



2024 ANNUAL REPORT TO SUPPORTERS



The Trustees of the Matukituki Charitable Trust (MCT) are again pleased to report that the West Matukituki Valley Predator Control project 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 last year has been very challenging due to a beech mast and the valley having not been selected by DOC for a 1080 programme to control possum, rats and stoats. As a result, we have managed higher than usual kill rates and large numbers of predators. However, the project seems to have protected the birds enough to maintain numbers and in some cases increase.

One special achievement has been a major effort to control cats and 29 cats have been caught with several weighing around 5kg.

A disappointment was the very late decision to cancel the release of Mohua after a huge effort by the Mohua Recovery Group to prepare the project. We're hopeful that the mohua translocation may be rescheduled again at a future date.

Photo: Kea are one of the species threatened by introduced predators. (Photo: Geoff Marks)

Operating Structure

Southern Lakes Sanctuary Trust have been providing our field operations support for the last two years under the Jobs for Nature programme. This has been a fantastic outcome and having Scott Bewley dedicated to the valley has been very positive for the programme.

The SLS Jobs for Nature funding has terminated so MCT has agreed to self-fund a major part of the MCT role and SLS have managed to find supporters for the balance to allow the project to continue. Thanks to our incredible supporters, MCT has funding available to maintain the project for the next 3 years at least.

Trap Stats - Good News!

In the last year (July 2023 - June 2024) we have eliminated a worrying **1293 predators** from the valley (in 2023 the total tally was 686). A summary of key statistics below:

Item	Numbers 2024/2023	Comments
Volunteer Hours	604	Very loyal, supportive & hardworking volunteers.
SLS Hours	416	Excellent support and activity from the SLS team.
Stoats	224/90	136 x stoats in January & February
Possums	92/128	Large numbers caught on farmland not included
Hedgehogs	23/57	Indications are that hedgehog numbers are declining.
Rats	848/327	60 to 80 rats each month July to Jan due to beech mast
Mice	50/40	Steady catch rate.
Cats	29/19	Sizeable 5kg+
Weasels	8/6	
Other/ferrets/rabbits	19/19	
Total Kills	1293/686	

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 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.

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.

Photos: Tools of the trade: a DOC200 trap which targets rats and stoats. (Geoff Marks)



Operational Issues and Challenges

1. Rob Roy Bridge Closure

In May 2023, 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. The bridge is currently being repaired so we look forward to having this key access available again.

2. Mohua

MCT, SLS, the Mohua Trust and DOC had planned a transfer of Mohua from Fiordland to West Matukituki in September 2024. The project had been funded by SLS and Mohua Trust and was only a few weeks from implementation when DOC cancelled the translocation thanks to the team who put in a great effort to be ready for this event and hopefully it will happen next year.

3. Bait Stations

As part of the planned Mohua relocation project it was agreed to install a network of 320 rat bait stations in the “Red Beech/Robin Loop” forest area of the valley around Aspiring hut. This area is high value for small birds such as Robins, Kakariki and Mohua and a high level of rat control was considered a priority. SLS agreed to undertake this work. 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).

4. Beech Mast

2023/24 was probably a beech mast year given the very large increase of stoats and rats caught. 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 had some real exposure to predator attacks.

As a result, we are considering increased trapping, bait stations and possibly ground control for possums. We are also working closely with SLS to review and adopt new trapping techniques and technologies as they become available and are relevant to the valley.



Kakariki, Kaka, South Island Robin and Rifleman are now regularly seen in the West Matukituki Valley (Photos: Geoff Marks).



The support of Aspiring Helicopters provides MCT volunteers with access to remote alpine areas where trapping helps protect the endangered rock wren (pictured) and kea. The MCT Trustees with new radios kindly donated by Tait Electronics.

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, and we wouldn't be here without them! Thank you all—you know who you are!

Scotty Bewley: as the Operations Manager for SLS, Scotty has done an outstanding job to manage the very high rat and stoat numbers in the valley and to coordinate our small, dedicated army of volunteers.

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 Queenstown Lakes District. As a team, Scotty, Paul and Matt are true conservation heroes.

Paul Hellebrekers: Paul continues to work many hours of volunteer time to assist on field trips and deliver the cat control programme. Cats have been a real challenge this year with one large cat managing to escape from the trap twice – Paul's persistence paid off and it was caught after a long campaign.

Paul has also been the Matukituki Valley representative Trustee on the SLS Trust and retired at the recent AGM. MCT would like to acknowledge and thank Paul for the successful establishment of the Trust and operations.

Ant & 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 10 years now.

Tait Communications Limited: donated 5 new state of the art field radios to replace our earlier models. 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.

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

Volunteers: Paul Hellebrekers, Stu and Heather Thorne, Geoff Marks, Marieke Hilhorst, John Ombler, Jane James, Jean Garman, Di Liddell, Peter Thompson, Rod Macleod, Rod Walker, Marty Lohrey, Gillian and Derek Crombie.

Phil Wilkins: for his steady supply of fresh rabbit bait over the season.

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

Plus, thanks to the hundreds of people who made donations to the Matukituki Charitable Trust bank account and cash collection at Raspberry Creek Car park. Every dollar received is spent on pest control—there are no admin or staff costs.



Our dedicated team of regular volunteers work in some challenging conditions from the alpine zone to the river valley.

Tales from the Trap Line

The year started off with a major effort to clear our trap lines from windfall after the huge winter storms of 2023. This year has continued to be very challenging with the weather, especially for accessing our high alpine lines and it was January before we managed to get into Gloomy Gorge and the Cascade Saddle lines—work normally undertaken in November.

A big focus this year has been on feral cats and between Paul H. and Scotty about 29 have been removed. 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.

We have managed to avoid any accidents and all our volunteers have returned home safely, albeit a bit worn out and in need of a hot shower and sanitising from the odour of dead rats, stoats and bait!



Poor weather prevented early season access to our Gloomy Gorge (left) and Cascade Saddle (right) traplines. (Photos: 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. KCT are currently monitoring a new nest with three eggs so we are hopeful for a successful hatch.

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 (estimated only 3,000—5,000 remain in the wild), 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 two significant issues:

- Monitoring birds – KCT believe there may be as many as 100 birds in the valley,
- 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](#)

Ongoing activities

- The focus for 2025 is to increase 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 and your continued support.

Derek, Gillian and Geoff (Trustees)

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2024: A year in the West Matukituki Valley (Photos: Geoff Marks)

