

Matukituki Charitable Trust Inc.

Newsletter

Winter 2020



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 has made noticeable progress to restore the habitat and increase the population of all native flora and fauna with the long-term goal of translocating other species to this unique valley. As we enter the second 5-years of our Management Agreement with DOC we look forward to collaborating with the Predator Free 2050 initiative to further enhance a very special valley full of birdlife.

Stu Thorne - Special Recognition



We are honoured to congratulate Stu and Heather Thorne for Stu's award of the Queens Service Medal. This is a well-deserved recognition of their life in conservation especially in the West Matukituki where Stu and Heather released and nurtured the now flourishing South Island Robin population. Well done.



We are also pleased to welcome Geoff Marks as a Trustee of the Matukituki Charitable Trust. Geoff brings a young and local perspective to the Trust with great enthusiasm for the Valley and its values.

Finally, we acknowledge the end of the first 5-year Management Agreement between MCT and DOC, in October 2020. This has been a very valuable and enjoyable relationship with the DOC Wanaka team, and we hope to continue with a new agreement in future and look forward to building on our successful partnership.

Why We Are Doing This

After 7-years effort we have seen the resurgence of many bird species in the valley and confirmed the presence of a very endangered Long Tailed Bat population. The effort to establish and maintain the trap network has involved over 1500 hours per year of volunteer time and over \$1Million of cost when DOC 1080 costs are included.



We asked Paul Hellebrekers (*on a trapping mission in photo above*) what inspires him to spend his free time clearing and operating trapping networks:

Question 1: *Why do you want to spend half your life chasing predators?*

Good question.....

- I have spent a large chunk of my life working and recreating in the backcountry in some of New Zealand's special places. I have seen first-hand the devastating impacts of plant and animal pests on the backcountry biodiversity and you cannot help but want to do something about it. Even if it is only in a small way. It's pretty special when you see a pair of rock wren popping between rocks high up in an alpine valley or having a couple of kea follow you from trap to trap as you clear them or just to hear the bird song as you travel through the forest.

Question 2: *What are your thoughts about the next 10 years for the valley?*

Really for the next 2 to 5 years as that is the focus for me at this time

- Increase our trapping efforts in the alpine areas to provide better protection for rock wren and kea in particular

- Complete a successful Mohua translocation back into the valley
- Work with the Kea Conservation Trust to get a better understanding on why kea numbers appear to be declining and then implement a predator control programme to halt this trend
- Support the Southern Lakes Sanctuary proposal get across the line and see the Upper West Matukituki Valley being designated as an eradication site for possums, stoats, and rats.
- It is also pretty exciting to see the significant advances being made in predator control: traps, lures, monitoring, artificial intelligence and so on. Many likely to be on the market in the next 1 to 2 years.

Birdlife Recovery

Over the last few years, we have seen a considerable increase in the numbers of South Island Robin, Kakariki, and Fantails. Recently Kaka have been confirmed and Kereru seen above Aspiring Hut which is exciting.

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, Whio and Rock Wren numbers as the programme continues to provide better breeding conditions.



Volunteer Myrthe Braam clearing a trap above Liverpool Hut

2019/20 Season West Matukituki Valley

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

The team has now installed 792 traps in the valley, completing the first phase of the Trusts trap installation efforts with all main sites installed. After last year's success we have recently used a professional hunter to focus on cats and possum and this has been very successful with another 7 cats removed.

The trap network has again shown its worth with 1510/825 (2020/2019 comparison) kills this season (end of June) and of real impact 103/58 stoats, 87/78 possums 207/241 Hedgehogs, 36/20 Cats and 763/119 rats. The number of cats in the valley is still a major concern for Kea nesting with cats seen throughout the valley (Glendhu to Scott's Bivvy) as well as around the huts. We also caught our first 3 weasels in the West Matukituki this year.



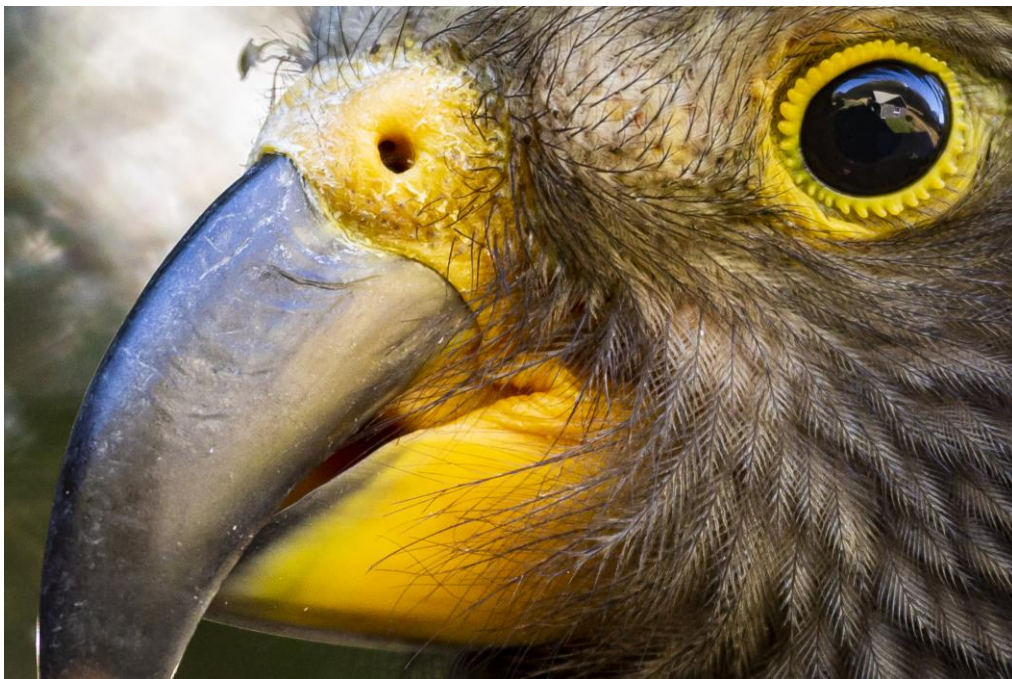
Trapping Results

Activity	Species	Number
Professional Trapper	Possum (not counted in MCT tally)	245
Professional Trapper	Cats	7
MCT Trap lines	Hedgehogs	207
MCT Trap lines	Stoats	103
MCT Trap lines	Rats	763
MCT Trap lines	Cats	36
MCT Trap lines	Possum	87
MCT Trap Lines	Mice and other	288
MCT Trap Lines	Weasels	3
Other	Other (rabbits, etc)	16
Totals	All species	1510

Other Activities

- Rat Bait Stations: 5 modified stations have been installed near Aspiring Hut. Filled with non-toxic bait (pellets). Will trial over the summer to see if they are kea proof and that the rats do not spread the bait outside of the station.
- Cat control: Paul Blackgrove has just completed a cat trapping week for a total of 7 cats and 245 Possum. One other large cat was caught by DOC staff. Note: DOC provided funding for cat trapping for 100 hrs and MCT 50hrs.
- Wildland Consultants completed their final report: Biodiversity Recovery Plan. MCT has prioritised the report recommendations and is working towards achieving these.
- MCT has also assisted DOC with rodent monitoring work, beech seed monitoring, and general duties

Bird Monitoring



A bird's eye view of Aspiring Hut

Bird monitoring continues for the fourth 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 quite low, however most species are stable to increasing their numbers.

Iris Broekema, Mainly Fauna Ltd, completed the 'Forest Bird Survey' in early November 2019 and reported:

- the population trend increased for bellbird, fantail, grey warbler, parakeet, kaka, kea long tailed cuckoo and tomtit.
- The population trend remained stable (no increase or decrease) for rifleman and robin.
- The population trend decreased for falcon, kereru, shining cuckoo and silvereye.

Paddy Stewart of SoundCounts (Guided Wellness Ltd) carried out a Bat survey with 19 automatic bat detection units:

- The Bat Survey carried out in November 2019 confirms the presence of Long Tailed Bats in the mid to upper valley however the weather during the survey was marginal, so results are limited.
- The 2015 report speculated that the low levels of activity likely indicated a relict population and that may have not been viable. This result shows that bats are still present, but not much more.
- An improved effort is needed to better understand bat activity about the valley.
- Low numbers likely reflect continued predation by rats and stoats following heavy beech mast, as occurs elsewhere where Long Tailed Bats remain. However, information from a long-term study of the benefits of predator control in the Eglinton Valley farther south in Fiordland indicates that Long Tailed Bat populations can recover from very low numbers with sustained predator control (O'Donnell et al. 2017).

1080 Operation

The beech mast in 2019 resulted in a major spike in pest numbers for example:

November to February	2019	2020
Stoats	35	69
Rats	14	555

As a result, DOC carried out a 1080 control programme to reduce the predator numbers.

The operation was delayed from its planned time in October because of weather and resourcing issues and in that time the predator numbers ballooned as shown above. Since the drop, numbers have reduced significantly and we are hopeful that they will reduce further, but we still caught 11 stoats in May 2020 compared to 1 in 2019 so the traps are still very active.

6 Kea deaths were recorded due to 1080 and it is probable that more occurred. This is a huge concern to MCT and we are working actively with DOC and Kea Conservation Trust to determine how this can be avoided in future. Initial indications are that the deaths were Kea that had socialised around the huts in the valley and may have seen the bait as a food source. KCT have established the Valley as a research site and have active tracking of a number of birds in the Valley. Of concern is that no nesting activity is being detected however there is a healthy population of juveniles still in the Valley (11 around Aspiring Hut) creating the usual havoc to tents and vehicles.



June 2020 Board Meeting at 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.

The Trust has been very fortunate to have support from the Lloyd Morrison Trust who have committed to a 5-year support programme. Ant and Kate Howard represent the Lloyd Morrison Trust and they are now Wanaka residents with a shared passion for the valley. We are also working together to target Kea protection in the wider area as well. This support along with our long-standing sponsors is critical to the MCT programme.

This year we recognise the contribution from:

- A team of about 10 volunteers who assist monthly with trap clearing and repairs across all levels of the valley from roadside to snowline. Some very long days are carried out with 15-20km long trap lines typical.

- **Southern Hemisphere Proving Ground**, 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
- **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 provide 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.



Paul Hellebrekers & Aspiring Helicopters above Liverpool Hut

Where to Next? What Has the Trust Achieved In 2020?

MCT are seven 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 792 traps covering the whole Valley from snow line to Mt Aspiring Station
- Completed clearing of 6617 traps over 46 site trips
- 1045.5 Volunteer hours, plus 692 hours project management
- Installed extended trap lines above Scotts Bivvy and Gloomy Gorge

- Carried out a full biodiversity study- Wildlands
- Completed year four of forest bird counts -Mainly Fauna
- Assisted Kea Conservation Trust with Kea monitoring and transponder installation:
- Provided the Wanaka/Hawea backyard trapping group with 8 more DOC 200 traps

Expenditure

Over the last year the Trust has received donations, grants, and sponsorship of \$40,000 and MCT has expended \$50,000 to fund the project. Total expenditure to date for the project exceeds \$234,000 and over 11,000 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.



Planning for 2020/21 season

The coming season should see a return to normal predator numbers if the 1080 control has been a success. We hope to continue clearing traps and hopefully seeing a further recovery of bird numbers. We have been clearing the traps through the winter period where this is safe and from that we have detected a big reduction in the

number of rats present indicating the 1080 has been successful. The clearing of the traps will ramp up again in spring.

Planning is also well underway to continue the monitoring programme (Kea, Rock Wren, Bats and forest birds).

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

Applications to the DOC Community Fund 2020 have been made for both these projects, and we hope to implement the new trapping before Christmas.

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 monthly task of clearing and resetting almost 800 traps up to the snow line. However, we hear and see the rewards of birdsong and activity and it all makes sense.

Many thanks to Geoff Marks for some great photos.

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 Geoff Marks.

Operations Manager: Paul Hellebrekers