

TRAPPER'S REPORT

PUKENUI/WESTERN HILLS FOREST CHARITABLE TRUST

(August 2014)



Hi to all,

The team have been busy chipping away at the bait station lines as per my last report. A few frustrations with the weather but that seems to be improving slightly as we move towards spring. Ever so slowly, the bush is drying out a little which makes getting around safer, easier and more enjoyable. The only down side is that the colourful fungi displays also start to disappear back into the leaf litter for another year.

In all my travels through Pukenui Forest, the country we have been working in lately is some of the most extreme I have seen; deep, steep, slippery creeks being the most time-consuming and tricky obstacles to negotiate around. This country is in the south-western end of Pukenui, the head waters of the Mangere stream and the creeks that feed into it. Care must be taken negotiating these areas and it is time-consuming work but we are making steady progress with a lot of good, well-marked tracks and bait stations installed.

There is quite a lot of possum sign in this area and I'm confident that the poison operation here will be very successful. It will be great to give the rat and possum population in this area a heavy knock back.

During these "missions", we have also identified a few areas of feral goat sign and the coordinates have been passed on to the Department of Conservation goat culling team. They are always appreciative of this information and a quick response by the cullers means they are able to maximize their hunting time and move closer towards the goal of total eradication of feral goats from Pukenui.

We have also been planning and getting ready for the poison operation along the bush faces from the Maunu Road quarry to Golf Harbour Drive. This will be a hand-laid cyanide operation and will help to slow re-invasion into other areas of Pukenui that we control with our permanent bait station lines. Overall, our efforts on possum and rat control via the various operations will be having a heavy impact on these pests which will be great for the whole forest.

It's interesting to see the effects a wet winter has on the bush and frustrating when your well-manicured trap line tracks suddenly become jumbled piles of wind-thrown trees!

Some impressive new slips have appeared and the damage created is pretty astounding. Large mature trees snapped, smashed and shoved around like matchsticks!

The power involved in these events is quite mind-blowing.



A large one the team recently encountered had a huge slip underneath, with a large area above which had "slumped" downhill by two or three metres yet still had large mature Taraire trees standing on it. All part of the natural cycle of the bush though, and the bare clay scars and piles of smashed trees will provide a nursery for young trees and colonizing species that prefer more sun than the mature bush canopy provides.



Barbed wire slowly being "absorbed" by a mature Puriri tree.

The ability of the bush to heal itself is impressive. This is evident in the areas we are currently doing bait station lines in. At some point it must have been cleared and burnt off as we come across areas of mature "old man gorse" growing amongst the native bush; slowly being killed off by the native canopy over-taking and restricting light onto the forest floor and preventing gorse seedlings from growing. Also in this area, old fence lines are quite common. Now mainly just lengths of wire running through the forest floor or an occasional old Totara post or two, they are reminders that slowly but surely the bush will heal its scars.

The kaka I reported hearing a while back has since been heard again. Max, Gerry and a visiting ecologist heard it in the same general area.

Also, while on a bait station mission last week, we found an old rotten log with fresh evidence of a kaka having chewed it open to extricate huhu grubs. This bird had obviously spent quite a bit of time ripping open the rotten wood and having a feed. Fantastic to be seeing signs of this awesome bird living in Pukenui! I hope it can draw some of its mates in as well and I look forward to the day when kaka are common once again in Pukenui. It certainly makes the Trust's work very worthwhile when we see physical signs of improvement for our efforts.

Recently, Gerry asked me to keep an eye out for a species of tree that is known to be in Pukenui but is quite rare due to it being a preferred browse species for possums – *Mida salicifolia*, Maire taiki or New Zealand sandalwood. I managed to find a potential specimen and Gerry has had it confirmed as the correct species. I will be taking cuttings from this tree and the team at Tawapou Coastal Nurseries will be growing them on. With the reduced possum numbers, it will good to get some of these seedlings established into Pukenui and hopefully help this rare native become more common. Another small, but important step in increasing the quality and biodiversity in Pukenui. So many things can be lost without us even knowing they are gone!

On that note, I must say that it's great having Gerry in the bush with us. A walking botanical encyclopaedia!! His knowledge on native tree species is impressive and Max and I both find it interesting and educational being able to ask questions about the bush species we encounter.

As we move towards warmer weather, the trap lines will be checked more regularly. Over winter, mustelids are less common but as the weather warms up, we increase the regularity of trap servicing to maximize the predator killing potential of the traps. Over winter, we also use eggs for bait as they last longer than meat baits. We go through a lot of eggs and I thought that if anyone has chooks and an abundance of eggs, we could certainly make good use of them! If you do have spare eggs, you can drop them in at Northland Hospitality (Max's business) and the trapping team will use them to tempt stoats into the traps.

Well, that's about it from me guys. Take care and I will update you in my next Trapper's report.

Regards,

Chris Windust

Trapper (Part-time)