

## **TRAPPER'S REPORT**

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

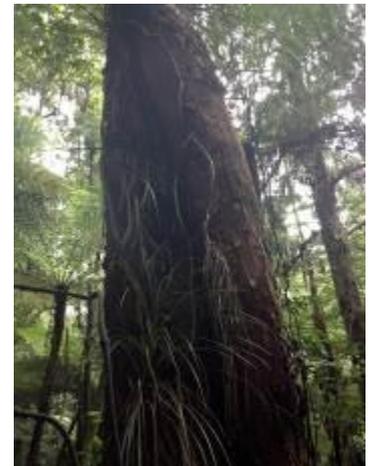
#### **(December 2014)**

Hi to all. Where did summer go?? As Christmas is nearly upon us, this wild weather feels more like winter than summer!

We have been busy getting around the bait station lines; cleaning up the odds and ends after the poison operation. Plenty of rat bait still being taken and a few fresh possum carcasses about so the pests are still taking a hammering. Over winter, we will walk all of the existing poison lines for clean-up, repair and maintenance work.

During these travels, we have had some interesting finds. Gerry's recent interest in northern rata and their presence in Pukenui have prompted me to keep an eye for these spectacular trees. Margaret has a fine specimen growing at her home and I noticed it was flowering so was on the lookout for their red pohutukawa-like flowers. Max pointed out a nice one on the terraces beside the Mangere stream. A nice mature tree but didn't appear to be flowering that we could see. This is the only confirmed mature specimen found so far. I hope it's not the last!

We also came across a massive rata vine that has nearly enveloped its host tree. It is by far the biggest I have seen – I couldn't wrap my arms around it. I assume by its size it is also a northern rata but am not sure. Apologies for the poor photo; it doesn't do it justice or show its real size. It is the trunk on the right hand side and is at least 20 meters tall.



**Figure 1: Rata vine**

It would be great to establish more of these forest giants back into Pukenui as they really are quite special. I see lots of their remains about. Huge old logs and stumps with a distinct red tinge, sad that they have been destroyed by years of possum browse and are all but gone, with just a few hardy specimens hanging in there. We also found a nice stand of five mature kawaka's. These are a very unique New Zealand native, almost looking out of place amongst the more common native trees. I have only ever found seven kawaka in Pukenui including these five so they are fairly rare, great to see and maybe another species that could have their numbers bolstered?



**Figure 2: Kiwi prints**

The most exciting find took place in a dark, supplejack-filled creek; a small side creek of the Mangere. This little creek has some swampy areas in it and while Max and I were checking it out, I found some very interesting fresh foot prints. The first photo is actually two prints, one over the top of the other. The bird had been trying to negotiate over a punga log. This bird had walked across a muddy section of creek leaving its distinct prints behind. Unfortunately, the mud it walked in was quite sloppy and didn't hold the prints that well. They were easier to examine and see clearly on site and the photos don't show them as clearly as we hoped. Three fairly stubby toes, prominent claws and no rear toe.



Figure 3: Kiwi prints

Again, we are unable to confirm 100% that they belong to kiwi but they are too short for pukeko and too big for pheasant. Also, neither of these species would be likely to be found in the location of these prints as they were so far into the bush. While we can't say 100% they are kiwi, like the probe holes we found, there is not really anything else they can be. The search continues!

On the trapping front, we are starting to see an increase in mustelid catches as we would expect at this time of year. I had a call from David, Manager of the Quarry Gardens. One of his team had had a family of stoats run across a track in front of them in the gardens – Mum and six young. I installed four box traps in the immediate area and we had great success within a week with four confirmed dead.



Figure 4: Quarry Garden stoats

The Mum is the one at the top (note longer tail) so the young are already well grown and ready to go forth on their own. The Quarry Gardens are excellent habitat for stoats so I'm not surprised she picked that spot to have her young. We have also been installing more feral cat traps and stoat boxes in areas we feel need more protection.

There are also a few areas on some of the bait station lines that have been popular spots for feral goats in the past. I make a point of checking these hot spots whenever I am passing and we recently found the only bit of fresh goat sign seen for months. I reported this to Allan Gardner and his culling team. While discussing this with Ross the culler, he reported he had only got one goat for the year out of Pukenui, a large black/tan billy taken from above Whau Valley dam. Ross is a very experienced hunter and has a top indicating dog. He reports that he and his dog have had virtually no contacts with goats in Pukenui so numbers are definitely extremely low.

Well, that's about it from me guys. I look forward to seeing you at the Trust dinner and wish you all a very Merry Christmas!

Regards,

*Chris Windust*

**Trapper (Part-time)**