



Matukituki Valley – protecting for the future

The Matukituki Charitable Trust (MCT) was established by Gillian and Derek Crombie in 2013 to ensure that the natural attributes in Mt Aspiring National Park's Matukituki Valley are protected and enhanced. In partnership with DOC, the Trust are now well on the way to restoring the habitat and increasing the population of all native flora and fauna with the long-term goal of translocating other species to this unique valley. We look forward to integrating with the Predator Free 2050 initiative and intend to provide a very special valley full of birdlife ready to flourish.

2018/19 Season West Matukituki Valley

MCT has successfully completed another outstanding year due to the dedication and determination of Paul Hellebrekers, Stu Thorne and our team of volunteers. Paul's contribution to designing and managing the work-plan is the primary reason that MCT have achieved its success and we are extremely fortunate to have Paul's skills and knowledge.

The team has now installed 783 traps in the valley, completing the first phase of the Trusts trap installation efforts. For the first time we have also used a professional hunter to focus on cats and possum and this has been very successful with over 300 possum and 7 cats removed. The traps have already shown their worth with 825 kills this season (end of Jun) and of real impact 58 stoats, 380 possums 241 Hedgehogs, 20 Cats and 119 rats. The distribution and number of cats in the valley is now better understood and concerning with cats seen high up the valley (Scotts Bivvy) as well as around the huts.

Trapping Results

Activity	Species	Number
Professional trapper	Possum	302
Professional Trapper	Cats	7 (one 8kg)
MCT Trap lines	Hedgehog	241
MCT Trap lines	Stoats	58
MCT Trap lines	Rats	119 (28 more in July)
MCT Trap lines	Cats	20
MCT Trap lines	Possum	78
Totals	All species	825



An 8kg cat caught by Paul Blackgrove as part of the Trusts's targeted cat control programme.

The Trust has also assisted DOC with rodent monitoring work, beech seed monitoring, and general duties.

The Trust continues to be very well supported by our volunteers and financial sponsors, showing that this effort to maintain and improve the valley does matter to people who are willing to give time, money and skills to make a difference.

We are winning and seeing great improvements in birdlife activity. With the current year being a beech mast event, we expect a real battle with predators in the spring and trust that DOC's Battle for Our Birds campaign will be able to assist MCT work over this period.

Challenges and Triumphs

The year has been challenging in the valley with a full beech and tussock mast event occurring and reaching the levels where an aerial predator control operation is planned in October. The mast has seen a spike in rat numbers with 74 rats caught in April to June. To date birdlife has held up with a lot of anecdotal reports of good bird activity around the huts and tracks but fewer sightings of kea than a year or two ago. A few long term valley users reported that the morning chorus was amazingly better.

A major flood event in March caused significant damage to the tracks and a number of traps

were inundated or washed away. The team managed to recover all but one trap but a lot of clearing was required.

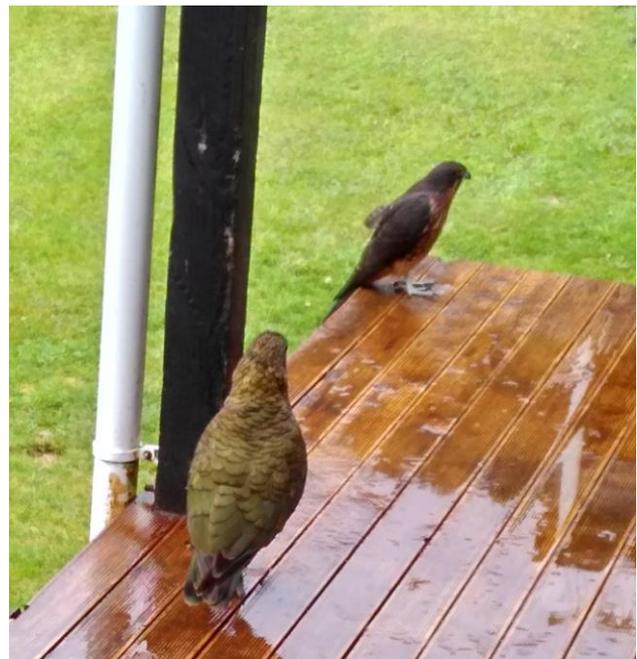


Paul and Derek resetting a flood damaged trap.

Birdlife Recovery

Over the last few years we have seen a considerable increase in the numbers of South Island robin, kakariki and even a few kereru. This is very exciting for Heather and Stu Thorne who nurtured the small robin population which were translocated by DOC from the Dart Valley back in 2008. Heather managed to catch and band 38 robins this year and over 140 have now been banded in total - a fantastic and patient result.

Overall birdlife is becoming more visible with confirmed sightings of kea, kaka, kakariki, bellbirds, kereru, native falcon, morepork, SI robin, fantail, tomtit, rifleman, and rock wren in the valley and moving downstream into side valleys. We are still hoping to see a recovery of kea, who and rockwren numbers as the programme continues to provide better breeding conditions.



A falcon and a Kea on the deck of the Aspiring Hut wardens quarters.

Sponsors and Volunteers Support

The trust would not be able to achieve its progress without the help of our sponsors and volunteers.

This year we recognise the contribution from:

- **Southern Hemisphere Proving Grounds** (George Gould) who have again financially supported Paul's position as Operations Manager. Foundation Sponsor.
- **Lloyd Morrison Trust**- major financial contribution towards the Wildlands Biodiversity study and general activities
- **Gillian and Derek Crombie**- continued annual funding and management hours. Foundation Sponsors
- **Tait Electronics** (Garry Diack) who provided another radio to improve field safety.
- **Stuart and Coleen Landsborough** whose contribution has been significant in supporting the annual bird survey and paying for bait and eggs
- **Aspiring Helicopters Ltd** who provided assistance with high trap line access to keep the "old volunteers" mobile
- **DOC Wanaka** for assistance with transport, expert advice and accommodation for volunteers as well as assistance to clear the higher alpine traps.



Also, a huge thank you for general donations received from those interested in supporting our project. Your donations help the Trust to positively focus on our vision.

Special Recognition- Flo Gaud

We are sorry to see Flo leaving DOC Wanaka for DOC Nelson but express our sincere thanks for her efforts and support over the last 5 years to establish a vibrant ecology in the West Matukituki. Her enthusiasm, knowledge and encouragement has been vital to our efforts since we started.

Flo overseeing the workers!



What has the Trust Achieved in 2019?

MCT are six years into a 5 to 10 year programme to restore the biodiversity of the valley and this year we have:

- Completed installation of a total of 783 traps covering the whole valley from snow line to Mt Aspiring Station
- Completed clearing for 5581 traps over 45 site trips
- 1180.5 Volunteer hours plus 499 hours project management
- Installed new trap lines on Shotover Saddle and Liverpool stream spur
- Extended the French Ridge trap line for Rock Wren protection
- Carried out a full Biodiversity study- Wildlands- refer web site www.mct.co.nz for details
- Completed year three of forest bird counts -Mainly Fauna
- Assisted Kea Conservation Trust with Kea monitoring and transponder installation:
- Provided the Wanaka/Hawea backyard trapping group with 20 DOC 200 traps

Expenditure

Over the last year MCT has provided \$40,000 to fund the project and, in addition, volunteers have contributed 1180.5 hours. Total funding to date for the project exceeds \$176,000 and over 9000 volunteer hours plus considerable DOC hours in support. To maintain all the activities long term we are budgeting around \$50,000 per year which will enable us to engage some assistance to check and maintain the trap network as well as extending some of the key trap lines that provide protections to kea and rock wren.

Traps

The network of 783 traps now extends on both sides of the river from Mt Aspiring Station homestead to the head of the West Matukituki at Scott's Bivvy. Side trap lines include Otago Boys High School Lodge, Rob Roy Valley, French Ridge, Gloomy Gorge, Liverpool Track and above Liverpool Biv, Cascade Track and Shotover Saddle route. The cost of traps purchased to date is almost \$80,000.



Winter trap clearing and a curious robin

Bird Monitoring

Bird monitoring continues for the third season and while some trends are being seen it is still too soon to confirm populations based on this data. Three groups; **Mainly Fauna** (forest bird counts), **Kea Conservation Trust** (kea) and **DOC** (rock wren) carried out monitoring and banding programmes. Overall the survey indicated that bird numbers are still fairly low however most species are stable to increasing their numbers. A positive population trend was seen for fantail, falcon, kaka, kea, long tailed cuckoo and shining cuckoo but a negative trend was seen for grey warbler, kereru and silvereye

Mainly Fauna reported that estimated densities were high for rifleman (5.77 birds/ha), but considerably lower for bellbird, parakeet, robin and tomtit (≤ 1.0 birds/ha).

Kea Conservation Trust have been actively monitoring the valley since 2016 and in that time transmitters have been fixed to 6 birds, 51 birds have been banded and 23 tested for lead levels (one tested high lead blood level). Monitoring Kea in the valley is very difficult due to the terrain and unsettled weather.

Anyone wanting copies of any of the monitoring reports referred to in the newsletter please contact MCT (matukitukicharitabletrust@gmail.com) or Paul Hellebrekers..

Planning for 2019/20 season

The coming season will be a real concern with the beech and tussock mast event this year and the decline in food supply over winter resulting in predators turning to birdlife for food. Previous mast years have seen whole populations of birds dramatically decline following a beech mast so MCT will be very active clearing traps and assisting DOC with Battle for Our Birds activities.

We have been clearing the traps through the winter period where this is safe and from that we

have detected a big increase in the number of rats present. The clearing of the traps will then ramp up again in spring.

Planning is also well underway to continue the monitoring programme (Kea, Rock Wren, Bats and forest birds) along with the monitoring of the current beech mast impacts.

The Wildlands report identified two key opportunities to improve the protection work:

1. Increase the number of traps on and above the bushline
2. Increase rat trapping in the beech forest areas

Both these issues will be evaluated and advanced during the coming season although both are very difficult to implement due to terrain and access issues.

Of course we still have almost 800 traps to clear every month - 480 dozen eggs per year!!!

Join us in this quest for a unique valley experience.

The MCT Trustees and volunteers are ready for the coming season and looking with trepidation on the task of clearing and resetting almost 800 traps up to the snow line. However, we see the rewards of birdsong and activity and it all makes sense.



Who is taking so long??

For further information on the Trust or the project please contact us:

Trust Website: <http://www.mctrust.co.nz/> **or email** matukitukicharitabletrust@gmail.com

Or donate to: Matukituki Charitable Trust (Bank Account) 03-1594-0586292-000

Trustees: Gillian & Derek Crombie and Mark Pizey.