



2026 ANNUAL REPORT TO SUPPORTERS

Mohua are back, Kea are circling

The last year has been a very exciting, if challenging, period culminating in the release of Mohua back in the valley. This achieves the main objective that the Trustees and Department of Conservation set out when the project was conceived in 2013 - to reduce predator numbers to a level that could sustain native birdlife. JUST AMAZING.

Birdlife in the valley is thriving and regular sightings of kaka, kea (**including a circus of 20**), kereru, kakariki and now mohua make the efforts justified. Well done to the MCT volunteers and Southern Lakes Sanctuary (SLS) team, lead by Scott Bewley and Paul Kavanagh.

The current year could be challenging due to a beech mast and the valley not being selected for a 1080 programme to control possum, rats and stoats, but the SLS and MCT teams are ready to do what it takes.



Photo: A banded Mohua in Matukituki Valley (credit: Geoff Marks)

This milestone comes with a change of focus for the valley with SLS taking a much greater role to extend the control programme towards predator elimination with significant funding and full-time staff resources. MCT will continue working as a subset of the SLS project but remain a separate entity with our own programme, trap network and volunteers.

Operating Structure

SLS Trust has been providing our field operations management while MCT has provided additional funding for day-to-day expenses and adding 30 AT520 traps for possum control. This partnership is working very well and Scott Bewley is coordinating and delivering the programme to make this a very enjoyable and manageable process for the MCT Trustees.

Changing of the Guard

As the MCT role changes so the people and contribution of our team has evolved. At Xmas our amazing Trustee, Photographer, Volunteer and local identity Geoff Marks retired after 6 Years contribution. Geoff has facilitated a huge period for the project and his and Gillians contribution to bring back Mohua will endure forever. Paul Hellebrekers has also stepped back from day-to-day activities (but still being an active volunteer) to allow a real life of work, family and travel. Huge thanks to these guys for an amazing outcome after many years solid contribution.

We are looking to the future and a younger generation to ensure the project continues and we are pleased to announce Fiona Crombie has agreed to become a Trustee. Fiona has a BSc(Env) and a long career in environmental management working on large scale conservation projects across Canterbury and the West Coast. She is currently the environmental manager for Central Plains Water. Fiona has done an apprenticeship in the valley over the last 10 years including clearing high lines, and most other lines. Watch this space for more young trustees in future! Gillian and Derek Crombie will continue to support the Trust financially, in the field and with its Governance.

Trap Stats – Good News

In the last year (March 2025 - March 2026) we have eliminated **479 predators** from the valley (2025 was 605). The lower number is encouraging as general numbers seem to be declining suggesting the control is working.

A summary of key statistics below:

| Item | Numbers 2026/2025 | Comments |
|-----------------------|----------------------|---|
| Volunteer Hours | 552/691 | Very loyal, supportive & hardworking volunteers. |
| SLS Hours | 475/430 | Excellent support and activity from the SLS team. |
| Stoats | 137/131 | 95 between Jan and March 2026. |
| Possoms | 163/128 | Increase due to night shooting and AT520 traps. Over 300 caught on farmland not included. |
| Hedgehogs | 37/19 | Change in bait possible reason. |
| Rats | 120/277 | Significant reduction |
| Mice | 4/16 | Significant reduction |
| Cats | 13/19 | Fewer sightings on cameras this year. |
| Weasels | 3/8 | Significant reduction |
| Other/ferrets/rabbits | 2/4 | |
| Total Kills | 479/602 | |



Photos: Trapping Adventures (credit: Geoff Marks)

Department of Conservation Partnership

MCT/SLS and DOC operate under a partnership agreement that was renewed in 2022 for 10 years. The agreement is a simple structure where MCT/SLS meet the cost and carry out the field predator control activities, and DOC undertakes bird monitoring, tracking tunnels for pest monitoring, beech seed monitoring and provides support with vehicles, accommodation, some trap clearing by Rangers at Aspiring Hut, and funding for some cat control.

The new team at DOC Wanaka lead by Charlie Sklenar is great to work with and very supportive of the work in the Valley

We look forward to continued support from the Team at DOC Wanaka for many years to come.



Photo: Mohua release lineup (credit: Geoff Marks)

Operational News and Challenges

1. Mohua

SLS, the Mohua Trust, MCT and DOC implemented a transfer of 50 Mohua from Anchor Island to West Matukituki Valley in October 2025. Thanks to the team who put in a great effort to be ready for this event and hopefully it will happen again later this year with another 50 birds planned to top up the population. The first release has been successful with some breeding identified and many birds being sighted across the valley. We hope that another breeding season will establish the population permanently.

2. Possum Trapping

Possum control in the west Matukituki has relied on 1080 use, following beech mast years, and this has been supplemented with a small network of 116 Trapinator possum traps. This network is not extensive enough to cover or control the possum population so a network of new traps is being trialled called AT520. This trap is controlled to detect whether a target is a possum or a kea and only activates if positive for a possum. A trial network of 30 AT520 traps and relays was installed for MCT in summer 2025. A long term solution to the possum control issue is still a challenge but it is possible that a 1080 programme could still happen in future.

3. Beech Mast

2025/26 is a beech mast year but so far only normal/low numbers of stoats and rats have been caught. We expect an increase after winter when the seed has been absorbed.

As a result we are considering increased trapping, bait stations and possibly ground control for possums.

Sponsors and Volunteers

Many of our sponsors and volunteers have been with us for over 10 years now and it is reassuring to have this long term commitment. Our special thanks to **Geoff Marks** for the wonderful contribution he has made as both a Trustee and a volunteer. His photography has been a special part of his skillset, and we have been lucky to have had his input. We welcome **Fiona Crombie** and her input in the coming months and years!



*Geoff Marks and volunteers (credit: Geoff Marks)
Fiona Crombie*



Scotty Bewley, as the Operations Manager for SLS, has done an outstanding job to manage the cat, possum and stoat numbers.



Photos: An AT520 (left), Scotty setting up the At520 relay (right) (credit: Geoff Marks)

Paul Kavanagh and Matt Hollyer, our SLS management team who have been totally supportive and worked tirelessly to secure future funding for predator control across the Lakes District.

These three guys are the true heroes.

Ant and Kate Howard and the Lloyd Morrison Trust – significant funding for the Cat control programme and general operating expenses.

Stuart and Coleen Landsborough - Financial support for bait and field supplies for over 12 years now.

Otago Regional Council ECO Fund

We have been exceptionally lucky to receive a \$49,490.00 grant from the Otago Regional Council for the installation of 25 AT520 possum traps and the relays associated with them. MCT purchased another 5 traps to complement the area we wished to cover, so 30 AT520 traps have been installed by MCT. SLS have installed another 30 AT520s across the broader valley.

T D Mankelaw Charitable Family Trust

We were fortunate to be funded by this Family funding agreement through Predator Free NZ to develop 12 prototype stoat traps. Scotty built and has been working with these in the field to test Kea and predator activity. This is an ongoing trial and show the measures Scotty has taken to test new theories and options available.

Sealgair NZ Charitable Trust – generously donated towards our trapping efforts.

Crombie Family- continued funding and administrative support for the team.

Tait Communications Limited have donated 8 state of the art field radios.

These have more safety features and serviceability to keep up with our team in the field.

Department of Conservation – support for cat control and trap clearing by Aspiring Hut Rangers.

Kea Conservation Trust - Tamsin Orr-Walker - kea banding, transmitters, camera protection, nest location and protection.

NZ Alpine Club- use of Aspiring Hut and Staff Quarters.

Randall and Alison Aspinnall- vehicle access through the farm and allowing traps on their land.

Aspiring Helicopters- James and Alex Ford sponsors of helicopter use to access high trap lines.



Photo: Aspiring Helicopters picking up volunteers after clearing high lines (credit: Geoff Marks)

Fieldwork Volunteers – Our wonderful base of volunteers without whom we couldn't operate!

Otago Boys High School- managing and clearing a trap line around the lodge.

The many people who made donations to the Matukituki Charitable Trust bank account and cash collection at Raspberry Car park. Every dollar received is spent on pest control– there are no admin or staff costs.



Tales from the Trap Lines.

Weather events have made access and trapping challenging, particularly this spring and summer. Downs Creek has been washed out on several occasions, and the Aspiring Road to Raspberry Creek has also been closed a few times. However, Scotty, Marcus and volunteers have done a great job of clearing traps every month whenever possible. The high lines have been cleared 3 times this season, which has required making the most of short weather windows! Hopefully we can fit in another one or two trips before the winter weather sets in.

Bats in the Valley

Several years ago a small population of long-tailed bats were detected in the valley by Patrick Stewart with acoustic recorders. Intermittent monitoring has been done since which has showed a steady small population. In December 2025, Southern Lakes Sanctuary performed a monitoring plan across 13 sites in the valley to determine how this population was surviving.

They were pleased to report that 10 of the 13 sites recorded bats with 284 detections across these sites. Their summary suggests that based on these results it is possible that a further 300+ bat detections is possible. This is exciting news and a significant improvement on previous results.

Our trapping efforts will most likely be helping the bats survive and breed.

Ongoing activities

- The focus for 2025 is to improve trapping methods and technology to reduce the impact of a mast year and use the new bait stations to control rats in the red beech forest.
- A continued effort will be made to eliminate cats and stoats and this will include considering use of ground based methods such as dogs and night shooting.
- A special intensive trapping project to try to reduce predator levels to very low numbers over 500 Ha is being scoped with the aim to see how effective that will be and whether it can be extended.
- Assistance to SLS to ensure they can continue the amazing work across the region.
- The current Trustees have agreed to continue with the project, and Gillian and Derek Crombie and Lloyd Morrison Trust have confirmed their continued financial support for another 5 years.

Many thanks for staying with us.

Derek, Gillian and Geoff/Fiona (Trustees)

Photo: Curious juvenile Kea! (credit: Geoff Marks)



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