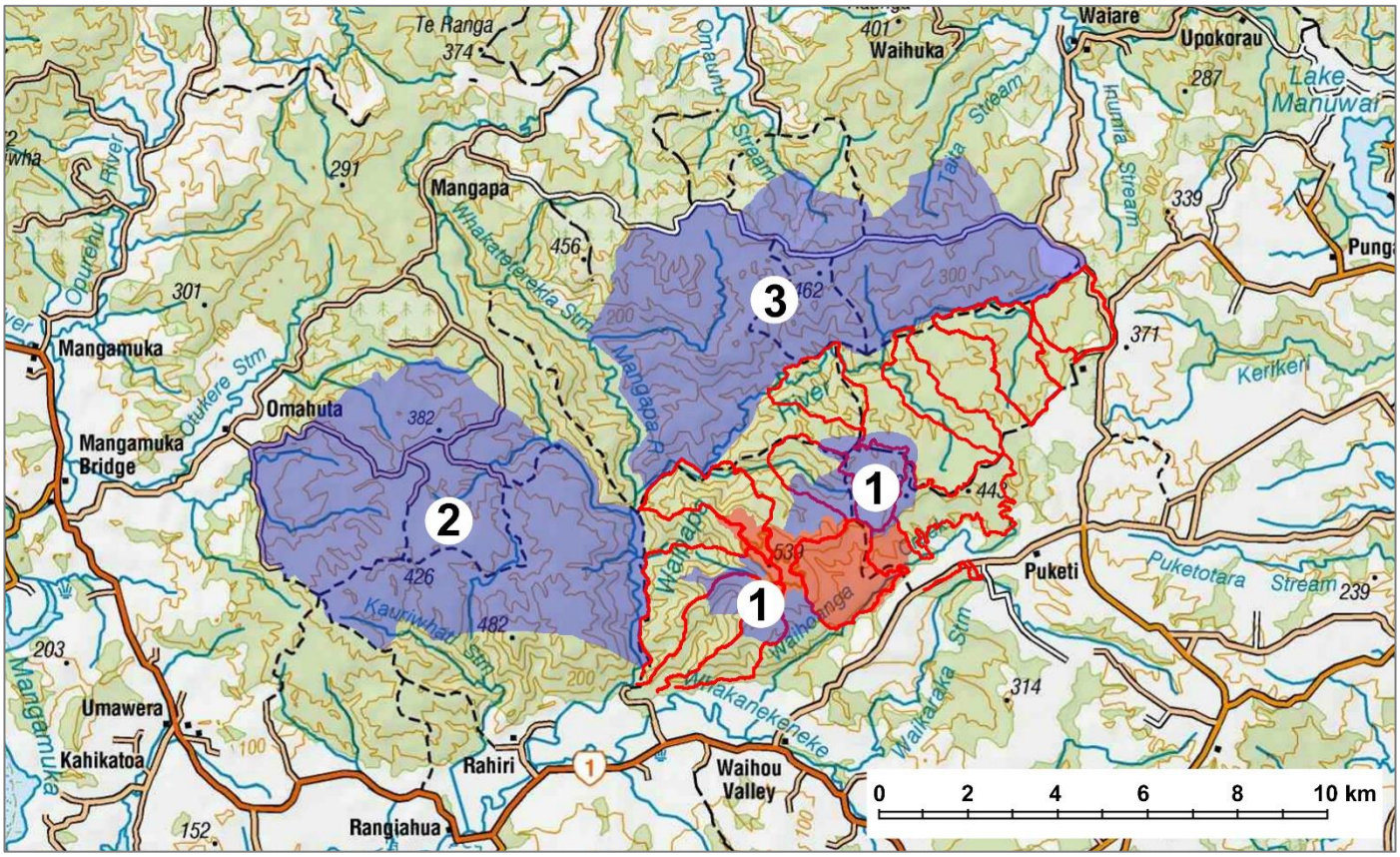
We have now appointed Lois Clayton as the project manager, Lisa Tanielu as administrator, Oliver Adams as a field supervisor, and 10 trainee rangers who begin training as soon as the Far North returns to Covid level 2 on 12 November. As well, we have rented premises (a three-bay shed, a double garage with two attached rooms and a small two-bedroom house) near the forest to use as a base and have started fitting it out with the equipment we will need. We have seconded Dan O'Halloran from DOC in Kerikeri to assist us through this set up phase until our new staff are up to speed. The two weeks pre-training will cover pest control, wildlife monitoring, and things such as forest history, tikanga, outdoor first aid, navigation and self-care. Once the pre-training is complete the two teams of workers will commence track clearing in the expansion area and regular training will be interspersed through their employment in advance of needing the skills.

This is a once in a life time opportunity for the Trust and for the health of the forest. Delivering such a big expansion will be a huge job – when we did our last expansion in 2007 it was basically a full-time job for about six months for me and longer for Ian Wilson - organising logistics, finding, hiring and organising contractors and volunteers, procuring what we needed, making sure everything was where it was meant to be, following up on things, accounting and reporting to the funders. This expansion will be three times that size and we will need the staff to be fully engaged and effective to achieve it. I am excited about the opportunity and look forward to seeing it unfold over the next three years and working with and getting to know our new team, who we will introduce in future newsletters.

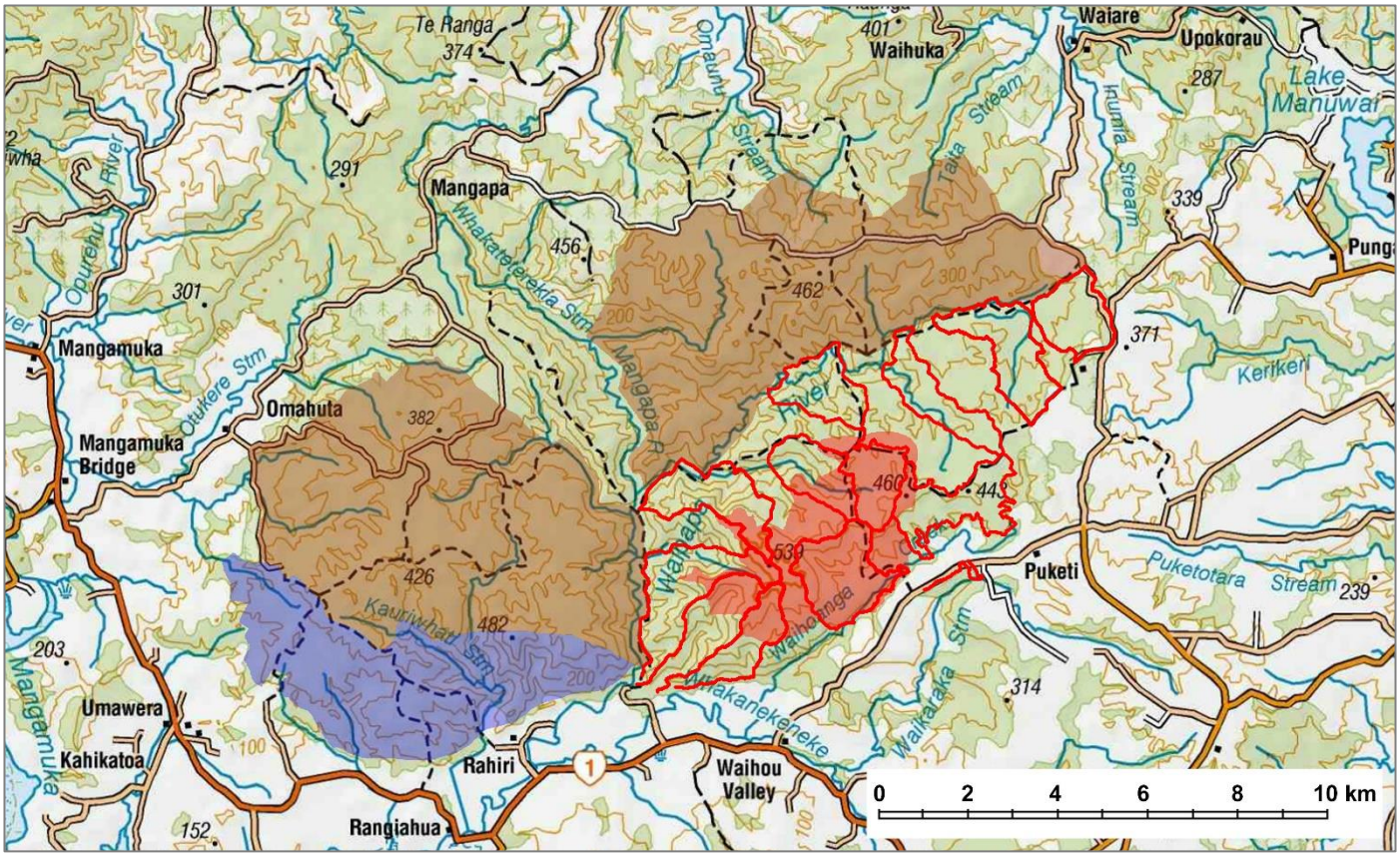
An enormous thanks to John Dawn and Adrian Walker who prepared the original applications, and to all the trustees who have stepped up their voluntary workload to get us in the position of being able to employ people, especially Laura Edmonds who has sat on the interview panel with John and myself and been to many other meetings related to the project. I look forward to sharing the successes of the project with you all as they materialise.



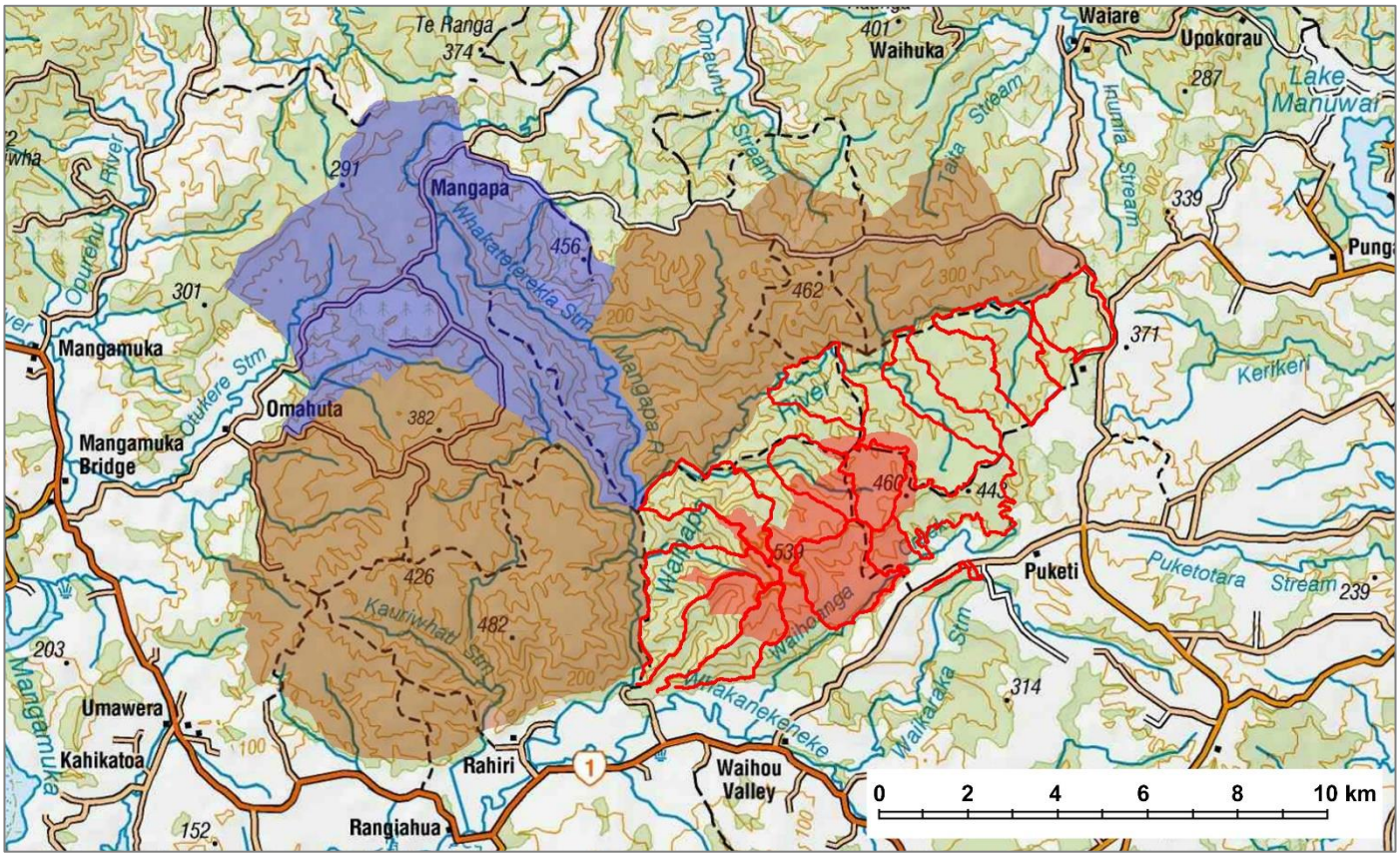
Map 1: Existing pest control in Puketi: Stoat/feral cat trap lines red, core area intensive rat & possum trapping shaded pink, Public Conservation Land shaded green.



Map 2: Jobs for Nature pest control expansion year 1, 2021-22: (1) Core area rat & possum trapping extension, (2) Central Omahuta stoat/feral cat trapping (by DOC, funded by Tiakina Ngā Manu), (3) North Puketi stoat/feral cat trapping. Pest control extension outside of PCL is subject to agreement with the landowners and occupiers.



Map 3: Jobs for Nature pest control expansion year 2, 2022-23: South Omahuta stoat/feral cat trapping, shaded blue.



Map 4: Jobs for Nature pest control expansion year 3, 2023-24: North Omahuta stoat/feral cat trapping, shaded blue.

The new Trust office and workshop at 2367 State Highway 1. Omahuta in the background, Puketi far right.

TRUST AGM 2021

Covid permitting, the annual general meeting of the Puketi Forest Trust will be held on December 4th at the new Trust premises, 2367 State Highway 1, Okaihau (on the left as you go north from Okaihau, 50 metres before Rahiri Road).

The meeting will start at 10:00 am, followed by an introduction to our new project manager Lois Clayton, who will give us a short talk on some of her previous pest control work and her vision for Puketi Omahuta.

We will then have a shared lunch and you can look around the new premises. Bring a plate of food to share.

Hopefully we will still be in Covid-19 level 2 (or better), in which case we will follow the social distancing rules. If we are back at level 3, the meeting will be postponed and the new meeting arrangement will be advised by email and posted on the Trust website puketi.org.nz. If you don't have email or internet access and would like to confirm the meeting arrangements, please phone Tricia at 021616546.

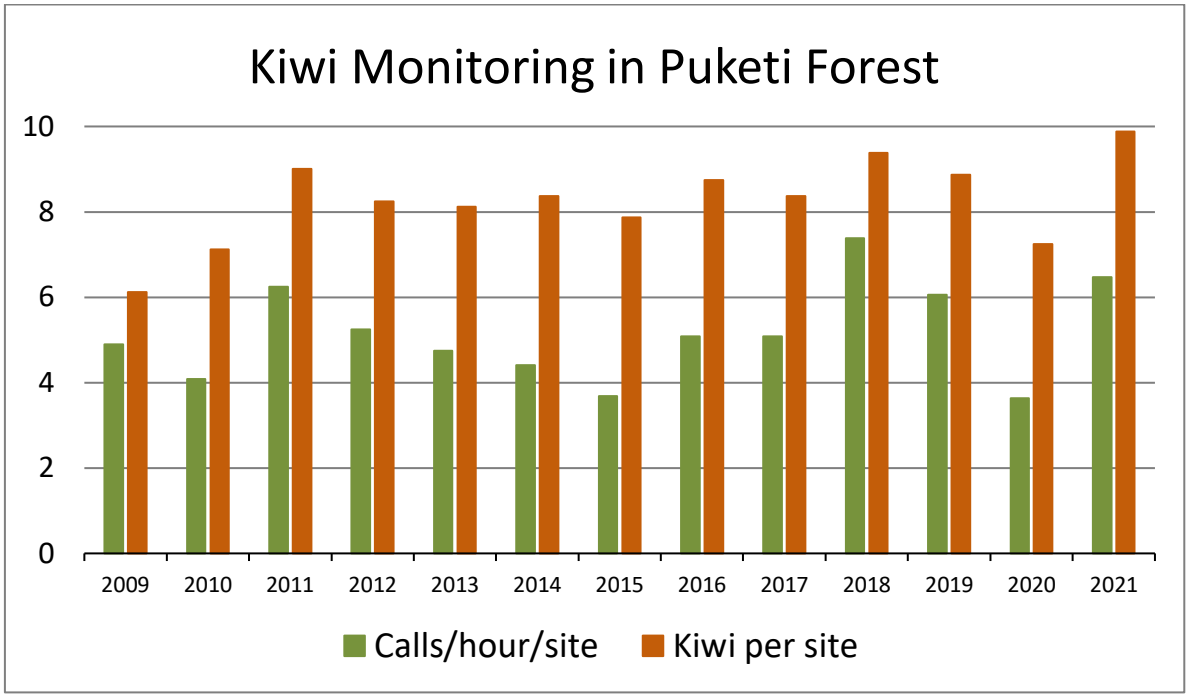
KIWI MONITORING

This year eighteen volunteers monitored kiwi calls at nine sites and another two sites were monitored with audio recorders. The trustees greatly appreciate the commitment of the volunteers who rescheduled their busy lives to be out in the forest, often at short notice, when the weather was suitable.

Last year call rates were less than in recent years. We were concerned that the low calling rate may have been due to more than just kiwi being in poor condition due to a lack of food during the dry summer. This year we were relieved when the number of calls heard on the first of four listening nights exceeded expectations. By the end of monitoring, the total number of kiwi heard was the highest and the average call rate was the second highest since Trust volunteers began kiwi listening.

From 2004, shortly after the Trust began trapping, to 2011, kiwi call rates increased about 2.5 times but since then have levelled off. One hypothesis for the lack of further increase is that young kiwi are driven out of the management area by territorial adults into surrounding areas without predator control and hence with lower kiwi density. It will be interesting to see if the number of calls increases after the expansion of stoat and feral cat trapping beyond the existing management area.

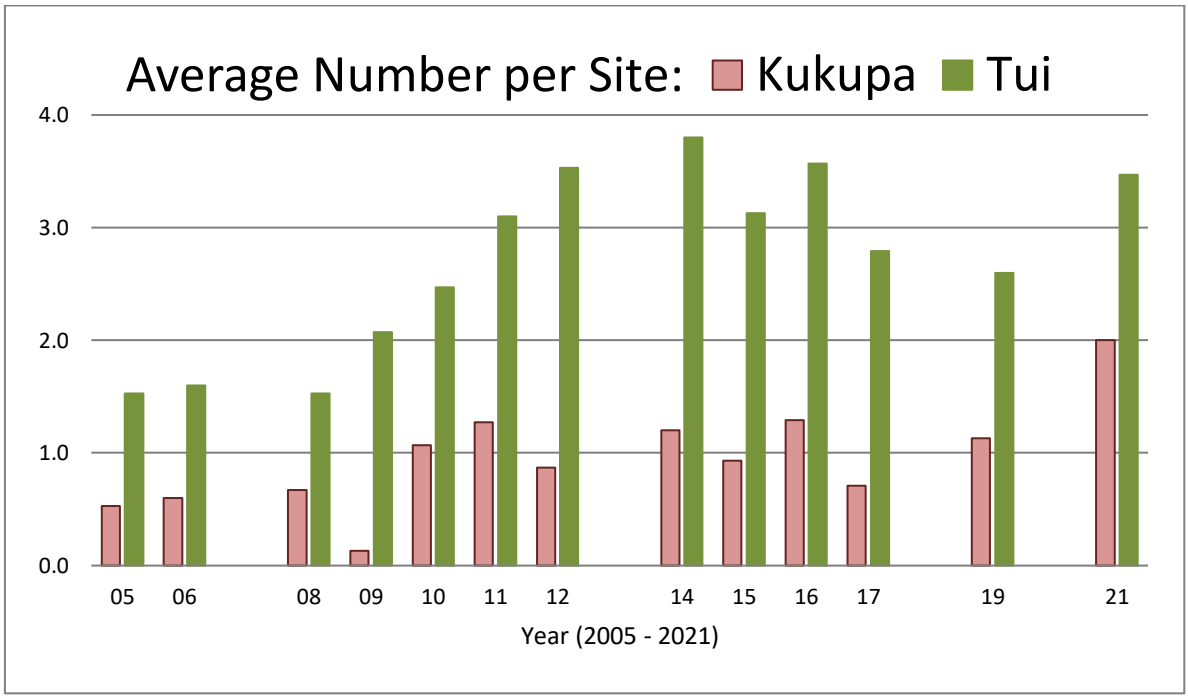
The number of sites monitored has increased over the years and two are now monitored using audio recorders. These give accurate calls/hour, but we can't determine how many birds are calling. The graph below is made up from eight sites that have been monitored every year from 2009 to the present by people. The frequency of kiwi calls varies quite a bit from year to year but over four nights of listening most birds call at least once.



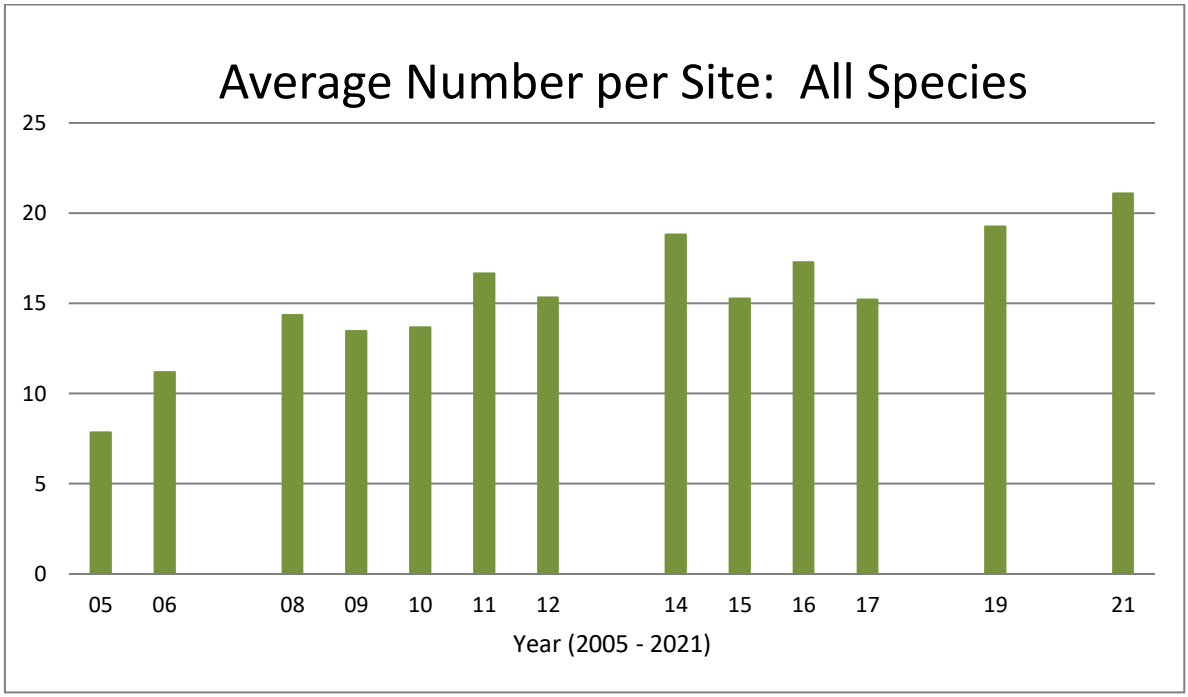
AUTUMN BIRD COUNTS

The autumn bird count could not be done last year because of the Covid-19 lockdown, but Mark and Fiona Darin managed to complete it successfully in April this year. The number of birds seen and heard this year is a record. Where else can you go into the bush and hear an average of 21 birds at 15 listening stations?

Tui and native pigeons, known as kukupa in Northland and kereru further south, are the two species that best indicate the success of a pest control program. (The numbers of smaller bush birds fluctuate more from year to year and some species decline in number as endemic species increase). The graph below shows that tui have doubled in number and this year's record number of kukupa is four times the number recorded before the start of intensive pest control.



Average number of birds per site: individual species. Standard 5-minute bird count + 5 minutes of squeaking.



Average number of birds per site: all species. Standard 5-minute bird count + 5 minutes of squeaking.

A FAREWELL TO OLD FRIENDS

Gary Bramley

It was with great shock and sadness that I heard of the death of Anthea Goodwin as a result of an accident in Mangonui on 15 September 2020 at the age of 89.

Anthea was well known to most conservationists in the Far North and was a keen and active member of a number of local and national conservation groups including Birds New Zealand, Forest and Bird, Whakaangi Trust, Friends of Rangikapiti Reserve, Project Island Song, Miranda Shorebird's Trust, Auckland Museum and the Kerikeri Shade House Volunteers. Anthea was also a regular and generous donor to the Puketi Forest Trust and also volunteered when she could. I first met her when I shared a ride in her white Hiace van to see the godwits (kuaka) return to Pārengarenga Harbour when I first returned home in about 2000 or 2001. It was always a pleasure to meet Anthea in the street and she was always very interested in our lives and children and the progress of the Trust and we had a number of mutual friends.

Anthea was a keen photographer and sailor and her photographic records from the 1983 Totorore expedition to southern Chile and the Antarctic Islands are held in the National Library. The Totorore was built and skippered by the late Gerry Clark of Kerikeri and departed Kerikeri on 26 February 1983, eventually returning on 6 November 1986, 3 years, 8 months and 16 days later, having travelled some 71,000 km eastwards, around and about the Southern Ocean and the Antarctic Peninsula, visiting sub-Antarctic islands to survey and count seabirds. Gerry and Anthea co-authored an article expanding the known home range of seabirds near southern Chile published in Notornis in 1984.

Anthea had the gift of being able to relate to everybody she met and had an aroha for and interest in people, especially children. She enjoyed nothing more than sharing her knowledge about nature with them. For some years she was kaitiaki of Motukiekie Island in the Bay of Islands and was instrumental in initiating the planting of native trees both there and elsewhere. Anthea was always hands on and very generous, both with her time and financially to the organisations she supported. There were not many Forest and Bird working bees without Anthea's participation. Ian Wilson remembered that whenever they filled the bait stations at Forest and Bird's Matthews Reserve, on the edge of the Herekino Forest just south of Kaitaia, Anthea could be relied on to be there and would usually try to carry two large bags of bait the kilometre across farmland to the main access point. At lunch time at the top of the hill she would produce a large bag of mandarins for everyone to enjoy.

When the Trust was established, Anthea sponsored a number of hectares, not just for herself, but for relatives as well. She helped build rat boxes, did kiwi listening for many years and also helped survey robins. Anthea also left the trust a generous bequest in her will.

Anthea was an example to us all – humble, positive, never heard to complain, always encouraging of others and willing to share what she had. She will be missed, but her passion for the environment and conservation has created a significant legacy for future generations. Go well Anthea.

Former trust member Margaret Parkinson also passed away in April 2021. Margaret lived in Auckland, but had contributed regularly and generously to the trust since 2004 when she joined as a result of a brochure mailed out with the Forest and Bird magazine. She always sent a hand written note with her donation and apologised for not having a computer so "could we please post her newsletter". June Wilson always sent a personal reply with her receipt, which Margaret would acknowledge. Margaret has also left the trust a generous bequest. Rest in Peace Margaret.

Both bequests will be added to the Puketi Forest Endowment Fund.

REPORT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

DOC Pewhairangi, like the rest of the motu has been dealing with the effects of COVID-19 lockdowns and alert level changes. The latest lockdown in the Far North has thrown a spanner in the works for many of our projects and planned work, but lots has been achieved and continues to be achieved in the ngahere in the meantime.

Omahuta Bat Protection

Due to the latest Far North lockdown, the annual bat survey in Omahuta has had to be deferred until early in the new year, which is disappointing but will hopefully provide some much-needed certainty around alert levels. We hope more bat roosts will be found, to tell us more about the size of the bat population and where to focus pest control.

Once Omahuta Forest moves to alert level 2, a helicopter will deliver 200 traps into the forest. These traps are a mixture of double-set DOC 200s and SA2 cat traps, targeting rats, stoats, cats and possums. The team has been busy supervising the extension of the bat protection area in Omahuta and servicing the existing traplines around the known roost trees. Phase 1 of the extension is well underway, with 32.6km of track marked and cut by two teams of contractors. Once the helicopter has delivered the traps, they will be put in place along the tracks.

Puketi Forest Possum Control

In other parts of the forest, contractors have begun a possum control operation to provide the forest some much needed relief from possum browse and predation. A team of local contractors began work in October and will be undertaking this work until mid-next year when the contract ends. The 1,975 hectare operational area is focused over the northeastern part of the forest and is one of three areas which used to be treated for possums on a rotational basis. Tiakina Nga Manu (Battle for our Birds) has funded this year's operation, and the DOC Pewhairangi team has been working with Northland Regional Council and Kiwis for Kiwi to coordinate pest control in neighbouring properties and forestry areas, enlarging the overall area of pest control and hopefully keeping the possums out for longer.

Jobs for Nature

As well as the Puketi Forest Trust Jobs for Nature project, the team is also working with project coordinators on the Kaitiaki Kauri project, which has recently employed five kaimahi, a project lead and a project administrator. They are preparing a summer program which will include track ambassador work, hut and campground maintenance at Puketi Headquarters and running kauri dieback workshops for marae, community groups and schools.

VALUED VOLUNTEERS

The Trust's work would not be possible without the efforts of hardworking volunteers who service traps, clear trap lines, monitor rats, toutouwai, kokako and day-active birds, count kiwi calls, prepare baits, organise contractors, raise funds and do all the little things needed to keep the Trust going. During the year to 31 July 2021, 59 volunteers worked more than 4,000 hours for the Trust. Many thanks to you all. The expansion of pest control will greatly increase the work load and the new project manager and team of employees will take that on, but the continued support of enthusiastic volunteers will still be essential.

The annual resupply of bait, bottled gas and equipment to the plateau hut was sponsored again by Baz Reiher from Whangarei, who donated the flying time of his helicopter. Baz is a highly experienced and skilled pilot who makes the manoeuvring of sling loads appear deceptively simple.

Volunteers Tom and Chris Frentz were at the hut to unload the incoming fadges and hook up the outgoing rubbish and empty gas bottle. This is the third volunteering visit to Puketi by Chris and Tom, who drove up from their home in Nelson, with a letter from the Trust to get them past the Auckland checkpoints. Chris and Tom spent 10 days at the hut, putting out pindone pellets for rat control in the plateau bait stations and doing other useful small jobs. It is wonderful to have the support of such committed and reliable volunteers.

The Puketi Scenic Reserve, a little over 80 hectares and a kilometre south of Puketi Forest, has a large number of taraire which fruit heavily at the end of winter, a time when food is in short supply. For many years, volunteers have

serviced a trap line in the north end of the reserve to protect kiwi and kukupa. This was extended recently; seven volunteers spent three days cutting, marking and placing traps on a new circuit in the south-west of the reserve. From July to the end of October, volunteer Guy Fulton has removed 119 possums from 11 traps on this line.

The number of kukupa flying from Puketi Forest to the Reserve to feed on taraire berries has been steadily increasing. Until this year it has normally been single birds, but farmers on land which the kukupa fly over have commented that this year two thirds of the kukupa are flying in pairs and there have even been small flocks of half a dozen.

KAURI DIEBACK ORGANISM MIGHT HAVE BEEN HERE A LONG TIME

An article in the New Zealand Herald, 25 July 2021 describes the results of a recent study which suggest the pathogen causing kauri dieback might have been in this country for 300 years or more.

Kauri dieback has been found at numerous places in Northland, Coromandel and Great Barrier Island. Puketi Forest was surveyed for kauri dieback from 2015 to 2018. During 2018, kauri dieback was found at one remote site in the centre of the forest. It appears to have been there for a long time but there are no clues to how it got there. This recent study might clarify the picture. From its first discovery on Great Barrier Island in 1970, it has generally been assumed, without much evidence, that the pathogen causing kauri dieback, *Phytophthora agathidicida,* was introduced to New Zealand sometime after 1940.

A team led by Dr Richard Winkworth of Massey University analysed the mitochondrial DNA of 16 samples of *P. agathidicida* from across its known range in New Zealand and compared their sequences with those of related species of *Phytophthora* from overseas. Mitochondrial DNA changes over time due to random mutations, and the amount of difference between the sequences of two individuals can indicate the time since they shared a common ancestor. The 16 samples from New Zealand formed four geographically distinct groups (Far North, Auckland, Kaipara/Coromandel and Great Barrier) with a most recent common ancestor about 300 years ago. Considering the geographical distribution and genetic divergence within New Zealand, and the similarity with related species overseas, the study authors concluded that if *P. agathidicida* in New Zealand resulted from a single genetically uniform introduction, this most likely occurred several hundred to several thousand years ago. This has important implications for research and management of kauri dieback. If a recent introduction is assumed, efforts will concentrate on vectors and the control of spread. If introduction occurred long ago and the pathogen is already widespread, attention must be directed to other components of the disease triangle (Pathogen – Host – Environment). It may be that emergence of kauri dieback is a result of environmental changes, e.g. climate change, forest disturbance and fragmentation, or introduction of an as yet unidentified co-acting organism. You can read the original report at PLOS ONE.

The whole kauri dieback story is undoubtedly more complex than currently known. While this recent study suggests some new aspects, we will continue to practice hygiene and advocate for control of vectors to reduce the risk of possible spread.

In May this year, the government allocated $28 million to a National Pest Management Plan to protect kauri from dieback. This funding is welcomed for the contribution it will make to urgently required research and improved management to protect our precious kauri.

May magnificent kauri such as these at Waihoanga in Puketi remain forever healthy.

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 Direct Credit**: Puketi Forest Trust, Account No 03-0351-0165464-000 (Westpac, Kerikeri)
   Please advise payment details by email to info@puketi.org.nz or by posting this form to the address below.
2. **By credit card or PayPal account through the web site**: puketi.org.nz/donate
   (payments are processed through the secure PayPal system).
3. **By Mail**: Complete this form and send with credit card details to:
   The Puketi Forest Trust, PO Box 257, Kaeo 0448, New Zealand.

Name ……..…….

Address…….....

……..…….....

Email: …… Phone:……..……..……

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: **Direct Credit** payment date: _____ payer account name: _____

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

Credit card number: _____/_____/_____/_____ Expiry: _____/_____

Name on card: _____ Card verification No (CSC): _____

If this is a gift for a friend, please enter their details below. Your friend will receive a certificate and Puketi Forest Trust newsletters. The receipt will be sent to you at the above address.

Name. ……..…….

Address. ……...……

……..……

Message to appear on their certificate: ……

……..……..

Puketi Forest Trust is a registered charity. Your donation will qualify for a tax credit.

Thank you for your support