

Matukituki Charitable Trust Inc.

Newsletter

Winter 2021



Special Thanks again to our loyal supporters, funders and volunteers –through our efforts we can again hear the morning chorus (and midnight kea activities) and birdlife flourishing in this iconic valley.

DOC, Gillian and Derek Crombie and our recent new Trustee Geoff Marks have been supporting/ managing the Trust now since 2013 and we have just renewed the partnership agreement for another 5 years so we decided this annual report would be more about achievements than statistics. Paul Hellebrekers and Stu Thorne have even longer connections to the valley and deservedly get highest status as their initiative was the catalyst for the Programme.

A big thank you to our supporters both financial and volunteers for staying with us for another year especially the last one where many of you have had to deal with significant personal and business challenges. We continue to have sufficient funding to keep our volunteers busy clearing traps and setting up new lines- we see this as a social duty to keep them off the streets and safe from cycling accidents!!!

Department of Conservation Update

On Monday 19 July 2021 Nikki Holmes (Operations Manager Central Otago) DOC and MCT signed a renewal of the Matukituki Management Agreement first set up in 2015.

This is a milestone showing the commitment from both parties to the conservation of the West Matukituki. Over the last 6 or 7 years we have worked together to install the 852 trap predator control network, undertake species monitoring, deliver three 1080 programmes,



remove about 5,000 pests and watched as numbers of South Island Robin, Kakariki, Kaka, Bell birds, Warblers etc have thrived. This work has been carried out with an excellent working relationship and each party has assisted the other to make it a very positive project. Twice yearly meetings have been positive exchanges of information and ideas to ensure the best practice is able to be delivered.

Derek Crombie (MCT) and Nikki Holmes (DOC) signing the Management Agreement

The renewed Trust agreement with Department of Conservation focuses on three specific objectives for the next 5 years including:

- A specific programme to protect and enhance Kea numbers (with Kea Conservation Trust support)
- Aiming to release Mohua in the valley
- Removal of cats and avoiding reinvasion.



MCT members and DOC staff after signing the Management Agreement

We look forward to the next 5 years and the inclusion of the West Matukituki area into the Southern Sanctuary Pest Free area.

Sponsors and Volunteers

The project could not have been achieved without the financial and field support from about 30 people. We are very grateful for support from:

Paul Hellebrekers – As Operations manager Paul works many hundreds of hours of volunteer time to organise the field trips and keep us all safe in the hills.

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

Department of Conservation - funding for Cascade Saddle Traps, Cat control, Trap Clearing, Vehicle use, Tracking Tunnels, Rock Wren, expert advice, 1080 drops.

John May - for the use of the Longview Environmental Trust 4WD vehicle when required.

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

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

Stuart and Coleen Landsborough- Financial support for bait and field supplies

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

Volunteers/ Pauls Press Gang – especially Stu and Heather Thorne, Brian Weedon, Geoff Marks, John Hogg, Peter Lind, Marieke Hilhorst, Gillian and Derek Crombie, Myrthe Braam, Mo Turnbull, Murray Burns, Jane James, Scott Gilmour, Brian Stewart and so many others who have helped whenever they can.

NZ Alpine Club- use of Aspiring Hut

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 Creek car park. Every dollar received is spent on pest control– there are no admin or staff costs.

Tales from the Trap Line

Paul Hellebrekers (Operations manager) has a great practice to cover the health and safety briefing each trip with a stop for coffee before leaving town- primes everyone!!!

We have managed to avoid accidents and all volunteers have returned home just worn out



but breathing.

Domestic life is not the same after a trapper comes home with odours of dead hedgehog, fish oil, rabbit meat and rotten eggs- amazingly the said trappers are immune to the odour (Covid maybe). Washing machines take a beating.

The odd volunteer has been heard to take a deep breath as they are delegated to cross the river to Deer Flat with water temperatures well below comfort levels.

A very exciting activity was assisting Kea Conservation Trust to protect a Kea nest with four chicks. This required a rapid response to install 10 traps around the nest through a very overgrown area. This was successful and hopefully the same nest will be used again this year.



A new trapline was planned on the South face of Rob Roy and memories recalled that a track used to go up from Shovel Flat. Brian Weedon and Geoff Wayatt had used this line to access Rob Roy for climbing so Brian's memory was recalled to advise the route. Brian had experienced a serious medical event earlier in the year but this did not stop him from going out with Paul H and volunteers to open up the old route and install 23 new traps- the line has been named Weedon's Line- legend.

A recent cat trapping programme has been successful with nine cats caught, including one 6kg cat, but one cat has outwitted our team and remains alive. Two Kea managed to eat the bait and spent the night in the trap – released unharmed. Our trappers are resolved to show they are smarter than a cat- no chance to outsmart a kea.

During placement of the 25 new traps along Cascade Ridge the team of four were dropped off by helicopter and due to be collected about 4.00pm. Some angst was building when several vague helicopter noises did not eventuate into a recovery and concern that the DOC office might close and prevent a radio message. All was well at 4.30 (Thanks to Aspiring

Helicopters for your great support) so the group had a very pleasant hour sitting on top of the Cascade waterfall on a stunning day (tough job).



Paul, Derek and Gillian on Cascade Saddle – looking towards Dart Glacier

Project Achievements by Paul and his Volunteer team include:

- 1336 hours work in the field plus 572 hours preparation.
- New 25 trap line across Cascade Ridge from the Pylon to the Saddle
- New 23 Trap line up the South side of Rob Roy above Shovel Flat (Weedo's Line). This line was an epic for Paul and crew having to find and open up the old Geoff Wayatt track and carry some traps from valley floor with the rest being dropped off at the top by helicopter and carried down - it is a great line though.
- 6 Additional Traps installed at head of the valley above Scotts Biv
- 60 Live capture cages for cat and possum capture bought/borrowed and used
- A 6 week cat trapping programme conducted from Raspberry Creek car park to Pearl Flat
- 852 Traps cleared, mostly monthly, covering 27 Lines over the whole valley from Gloomy Gorge, French Ridge Quarterdeck, Liverpool Hut/ Mt. Barff, Cascade and Shotover Saddles to Aspiring Homestead on both sides of the river,
- A successful application was made to the DOC Community fund for support to install a new trap line on Cascade saddle. \$6600 approved and spent.
- Assisted Kea Conservation trust to protect a kea nest with four chicks which eventually fledged.

Predator Control

Following the 1080 programme in February 2020, the valley recorded very low levels of predators over winter, especially in the upper traps. However pests are again on the move and we are catching increasing numbers of stoats, cats and rats in the lower valley lines where 1080 was not applied.

Key statistics for the year 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021 year:

Traps cleared 6569
Total predators 830
Stoats 69
Possums 145
Hedgehogs 181
Rats 291
Mice 95
Cats 24
Weasels 2
other 23 - rabbits, etc

There are hundreds of additional possums caught on the farmland by others that we don't record.

The Kea Project

KCT have been working hard in the valley to monitor birds (20 plus 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 problems and develop solutions.

<https://www.keaconservation.co.nz/>

Progress to date has been slow but positive with four 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.
- Removal of Lead from old buildings– KCT has a large programme across the South Island to remove lead from Kea environments including the West Matukituki.

<https://blog.doc.govt.nz/2021/06/30/the-hidden-risk-for-the-worlds-smartest-bird/>

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2021-media-releases/kea-study-shows-impact-of-stoats-and-feral-cats/>

Ongoing activities

- The Mainly Fauna Bird Count survey had to be postponed in 2020 due to an injury to the key person . The final 5th annual survey will be done again in October this year.

However, we are seeing much increased bird activity and numbers of Kaka, Kakariki, Karearea, and Kereru, throughout the valley. Kea numbers are steady especially around the high huts and a group of 18 mostly juveniles were creating mischief around Aspiring Hut..

- We are also at the point where some species (Mohua, Whio) that have been lost from the valley might be returned and we look forward to reporting on that later in 2022.
- 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.
- We are about to trial 3 audio recorders kindly donated by Scott Gilmour – will update progress on this next time.

Many thanks for staying with us, and thanks to Geoff Marks for the photography – so many beautiful photos of this wonderful valley that we would love to share!

Derek, Gillian and Geoff, (Trustees) and Paul (Operations Manager)



The Kea Nest protection crew from DOC, MCT and KCT