

TRAPPER'S REPORT

PUKENUI/WESTERN HILLS FOREST CHARITABLE TRUST

(November 2014)

Hi to all,

We have had some very warm days in the bush lately and, over a few short weeks, the bush has become crunchy dry underfoot.

Along with this dry summer weather comes species we don't see over winter. Shining cuckoos can be heard calling throughout Pukenui now. I find these wee birds quite amazing, arriving back here after a massive journey from Papua New Guinea every year. They are very hard to actually see, even though their distinctive calls are easy to pin-point. It's worth looking for them though as they are a very handsome bird. While I enjoy their company in the bush, I can't help feeling sorry for the poor old grey warblers, etc. whose nests will be hijacked and they will unknowingly be feeding cuckoo chicks instead of their own.

Also, the less than desirable species appear. We saw the first German wasps in the bush this week. With the mild winter, I'm picking this summer will see massive amounts of these aggressive wasps throughout the forest, especially after the scary amount of nests that were around last summer! It may be worth talking with DOC or Council about some warning signs at the entrance-ways to popular walking tracks. These wasps have the ability to cause serious injury or worse to unprepared users of Pukenui.

Another nasty that has me quite worried has been popping up all over Pukenui through spring – the dreaded Taiwan Cherry! Supposedly, it doesn't germinate under a high bush canopy but this is obviously not the case. Nearly every day I'm in the bush I am pulling out seedlings. Any open space where the sun can reach the forest floor, especially areas that have large trees like Puriri above that wood pigeons like to sit in, will often have Cherry seedlings growing. Most are only five or six inches high but I have also pulled out many over a meter in height.



Cherry seedlings

I dread the day spring sees Pukenui turning pink with Cherry blossom! Once you get an eye for spotting this invasive tree species, the amount and spread of them throughout the Whangarei district is alarming. I really think the Whangarei Councils need to urgently declare this species a noxious weed and encourage people to destroy it.

On a much brighter note, DOC has had reports from three different land-owners in the Pukenui Road area of kiwi calling at night. Max and I have visited the area and spoken to a couple of residents. One lady seems to be familiar with kiwi calls and had heard them the night before our visit! She has lived there for twenty-five years and said she used to hear kiwi regularly but, over the years, their calls have become less and less. We have set up two listening devices in the area so we are very keen to see what turns up on these. Luckily, if there is kiwi there they are living amongst two extensive trap lines so have some good protection from stoats.

We have also been busy extending the trap lines; carrying in stoat boxes and increasing the amount of stoat and cat traps both within Pukenui and around the buffer zone. One trap that Max put out recently has already taken out a very large weasel and a hedgehog in a couple of weeks.

While doing this work, we usually walk one of the bait station lines rather than use the walking tracks, mainly to gauge how many kills the bait stations are achieving and to re-tox them as we go. Some bait stations have eight or nine dead possums under them but virtually all of them have two or three. On top of that the rat take on the rat poison is 100% in many of the stations and never less than 50%. Great to see such good numbers being taken out!

We have also been busy getting ready for the next poison day. We were joined by Mary Lewis, a new volunteer from the tramping club. We packed around 650 portions of rat bait ready to go out. Thanks for your help Mary! Mary farms at Maungakaramea and has also offered her farm for rabbit shooting. With the increase in trap numbers and a three week trap cycle about to start, we require a lot of good tempting rabbit bait so properties with rabbits present are always very welcome. Max and I went out this week to another property and managed to shoot six rabbits to boost the supply. If any Trust members know or hear of properties with good rabbit populations, we are always keen to get more so please let us know.

I have not seen any fresh goat sign for a couple of months now which is great. The result of not having large goat numbers is very good numbers of their preferred browse species like pigeonwood and kohekohe coming through.

A small amount of localized feral pig sign has been seen. This appears to be the same single animal that has lived in the same area for a few years now. Glen Coulston from DOC is a keen pig hunter and has been out looking for it a couple of times. No luck yet but I'm sure it's days are numbered!

Pukenui feels alive at this time of year. The trees are all flushed with new growth and growing fruit and the bush is full of bird song. The birds are very active with most species seen or heard each day. We heard kaka again this week but I am yet to actually lay eyes on them. Tui seem to be everywhere at the moment and are frantically hooning about all over the place like boy racers.

At present we have trail cameras up, listening devices in place, new traps set, old traps serviced and bait stations still with poison in and ready for a new load; so plenty of good work in place to meet the summer pests and predators and find that elusive Pukenui kiwi! Personally, I believe evidence is mounting and I'm hopeful that we WILL find kiwi in Pukenui. Fingers crossed!

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

Regards,

Chris Windust

Trapper (Part-time)