



## 2023 ANNUAL REPORT TO SUPPORTERS

The Trustees of the Matukituki Charitable Trust (MCT) are pleased to report that the MCT operation continues to thrive through the dedicated support from our volunteers/donors, but importantly through the fantastic alliance we have with Southern Lakes Sanctuary (SLS).

The birdlife in the Valley is noticeably in the best shape since the project started 11 years ago with a recent highlight being a Whio | Blue Duck taking residence in the upper valley – a first for over 30 years. We also have a large number of Kea back causing the usual chaos to campers. A confident report of a Mohua in the valley completes a great story and credit to Paul Hellebrekers and the volunteer teams for the last 10+ years of hard work, we're definitely see some encouraging results.

*Photo: Kakariki are now a regular sight in the Valley (Geoff Marks)*



### Operating Structure

About a year ago our founding Operations Manager, Paul Hellebrekers decided to reduce his daily activity but in doing so he introduced the newly established Southern Lakes Sanctuary Trust to the MCT programme and we have entered a service agreement for SLS to carry out the operations management role as well as some in field clearing activities.

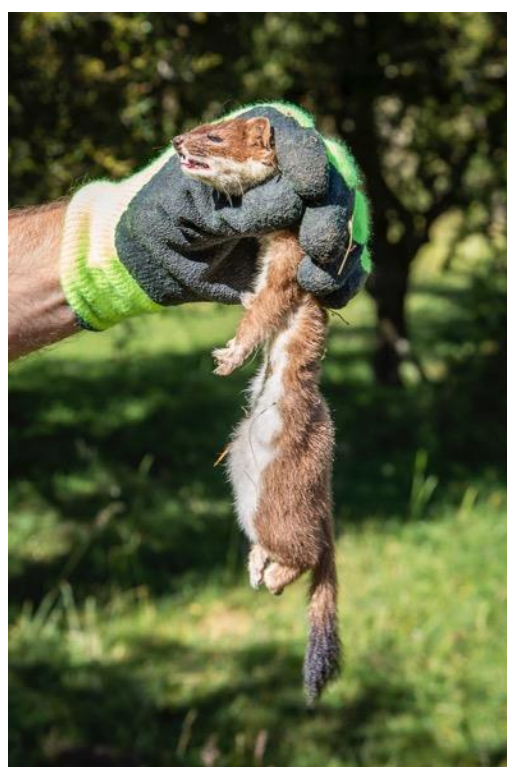
This partnership has been outstanding and the additional funding and field resources that SLS have provided has lifted the activity levels even higher. In particular SLS have been able to provide predator control in the East Matukituki valley and this has been beyond the resources of MCT until now. SLS funding from Jobs for Nature is secured only until July 2024 and we have real concerns that the progress achieved over the last two years will be lost or at best moderated. In the meantime, along with a number of other groups, MCT will continue to work through the SLS model and support the Trust.

## Trap Stats – Good News

In the last year (July 2022 - June 2023) we have eliminated **686 predators** from the valley.

A summary of key statistics below:

Item	Numbers	Comments
Volunteer Hours	701	Very loyal, supportive & hardworking volunteers.
SLS Hours	322	Excellent support and activity from the SLS team.
Stoats	90	33 x stoats in February
Possums	128	45 x possums in June
Hedgehogs	57	Indications are that hedgehog numbers are declining.
Rats	327	59 x rats in June. Numbers increasing this winter (mild).
Mice	40	Steady catch rate.
Cats	19	Sizeable 5kg+ cats and more females.
Weasels	6	A new trend, perhaps due to less stoats (apex predators)
Other/ferrets/rabbits	19	4 x ferrets.
Total Kills	686	



*Photo: A double whammy! Two stoats caught in a double DOC200 trap. (Geoff Marks)*

## Department of Conservation Partnership

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

This arrangement has been working very well and we welcome the new DOC staff to the project - Kathryn Longstaff (Senior Biodiversity Ranger) and James Spiers (Biodiversity Supervisor) and record our

appreciation for the increase in support and activity that has been achieved. We also record our appreciation for the support and advice provided by John Keene over many years. The current funding and resourcing challenges faced by DOC are a concern to the programme but we are fortunate that SLS and MCT have been able to work around these issues so far.

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

## Operational Issues and Challenges

### 1. Rob Roy Bridge Closure

In May, DOC advised that the Rob Roy swing bridge was closed to users as a result of a safety concern and its reopening would be unlikely until 2024. This means that MCT volunteers have to ford both the main Matukituki River and Rob Roy Stream to access the trap lines on the true left of the Matukituki River. This is a serious safety issue and has resulted in the Trust changing its operational approach which now limits the number of people who are qualified to clear these lines. Submissions have been made to DOC that a single person crossing the bridge is much lower risk than crossing the river but this point has not been accepted.

*Photo: View from Rob Roy Bridge (Geoff Marks).*



### 2. Mohua

MCT, SLS, the Mohua Trust and DOC had planned a transfer of Mohua from Fiordland to West Matukituki in 2022. The project had been funded by SLS and Mohua Trust and was only a few weeks from implementation when an issue arose with approvals from Iwi and DOC that resulted in the cancellation of the translocation. In the meantime the founder of Mohua Trust, Nigel Babbage, has sadly passed away and the Trust is no longer being funded. It is unfortunate that this project will likely be dropped.

### 3. Bait Stations

As part of the planned Mohua relocation project it was agreed to install a network of 150 rat bait stations in the “Red Beech” forest area of the valley. This area is high value for small birds such as Robins and Mohua and a high level of rat control was considered a priority. SLS agreed to undertake this work with assistance from DOC and MCT. Bait stations were funded and supply ordered prior to the cancellation of the Mohua project so it was agreed to proceed with the installation. The Bait stations are now installed and can be loaded with bait if rat numbers increase, which is likely in the event of a beech mast (see below).

*Photo: South Island Robin (Geoff Marks)*



### 4. Beech Mast

2023 has probably been a beech mast year but seed counts carried out by DOC have not been reported yet. The recent spike in rat and possum numbers follows the trend in other mast years. DOC has advised that despite the mast in the Matukituki Valley it is not a high enough priority area to carry out a 1080 programme. Thus we have some real exposure to predator attacks.

MCT view this situation with mixed feelings as the last 1080 drop in 2019 resulted in very high kea by-kill. As a result we are considering increased trapping, bait stations and possibly ground control for possums.



We understand our colleagues at Makarora have similar concerns and the lack of funding for predator control is a major issue for the Predator Free 2050 project.

## Sponsors and Volunteers

DOC, Gillian and Derek Crombie and Geoff Marks have been supporting the Trust since 2013 but Paul Hellebrekers and Stu Thorne have even longer connections to the valley and deservedly get highest recognition as their initiative was the catalyst for the programme.



*Photo: Gillian and Derek Crombie, and Geoff Marks - Trustees*

**Scotty Bewley**, as the Operations Manager for SLS, has done an outstanding job to extend the control programme into the East Matukituki Valley. Scotty has taken to the role with enthusiasm and energy and works tirelessly to support all the initiatives. His highlight achievement was the sighting of a whio in the valley for the first time in over 30 years



*Photo: Scotty – Operations Manager*

**Paul Hellebrekers** –despite his changed role, Paul continues to work many hours of volunteer time to assist on field trips and deliver the cat control programme

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

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



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

**Stuart and Coleen Landsborough** - Financial support for bait and field supplies for over 10 years

**Gillian and Derek Crombie** – Financial and administration support for the programme, vehicle use.

**Volunteers**– Paul Hellebrekers, Stu and Heather Thorne, Brian Weedon, Geoff Marks, John Hogg, Marieke Hilhorst, John Ombler, Jane James, Jono Jarvis, Di Liddell, Pete Thompson, Rod Macleod, Gillian and Derek Crombie.

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

**Randall and Alison Aspinall**- vehicle access through the farm and allowing traps on their land

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

**The hundreds of 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.

*Photo: Aspiring Helicopters drop off a volunteer in Gloomy Gorge (Geoff Marks)*



## Tales from the Trap Line



We have managed to avoid accidents and all volunteers have returned home just worn out, but in need of sanitising from dead animal and bait odours!

The year started with a major effort to clear tracks from windfall from the huge storms last year. This year was very challenging with weather, especially to access the high lines and it was January before we managed to get into Gloomy Gorge and Cascade Saddle lines – work normally undertaken in November.



*Photos: Whilst very picturesque, the winter snow caused significant windfall. A large 5kg feral cat caught in the valley.*



A big focus this year has been on feral cats and between Paul H. and Scotty about 20 have been removed. The honour for the largest went to Scotty with a 5.5 Kg monster in the East Branch but Paul was close with a 5kg cat. One very large cat is eluding the team around Aspiring Hut – it is big enough to back out of closed traps - challenge accepted!

A large number of stoats have been caught especially in the early season on the high routes such as Shotover Saddle and Weedos Line / Rob Roy West - stoats are invading the West Matukituki continuously.

Our Kea friends have provided many interesting activities such as one moving ahead to the next trap in the hope of snaring a snack - for more than 10 traps down French Ridge. Another kea was systematically removing the rocks off the traps as soon as we moved onwards.

*Photo: Kea on Cascade Saddle (Geoff Marks)*



The building activities at Aspiring hut limited access for some overnight trips but Stu and Heather being on site much of the time was a big help to keep trapping active.

*Photo: Refurbished Aspiring Hut – (Geoff Marks)*

## The Kea Project



The [Kea Conservation Trust](#) (KCT) have been working hard in the valley to monitor birds (30 plus birds are now fitted with transmitters), banding, nest site location and protection. This is fantastic work and hopefully will be key to returning kea to the area in the numbers that should be there historically.

Kea are hugely threatened and numbers are declining to the stage we have real concern for their survival so MCT is working with Tamsin Orr-Walker from Kea Conservation trust to understand the

problem and develop solutions.



Progress to date has been slow but positive with three significant issues:

- Monitoring birds – KCT believe there may be as many as 100 birds in the valley
- Improving management of Kea during 1080 operations to avoid by-kill.
- Protecting breeding nests.

Some interesting reading about kea and the risks from predators here:

[The Hidden Risk for the World's Smartest Bird](#)  
[Kea Study Shows Impacts of Stoats and Feral Cats](#)

*Photos: Kea in flight (Geoff Marks) and Kea Chicks in Nest (KCT)*

## Ongoing activities

- The focus for 2024 is to increase trapping to reduce the impact of a mast year and use the new bait stations to control rats in the red beech forest.
- A major 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.
- 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 (Trustees)

E: [info@mctrust.co.nz](mailto:info@mctrust.co.nz)

W: [www.mctrust.co.nz](http://www.mctrust.co.nz)



*Photo: Paul, Gillian, and Derek Installing new traps on Cascade Saddle (Geoff Marks)*