

TRAPPER'S REPORT

PUKENUI/WESTERN HILLS FOREST CHARITABLE TRUST

(June 2014)

Hi to all. With the recent heavy rain, winter has well and truly hit in the Pukenui Forest! An aspect of my work in the forest that I really enjoy is seeing the changes that happen between seasons. The tranquil little creeks I walk on the trap lines that in summer are pleasant, shady little places that give relief from the heat, change into dark, wet, slippery creeks where extra care needs to be taken to negotiate safely. There has been some serious windfall in places with large trees coming down across tracks; a couple nearly taking out a couple of our trap boxes. Despite the gloomy, wet, muddy conditions of winter, it's also neat seeing the bush looking fresh, vibrant and green after it gets a good hose down from above.

On Wednesday the 11th, after the heavy rain had passed through, I was carrying trap boxes into the head waters of the Mangere stream. While setting a box up, I was thrilled to hear loud, raucous screeching from a few hundred metres down-stream. The first kaka I have heard in Pukenui was telling all and sundry he was sick of the rain! I went looking for it but once I got close it stayed quiet. I suspect it was actually watching me from somewhere above, probably wondering what the wet, bedraggled looking human was doing floundering about in the creek! Great to hear one in Pukenui and, with populations at Whangarei Heads growing, hopefully we will see more of these stunning birds living permanently in the Pukenui bush.

As expected at this time of year, bird life becomes less obvious. I am still seeing the usual species fairly regularly but they are just not as active during the winter months. Tomtits are becoming more and more common and are often seen in pairs. As they are an "indicator species", being highly susceptible to predation, it's very good news to see their numbers growing and shows us that the Trust's efforts are working and having a positive effect. Wood pigeon numbers are very good in parts of the forest and are often seen/heard throughout the day as I make my way around the traps. It is now quite common to see groups of six or more pigeons together which is fantastic to see.

As well as servicing existing trap lines, priority is being given to getting the last of the new stoat boxes in place. A recent trappers' meeting at Max's house saw us plot every trap onto a large map. It was great to see an overview of our trap lines, and identify gaps and areas we need to cover more thoroughly. The trap lines now are much larger with far more coverage. This can only be good for the native fauna in the bush.

Mustelids are far less active during the cold months and this is being reflected in trap kills, as we would expect. Only a couple of stoats recently with the main trap victims being rats. Juvenile ship rats are making up the majority of kills and seem to be in quite large numbers. I even caught three rats in one box recently which is a first. With only two traps per box, it makes me wonder at the overall numbers when one trap can catch two rats, both of which climbed over their decaying mate in order to get caught!

Thankfully, the plague of German wasps that were in incredible numbers over summer have now largely disappeared. I am not sorry to see them go!

Well that's about it from me guys so until next time, take care.

Chris Windust

Trapper (Part-time)