



## **TRAPPER'S REPORT**

### **PUKENUI/WESTERN HILLS FOREST CHARITABLE TRUST**

**(September 2014)**

Hi to all,

Just as the bush was starting to dry out a little, the recent heavy rains have got everything pretty soggy again!

Along with the rain, more strong winds.

Even some of the forest giants couldn't withstand the battering.

This massive Kauri dropped a huge branch, completely blocking the main ridge track. The force involved in snapping such a big branch, virtually a tree in its own right, off such an old giant that has stood there for so long is incredible.



**Kauri**



**Flour lure and cyanide bait**

All efforts have been going into poison operations around Pukenui, targeting both possums and rats. We started with a new approach in that we undertook a cyanide operation ourselves instead of paying contractors. This was to target possums along the bush faces from the Maunu Road quarry up to Golf Harbour Drive, Maunu.

We were blessed with a near perfect weather window and Max, Gerry, Mark, Julianne and myself got stuck into a fairly large area with some heavy country in places. We pre-fed the area then followed up with cyanide baits. From what we have seen, it looks like we achieved a good knockdown in possums. One ridge I walked up had eleven dead possums and numerous other baits had been interfered with but I couldn't see the kills.



**Bait station**

With Kereru and other bird species starting to nest now it's a great time to hit the possums and let more of the Pukenui birds nest in peace this season.

Next up, the predator team along with volunteers began filling the bait station area off Three Mile Bush Road with both rat and possum poison. We are nearly two-thirds through this huge area and will have it completed next week. All up, I think an area of around 800/ha has been covered and pests/predators in that area will have had a good reduction in numbers. A huge "Well done" to all involved!

This is a big job; lots of miles through some challenging terrain and the team did very well getting their respective lines baited up and ready to go.

Now that it's mostly complete, it's great to know this vital work has been done (well, maybe in a week or so it will be great once the legs stop aching!).

As usual, the organization was excellent and the operations ran safely, efficiently and trouble free. A real credit to Max here as there is a vast amount of work involved in organizing how these things are done. Good planning makes a hard job easier, thank you Max.

It was good to get back into this part of Pukenui as it has some fantastic bush and is quite different to the Southern side where much of my work is done. There are some really good sized Kauri, Kahikatea and Rimu in this area and some impressive Totara also.



**Kaka feeding sign**



**Kaka hole in log**

While on the bait station line, I also found more very recent sign of Kaka feeding. It had been busy ripping open a rotten old log looking for grubs. They must really get stuck in when they find one as you can see in the photo that they are obviously well equipped for a bit of wood-work!

Gerry, Max and myself also recently met with Search and Rescue to talk about how/when/where things will happen should an emergency arise, tracks, access etc. They look a well-organised crew and it's good to know they have done some training exercises in Pukenui and are familiar with the main tracks, etc.

It was interesting hearing how two people had recently got into trouble in the forest, what went wrong and where it happened, etc. It's easy to under-estimate Pukenui as we drive past it all the time. There is some pretty serious country once you get off the main tracks and people can soon get into trouble if unprepared or inexperienced. A good, well-maintained track system is vital for people to safely access the bush and with the amount of windfall over winter I think we will need to look at some clean-up work once we get past the poison operations.

With the weather slowly starting to warm up, the mustelids will soon also be more active. We will be getting the last of the trap boxes into the bush and set up, and going to a more regular trap servicing regime ready to meet them! Recent kills of a stoat for Bevan behind Whau Valley dam and a weasel in one of my traps at Maunu could be the start of the summer influx of this number one predator. This will be the first summer with all of the stoat boxes in place so we should be able to make a good dent in their numbers. Being such active creatures and having traps every two hundred metres throughout a large area of the forest, they have a lot of opportunities to get caught.

So in summary, the team have been busy and pest control in Pukenui is in full swing. Well done guys.

Regards,

*Chris Windust*

**Trapper (Part-time)**