

## TRAPPER'S REPORT PUKENUI/WESTERN HILLS FOREST CHARITABLE TRUST (October 2014)

Hi to all,

Great to see the days getting a little longer and a bit more sun about. Summer is not far away now. All recent efforts by the trapping team and volunteers have been put into the possum and rat control operations. As I reported last month, this is a huge undertaking but we are now down to the last few bits and pieces on various poison lines. Basically, tidying up odd bait stations here and there to complete the entire operation. This should be completed with a couple of days work and the job will be done.

It's been an interesting task with plenty learnt and a few new questions raised. Keeping on top of pests and predators is a constantly evolving job and it's vital that we continuously look at better ways of beating them and improving our methods so that our efforts reap the very best of results. While completing the last few bait station lines, we have walked over lines that have had toxin in them for a week or two. In this virgin country that has not been a part of previous poison operations, the knock down on possums and rats has been impressive. It's very satisfying to approach a bait station and see dead possums scattered about and empty bags of rat poison! Virtually every female possum found dead has also had a dead juvenile possum with her so we have taken a serious toll on not only the current possum population but also the next generation.

This bait station operation, along with our previous cyanide job, has taken literally hundreds of possums and rats out of Pukenui right in time for the birds' nesting period. Hopefully, this will ensure a much higher rate of survival for this season's chicks. All and all, a very successful and satisfying operation and a great job done by all involved.



Suspected kiwi probe hole

### ***Exciting news!***

While Max and I were completing one of the last full poison lines, a very exciting discovery was made. As we made our way along a ridge in the north-western end of the forest, unusual holes were observed amongst the leaf litter. On closer inspection, we located dozens of these holes scattered about. They varied in depth from shallow to around 15cm deep. They looked exactly like kiwi probe holes I have seen on Stewart Island and, on showing photos of them to various people at DOC, everyone agrees they look very much like kiwi probe holes.

Max and I carried in and installed two recording receivers from DOC the following day and have since been back to retrieve them after they had been listening to the night life for six nights. Fresh probe holes were observed in the same area on the three consecutive visits to this remote area.

We have listened to most of the recorded data and have a couple of suspicious calls recorded but, as yet, no definite kiwi calls. We can confirm, however, that the Ruru (morepork) population is very healthy. These are one of my favourite native birds and the recordings were full of their various calls. It was also interesting to hear lions roaring! I certainly hope they are Lion Park specimens and not Pukenui residents!

Pete Graham from DOC said that if it is a lone kiwi, it may not call much at all. Also, the recent very windy conditions make things hard to hear. The receivers turn off at 1.00am so calls could also have been made after the receivers switched off for the night.

Everyone agrees that there is nothing else that makes holes like this and I have not observed anything like this anywhere else in Pukenui. It's extremely exciting news and hopefully we will be able to prove 100% that we have a kiwi alive and well in Pukenui!



Kiwi listening device installed & ready to record!

If it is, I wonder if it's a tough old battler that's managed to hang on or a new arrival that's wandered in from neighbouring areas.

We also carried in and set up stoat, ferret and cat traps in the area to increase protection if there is, in fact, a kiwi living there. *Fingers crossed guys!*

As well as the bait station work, I have been getting around the trap lines and freshening up baits and trap sets ready for the summer mustelid increase. Last week, I caught two weasels along with the usual pile of rats. The Steve Allan traps the Trust recently purchased again proved their worth and I was very pleased to see another large feral cat dead in one of mine. These things are huge and a serious predator, so happily another "Pukenui panther" bites the dust!

Recently, Gerry organized a planting day at the Amalin Drive entrance to Pukenui and Julianne, Gerry and I, along with teachers and helpers, got a whole bunch of primary school kids stuck into planting native trees. It was a fun day and great seeing the younger generation enjoying themselves and being involved in conservation.

While Max and Mark were driving in off Woods Road to do bait station work, a pair of Pateke (Brown Teal) were observed on an area of flood water on the Pukenui boundary. They would do well in the Mangere Stream, which is right next to where they were seen, so let's hope they move in. Also, several pairs of Grey Teal were seen and they had good broods of well-grown ducklings with them.

That's about all from me this time guys so until next time, take care.

Best regards,

*Chris Windust*

**Trapper (Part-time)**