

# Matukituki Charitable Trust Inc.

## Newsletter

June 2016



### Kia Ora

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.

### Summer 2015/16 West Matukituki Valley



MCT has just completed its busiest and most exciting year with the completion of the first breeding season with significant predator control installed in the valley. While the Trust still has to complete accurate bird counts, they are getting reports about significant increases in bird activity and numbers. A real thrill has been confirmed sightings of South Island robins widespread throughout the valley.

### Volunteering is such hard work!!

This is very exciting for Heather and Stu Thorne who have nurtured the small robin population with traps over the last 10 years.

The Trust also had a confirmed report of 30 Kea "surrounding" a helicopter during a trap placement project.

Overall birdlife is becoming more visible with confirmed sightings of the following species:

Kea, Kaka, Kakariki, Bellbirds, Native Falcon, Morepork, SI Robin, Fantail, Tomtit, Rifleman, Rock Wren, and Long Tail Bats.

MCT volunteers are also noticing some strong regrowth in the beech canopy with the reduction in possum numbers. Overall the combination of poison and trapping has made a big improvement in the valley.



Fledgling robin (Dec 2015)



## Project Management



The programme over the last two years has been managed by Paul Hellebrekers who has put in a huge effort with the great support of our volunteers. Paul has not only coordinated the programme but has personally handled every trap and installed most of them in the field.

### Paul installing a Goodnature A12 possum trap

Paul's mid-season update to Tom Elworthy, Managing Director of sponsor Southern Hemisphere Proving Grounds states:

It has been a busy summer season to date with now 19 traps lines established in the West Matukituki Valley. In all there are now over 400 traps in place.

The Trust is hoping to get the last 3 new trap lines established in April/May. Once completed there will be a comprehensive network of trap lines which will be a significant achievement.

The lines have been cleared monthly on average with low kills number which is good. Generally only a few stoats, feral cats, rats and hedgehogs are caught each check.

The benefits of the trapping programme are certainly starting to be realised with good number of young South Island Robin, rock wren and kea (target species) being observed. Numerous other native birds are also being recorded. A highlight though is the discovery of a small population of long tail bats in the red beech forest near Aspiring Hut. Long tail bats are quite rare.

We now have a dozen or so dedicated volunteers helping with the project which is great. The Trust is also working closely with other Trusts running similar conservation project within the wider Matukituki Valley Catchment which is having real benefits too.

MCT's next big push is to have Mohua (yellowhead) translocated into the valley. They were last recorded some 30 years ago. It would be a real achievement to have them re-established back in the valley.

Once again , many thanks for your support of this project.

Paul's contribution is the sole reason that MCT has achieved its success and we are extremely fortunate to have Paul's skills and knowledge.

## Sponsors Support

The trust would not be able to achieve its progress without the help of our sponsors, both financial and volunteers. This year we recognise the contribution again from:

- **DOC Community Fund** (Formerly CCPF) who have largely funded the cost of traps and installation costs excluding volunteer time.
- **DOC Central Otago District** (Wanaka office) for assistance with trap installation work.
- **Southern Hemisphere Proving Grounds** (Tom Elworthy) who have supported Paul's position as Operations Manager.
- **Longview Environmental Trust** (John May) who have provided the use of their 4WD vehicle when other suitable vehicles have not been available.
- **Tait Electronics** (Garry Diack) who have provided us with radios to improve field safety
- **Gillian and Derek Crombie** who have provided general funding for traps, food, vehicles and operations.
- And of course our **Volunteers** who have contributed over 2000 hours work in the past year.

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

## What has the Trust Achieved so Far:

We are three years into a 5 to 10 year programme to restore the valley and so far we have a total of 483 traps installed including:

- 139 DOC 250 single set Traps
- 302 DOC 200 single set Traps
- 2 DoC 200 Twin set
- 10 Goodnature Possum Traps
- 10 Goodnature Stoat Traps
- 20 Trapinator Possum Traps
- 16 Beech Seed funnels
- 80 Tracking tunnels
- trap clearing tools ( 5 Sets)
- Trap carrying pack frames (2)



**Flying traps up the valley for installation**

Traps Ready to be Installed Next Summer:

- 100 DoC 200 Single set
- 25 Goodnature A12's
- 100 Trapinators
- 80 DoC 200's- older models



## Achieving Results

The network of 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 Lodge, Rob Roy Valley, French Ridge, Gloomy Gorge, Liverpool track and above, Cascade Track and Shotover Saddle track. The cost of traps purchased to date is almost \$70,000.

The traps have been successful in reducing the predation of birds to enable a good recovery and breeding season. Trap catch data for the whole valley from September 2015 to May 2016 show 452 predator kills: 41 Stoats, 21 Rats, 177 Hedgehogs, 38 Possums, 168 mice and 7 cats.



The relatively low numbers are encouraging, suggesting predation is under control. However, indications predict another beech mast year, so DOC and the Trust are working together to minimise the negative effects this may have.

As well as the active field work we have:

- Held a well-supported Health and Safety induction course for volunteers
- Continued our involvement in the Community Fund programme
- Assisted other similar Trusts with resources
- Attended the Dunedin Conference- Inc 2 run by the Yellow Eyed Penguin Trust

## Partnership with DOC

MCT is fortunate to have a very progressive relationship with DOC's Wanaka office throughout the recent changes in roles and staff. Our thanks go to Chris Sydney for his support over the last few years. We have nothing but full commitment from the Wanaka



**Flo (DOC) catching and banding a fledgling SI robin**

DOC team and this is a major factor in the continuing success of the programme. Special recognition goes to Florence Gaud (Flo) who provides the technical expertise for the project and connects the various strands of work being done from trapping to monitoring to health and safety. Annette Grieve has been a great support arranging meetings and following up issues to enable the project to progress. Thanks to all.

A major achievement of the partnership has been the joint effort to install and maintain traps in Gloomy Gorge to protect rock wren.

Access is challenging, requiring good experience and helicopter assistance so DOC and MCT have coordinated this work to make best use of the helicopter time.

## Volunteers

The Trust is fortunate to have a wide and capable pool of volunteers to the extent that we seldom have a shortfall of people for work days. The teams fall into two groups: days trips to clear the lower valley traps – generally 4 or 5 people for a day a month, and overnight groups to install or clear the upper valley traps – usually 4 to 6 people. We have work available for every level of fitness and experience from clearing traps alongside the road to high alpine traps requiring good back country experience.

Last December a trap line was set up with the students from Otago Boys High School along the bush edge behind their lodge. The students have adopted this line and now clear it as part of their regular trips to the valley. It is great to have the students and teachers involved in the project.



↑Grant Morgan  
admiring view at top  
of Rob Roy Valley

Volunteers who have made it happen this year include:

- Paul and Tess Hellebrekers
- Rod MacLeod
- Ian and Jane Turnbull
- Grant Morgan
- Stephen Mattingly
- Randall and Allison Aspinall
- Stu and Heather Thorne
- Donald Lousley
- Murray Burns
- Jim Cowie
- Roy Borgman
- Patrick Stewart (Bird Count Acoustics)
- Gillian and Derek Crombie
- Johnny Hogg
- Dan Orbell
- Henry Aubrey
- Richard Roe and OBHS Students

## Planning for 2016/17 season



Derek, Paul and John laying traps up by  
Scotts Bivy in rather damp conditions!

Planning is well underway with the main targets being; getting the last of the traps installed in the valley, increasing the bird monitoring programme, commencing the Mohua translocation process and monitoring of the current beech seed production and being ready to react if there is an increase in predator numbers. MCT volunteers will be clearing traps through the winter period where this is safe and from that will understand the number of predators present.

A recent Tracking tunnel survey indicated high levels of mice (61%) over 16 tracking lines.

The Kea Conservation Trust obtained funding to research the Kea population in the Matukituki Valley. This project has 3 main aims to support kea conservation initiatives:

- i) run an initial catch trip to enable attachment of transmitters and bands to adults and bands to fledglings and juveniles,
- ii) monitor kea nest productivity and predator impact through the breeding season,
- iii) run a kea survey and combine with all other data to provide a baseline for the local kea population.

While their initial catch trip was thwarted by bad weather and had to be postponed until next Spring, we support and encourage this work as it will assist in determining whether we are targeting predator control for kea as effectively as we can.



The MCT leaders and volunteers are ready for the coming season and looking with trepidation on the task of clearing and resetting over 500 traps up to the snow line. But - we see the rewards of birdsong and activity and it all makes sense.

#### ←Planning at Aspiring Hut Wardens quarters

Thanks to Donald Lousley, Tess Hellebrekers and Gillian Crombie for photos supplied.

## Join us in this quest for a unique valley experience.

Without public support, assistance from volunteers, and contributions by donations, conservation projects like this are not always possible. You can assist by funding or sponsoring one of the field programmes or by volunteering your time to assist either in the field or in the preparation required for field work. Information on how to donate or register as a volunteer is on our website.



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

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