

# THE REMU-TALKER

## The Story of a Stropky Kiwi

Hatched on 13th December 2009, the story of Whoopsy the stropky kiwi comes from the archives. Whoopsy needed help hatching out as she was back to front in her egg. Kiwi chicks can take days to hatch and need to be positioned in a certain way to have the best chance of hatching.



Left: The X-ray shows a small hole in the top right hand side of the egg where a hole was manually made to enable the chick to breathe. The top left area that is dark is an air cell where her bill should be!

An air cell is a pocket of air that grows as the chick grows. A few days before hatching the kiwi will pop its bill through the membrane and start to breathe within the air cell, a few days after that will pop its bill right through the shell.

Below: Assisted hatch getting there with an elbow breaking out.



Pictured above at Fernlea School as a young chick just before her release back into the Remutaka Forest Park.

Woopsy was named by children from Fernlea School, Wainuiomata. So named as she did a 'woopsy' down the front of the handler's shirt.

Left: A grownup Woopsy who weighed in at a healthy 2010 grams. We think she may have paired with Elvis and is now living wild in the Park.



## Volunteer Profile - Gerry Brackenbury

Over a coffee on a blustery Wellington day I chatted to our Trust President Gerry Brackenbury. Though new to the Wellington area and RCT, Gerry has an impressive background in conservation born out life-long passion for the environment and is a self-described “raving greenie”. 40 years of service to conservation and natural history in Whangarei and Northland saw him honoured as a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2016.

After moving to the region from sunny far North to be closer to family, Gerry was looking for a new challenge and a way to meet new people when he was headhunted for the Trust President role by Phil Waddington. He is very grateful for all the support he has received from the committee so far.

When asked where he sees the Trust going, he is quick to say there is no doubt that the Trust is here for the long-term with the organisation in “good heart” as a result of good managers with clear roles. Gerry is still finding his feet but is already pondering what species could be next to be translocated - possibly with the help of professional consultants. Based on his years of experience Gerry is wary of volunteer burnout and hopes to provide support and guidance around this.

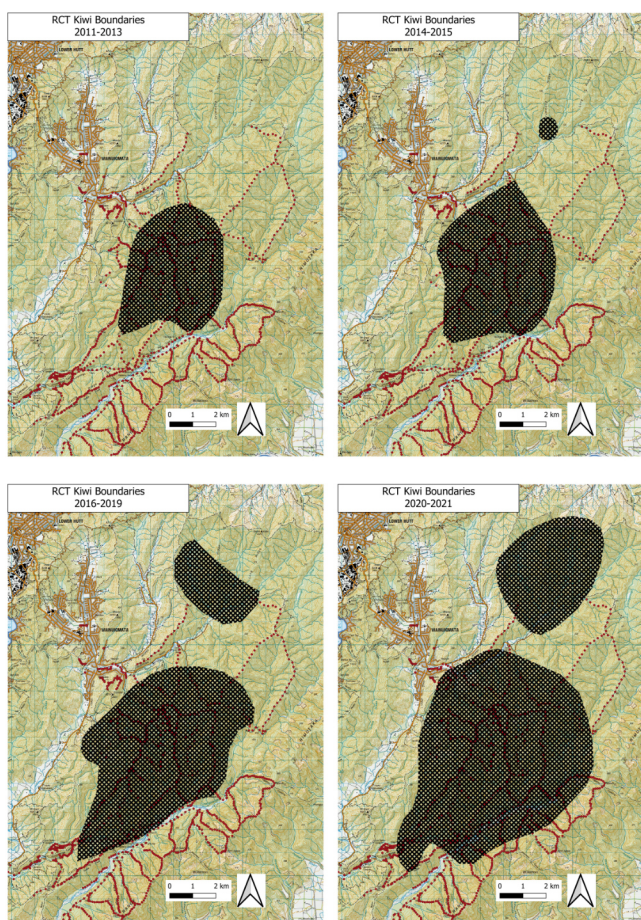
Thanks for the coffee Gerry and welcome aboard!

## Over 200 Wild Kiwi Estimated in Park

Susan Ellis

Our kiwi monitoring team have been conducting annual acoustic surveys to monitor the spread of our North Island brown kiwi through time. Many volunteers have been involved in setting out and bringing in the recorders along their traplines, and a few years back we also combined forces with MOA Conservation Trust to monitor for kiwi calls on the eastern side of the Ōrongorongo River.

The plot below shows the approximate range of our kiwi through time after their initial release in the Upper Turere Stream. **Kiwi can now be heard calling all the way from the eastern banks of the Ōrongorongo river to the outskirts of Wainuiomata.** There is also a substantial and growing population in the Wainuiomata water catchment near the GW mainland island. It is difficult to precisely estimate the population as we no longer track our kiwi using radio transmitters, but based on the known population in 2011 and chick survival rates measured in the field, **we estimate the population should now number over 200 birds.** Within this population we estimate a minimum of 40 breeding pairs as picked up duetting on the acoustic recorders.



Future kiwi monitoring will now be done less frequently (every 3 years) and will focus on the expanding boundaries to help inform our trapping efforts.



## Remutaka Forest Park, in Pictures

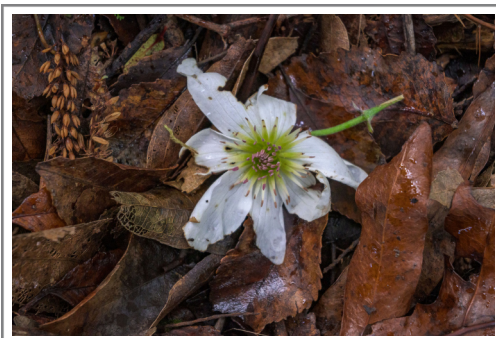
RCT Volunteer **Shaun Barnett** captured these magnificent images of the park we all love. Enjoy the gallery below showcasing the beauty and majesty of the park.



Lookout view over Wellington Harbour, near McKerrow Track



Fungi, Clay Ridge Track



Clematis flower, Clay Ridge Track



Kidney ferns on a branch, Clay Ridge Track



Large Rimu, Clay Ridge Track



Bracket fungi, McKerrow Track



## Asmuss Foundation

To celebrate 100 years of business, Asmuss launched the Asmuss Foundation. It was established to ensure they continue in their commitment to create a stronger New Zealand by helping their customers, communities and people succeed.

Asmuss is a family-owned company which manufactures a variety of products for infrastructure and construction projects.

The Remutaka Forest Park Charitable Trust, was chosen by Asmuss staff at the Wellington branch. The staff in Wellington felt a strong connection to this local iconic area, it is a popular walking and tramping area used by staff and the wider community.

Wellington branch manager Scott Fitzgerald met with RCT President Gerry Brackenbury and committee member Rosemary Thompson to present the donation and receive a RCT T Shirt and Certificate.



## Cyclone Damage

In February tropical Cyclone Gabrielle smashed into the North Island causing devastation and loss of life. The Wellington Region was spared severe damage compared with other regions. Elly Peters (DOC) has supplied us with these pictures showing the impact in the Park.



(Above left) In the Catchpool Valley, the road was reduced down to one lane, after flooding damaged the foundations of the ford, and took a fair chunk out of Kereru Corner.

(Above right) The power cable to the new cell tower was washed out, causing an outage of newly established cell reception for a couple of days.

(Right) Pip Cox fixing the waterline leading to the toilets in the Catchpool carpark. The toilets were closed for two days while being repaired.



As a quick reminder: please don't use the toilets if the water is not flowing. There's always someone who will have to clean-up after you. Park maps will show you where the next closest facilities are.

Further into the park DOC is asking walkers to be aware of slips and track closures. Jacob's Ladder, the last part of the Ōrongorongo Track before the Turere bridge, is in a dangerous condition, with engineers saying it could move at any time. DOC has closed the section of the track and built an alternative track. There is signage installed however this has been vandalised recently so please take care.

Please also take extra care on Big Bend Track between Turere Curved Bridge and Turere Lodge, where there is another large slip.



## Autumn in the Park

While the birds are preparing themselves for the Winter months, many of us are mourning the end of summer.

Sure the evenings are getting darker and the weather turning colder but we think autumn is one of the best seasons to visit the Park with crisp sunny days for walks and picnics and clear dark nights for star gazing.

Head into the park for an overnight stay with family or friends. See what native birds you can see or hear. For inspiration check out this [great trip report](#) from Nathan Watson, Operations Manager, NZ Mountain Safety Council on his family adventure to Jans Hut. He has voted the Ōrongorongo Track the BEST first overnight family tramp in New Zealand!

Sunday 23rd April the Park hosts the Xterra trail running event. This event was first held in the Park back in 2008. There are three distances (7km, 12km, 20km). Your editor has slowly 'run' the 12km and although challenging it was a fantastic atmosphere. <https://xterrawellington.co.nz/>



Catchpool Stream in Autumn  
Photo: Tony Harcourt

## Jack Skellett Bequest



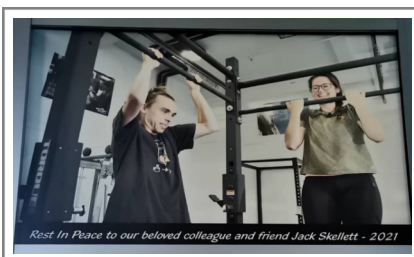
In December 2021, Jack Skellett a young man in his early 20's, tragically died in a kayaking accident on Wellington Harbour.

Jack had a great personality and sense of humour and had already achieved a great deal in his life. His care for the environment was reflected in how he shopped, lived and travelled - with his skateboard his preferred means of commuting. He had been offered a job teaching in Korea and was saving to pay off his student loan before he travelled.

He was also passionate about conservation and loved the outdoors, with birdlife his particular interest. He enjoyed tramping in the Remutaka ranges, with Baine-iti (reputedly the oldest of the Ōrongorongo huts) being his favourite. The photo above is of one of these trips.

Jack particularly enjoyed football and had played for Tauranga as a youth, Otago University AFC as a player and coach and Wellington University AFC. The Otago University Football Club lower grades now play an annual tournament for the Jack Skellett memorial cup.

His loss was also deeply felt by his workmates, and the Wellington Recreation Centre where Jack worked have a memorial glass panel in their entrance.



Memorial glass panel



Mum Karen with son Jack

Despite his youth and need for outdoor equipment, he still managed to save money. His mother, Karen wished a fitting memorial to Jack and so decided to donate \$8,000 from his savings to the Remutaka Conservation Trust. This is obviously a significant amount of money for us and we are incredibly honoured to be the recipient.

In discussions with her, we decided to allocate \$5,000 to the Kiwi project, \$2,000 to the restoration project and \$1,000 to support the Kiwi Aversion Training courses. We will also plant a Totara tree in Jack's honour in a suitable place. Totara is significant in this instance as it is the preferred species for carving canoes.

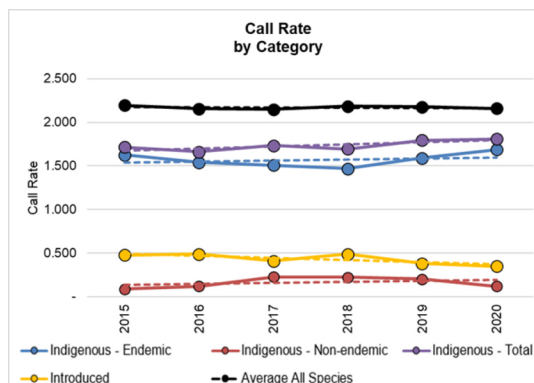
The Committee on behalf of the Trust, passed on our condolences to Karen on her loss and we will do all that we can to honour Jack's memory through the appropriate use of his bequest funds.



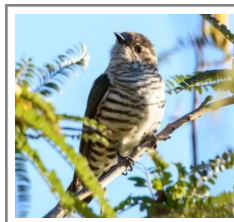
## Bird Species Surveyed

Understanding the presence and variety of bird species in the Park is an important indicator of the state of biodiversity and the effectiveness of our predator control efforts. To identify what is happening to bird numbers in the Trust's trapping area, six annual diurnal (daytime) bird surveys were undertaken in November through January from 2015 to 2020. These surveys utilised acoustic recorders to detect which bird species were calling, and the frequency of calls. Winifred Long has shared the results with us.

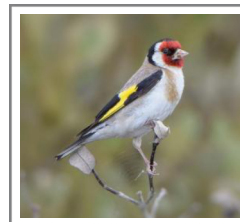
The annual call rates by species classification are illustrated on the graph below, with the dotted trend lines identifying whether the call rates are increasing or decreasing for each category.



Indigenous endemic:  
Miromiro (North  
Island Tomtit)  
Shellie Evans



Indigenous non-  
endemic: Pipiwaharuroa  
(shining cuckoo)  
Leon Berard

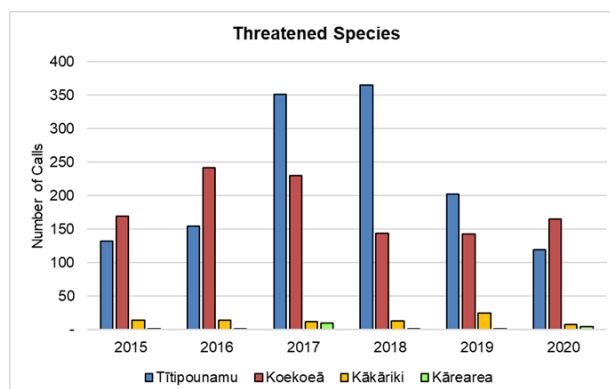


Introduced: Kōurarini  
(Goldfinch)  
Tony Whitehead

- \* Over the six years the number of bird species detected fluctuated between 19 species in 2017 to 22 in 2018, with a total of 26 species in all as a few species were heard in some years but not others.
- \* The most frequently heard species was the miromiro (North Island tomtit) with 9,109 calls, followed by the tūi/korimako (tui/bellbird) combination (8,621 calls). The least common was the sulphur crested cockatoo which was heard in two sound bites in 2015.
- \* The overall call rate across all species was static over the six surveys. However, the call rate for species only found in New Zealand (indigenous endemic) increased by 4%, and the average native self-introduced species (indigenous non-endemic) call rate increased by 38%. The increase for the combined indigenous species was 5%, a positive result, but whether this 5% increase is statistically significant is yet to be tested.
- \* Over the same period, the average rate for introduced species steadily reduced, with a 27% decrease overall.

Four species heard in the surveys; titipounamu (rifleman), koekoeā (long-tail cuckoo), kākāriki (parakeet), and kārearea (New Zealand falcon), are considered threatened as they are either declining in number or nationally vulnerable.

- \* All four species were heard in all years although the Kārearea was infrequently detected with a maximum of 10 calls heard in any one year.
- \* The most frequently heard threatened species was the titipounamu with 1,327 calls over the six years, an average call rate of 0.134, with the number of calls fluctuating significantly by year as shown by the blue columns in the graph.





## Joint Monitoring Team

The leaders of the diurnal bird, kiwi and bat acoustic monitoring project have joined forces, to support each other and lighten the load. The new monitoring team is coordinated by Winifred Long, Susan Ellis and Fanny Leduc.

The coordination, execution, analysis and reporting of each project should be easier. In particular, the kiwi acoustic survey is taking place on an ever growing area of the park which requires a lot of volunteer effort to set up and bring in recorders. Also, the diurnal bird survey requires a lot of volunteer hours interpreting the recordings.

As we have a good baseline of kiwi and diurnal bird data, these projects will now be done every 3 years. We will also work with Meg Shaw to support her lizard monitoring project as needed. Our plans are as follows:

- \* Diurnal birds: 2023 & 2026
- \* Kiwi and lizards: 2024 & 2027
- \* Bats: 2025 & 2028

## Volunteer "Crutch-up"?

With three good legs between them, these volunteers enjoyed swapping war stories at a RCT volunteer CATCH-up.



FYI - none of the injuries were sustained during their work in the park!! Wishing them all a speedy road to recovery.

## US Secretary Praises Conservation Efforts

In February, US Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland visited New Zealand at the invitation of Minister of Foreign Affairs Nanaia Mahuta to highlight the United States' role as a Pacific nation and the importance of international cooperation on addressing climate change and honouring Indigenous communities.

Secretary Haaland accompanied by US Ambassador to NZ Tom Udall and his wife Jill spent a morning in the Remutaka Forest Park. Following the mihi whakatau, they were given an overview of DOC and the Trust's work, before a short walk in the Catchpool. RCT volunteer Peter Cooper did a fantastic job championing the Trust and highlighting the bird information panels.



The DG of DOC and Jack Mace accompanying Secretary Haaland along the Catchpool Loop Track

Secretary Haaland described the Remutaka Forest Park as "an amazing system of trails that allow visitors to explore beautiful outdoor landscapes right near a major city". She also stressed in a tweet: "as we address the climate crisis, it's imperative that people everywhere have access to nature and become stewards of these special places"

We understand that the visit was a real highlight of her trip. The Secretary commented how pleased she was to be able to see Aotearoa's conservation efforts "in real life."

Photo credits: Ola Thorsen



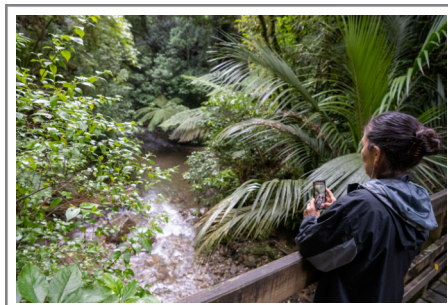
The group in front of the waharoa



Melody meeting Secretary Haaland



Ambassador Udall and Secretary Haaland at the RCT interpretive signs at the start of the Orongorongo Track



Catchpool Loop Track bridge



## Help Needed

The Committee is looking for a volunteer or team of volunteers to replace Rosemary Thompson and Sarah Hutchison as sponsorship coordinator(s) for the Trust.

As a non profit volunteer run organisation, the Trust relies on funding for day to day operations and to promote our conservation work. The sponsorship coordinator(s) work with the committee to help secure funding and work with our amazing sponsors. Together with our sponsors and supporters we can achieve our goals.

If you are interested, or if you know of anyone else who might be, please email us [sponsors@remutaka.nz](mailto:sponsors@remutaka.nz). We will arrange an introduction to the role and support to get up and running.

## How to Donate

Please email [sponsors@remutaka.nz](mailto:sponsors@remutaka.nz) with your donation amount and contact details. You will receive a receipt and we are a registered charity (CC37211) for tax deductible claims.

Deposits can be made directly to Rimutaka Forest Park Charitable Trust 02 0544 0002549 00 (make sure that you also include your surname so that we can associate the payment with your donation)

**Thank you to the following key sponsors as well as all of you who sponsor kiwi, transmitters, traps and trees for your continued annual support**



William Noel Pharazyn Charitable Trust



Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*



CALTEX

