

Waitutu Field Trip Report Feb 2017
14th – 20th February

This report summarises a quarterly monitoring trip with the usual tracking tunnel monitoring lines run, seed fall collected and all traps checked and rebaited. In addition, the results from the post control possum monitoring carried out between 27th of February and the 3rd of March are also included.

Weather:

The weather for the trip was fine, very warm with light winds for both trips.

Personnel:

Quarterly monitor

- Poteriteri – Terry Greene & Paul Van Dam Bates
- Crombie – Peter Dilks
- Waitutu – Colin Bishop, Rose Collen & Inge Kluts
- Slaughter Burn – Steve Fortune
- Grant Burn – Ross Curtiss

Possum monitor

- Slaughter Burn – Colin Bishop
- Grant Burn – John Garrett

Terry & Colin flew in earlier in the day with a TV3 media team to do some filming for a news item on the recovery of kaka in Waitutu Forest. This story received quite a bit of positive coverage through several national media outlets as follows:

<https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/south-island-kaka-making-remarkable-recovery-after-being-nearly-wiped-decade-ago>

Kaka flying high in Fiordland

From Newshub

Published 21:31 06/03/2017

South Island kākā make spectacular comeback

From Radio New Zealand

Published 20:49 06/03/2017

Fiordland kaka make "phenomenal" comeback

From Southland Times

Published 14:14 06/03/2017

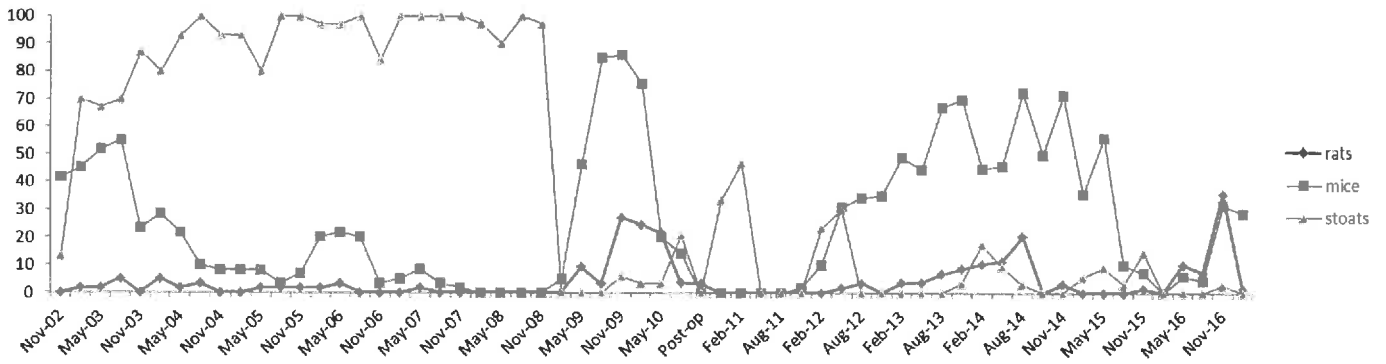
Also from [Yahoo](#), [MSN](#)

[Kaka a comeback story](#) - Dominion Post - 6th Mar 2017

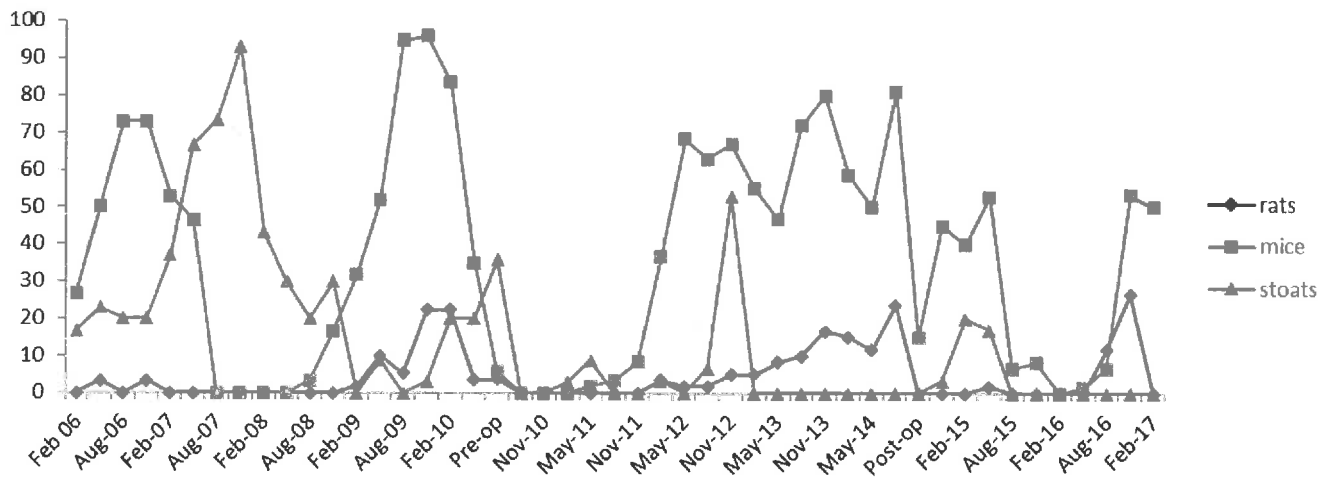
Tracking Tunnels

Predator control was carried out in November 2016. Cereal pellets containing biodegradable 1080 were applied over 30,000 ha. Tracking rates for rats were trending rapidly upwards prior to the 1080 operation but have taken a big hit. Mice have increased at coastal Waitutu and Crombie and dropped off slightly at the other sites and tracking rates for stoats remain low.

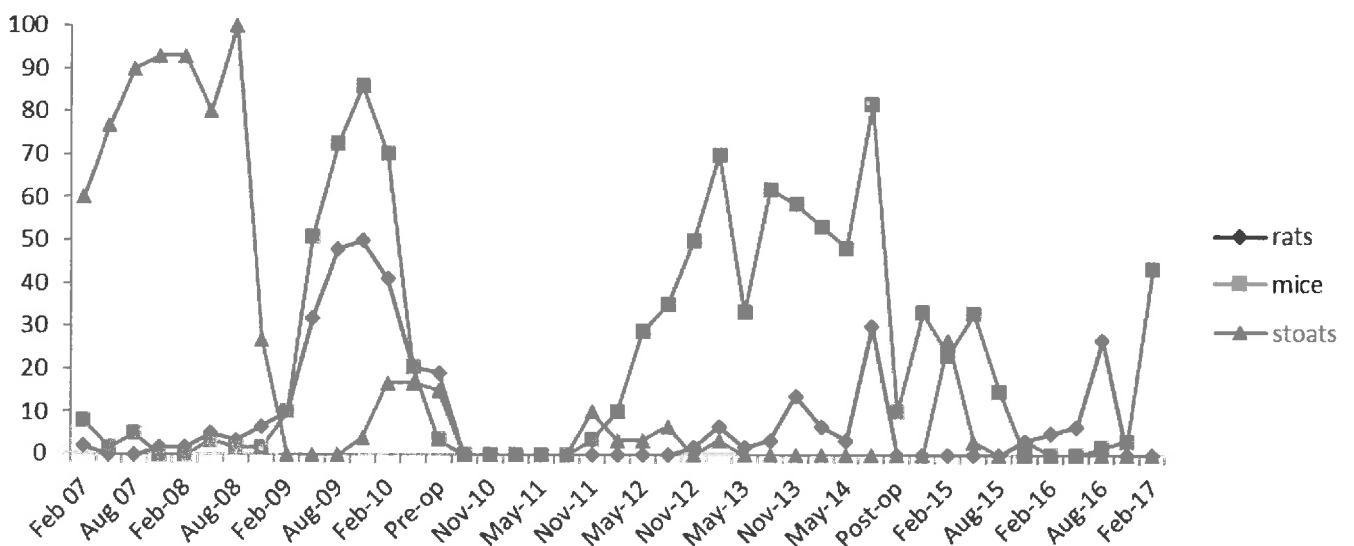
Slaughter Burn - % of tunnels tracked



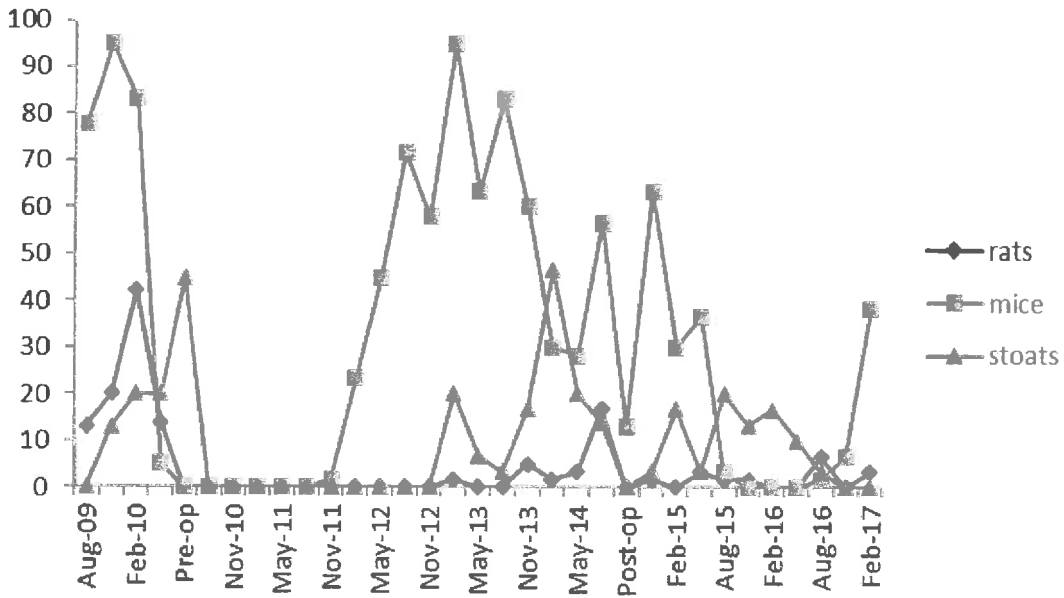
Poteriteri - % of tunnels tracked



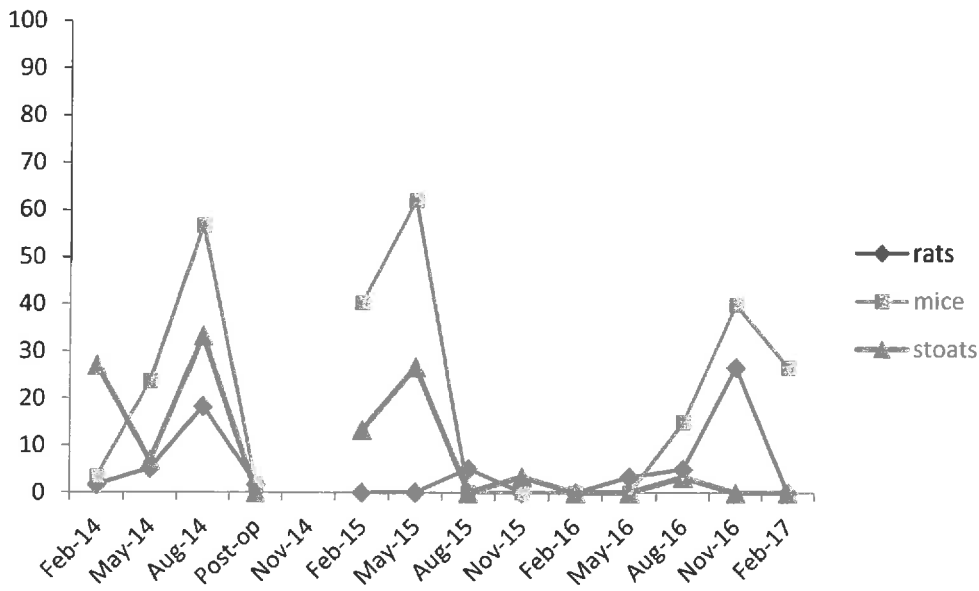
Waitutu - % of tunnels tracked



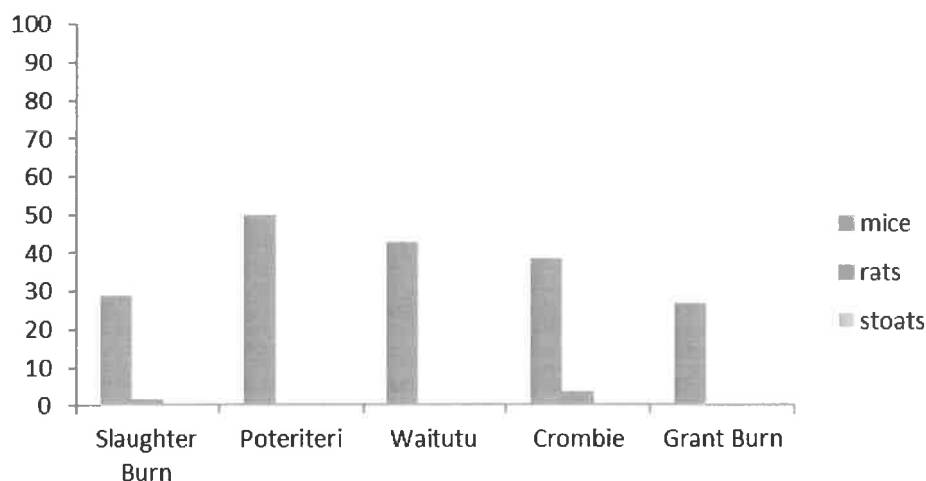
Crombie - % of tunnels tracked



Grant Burn - % of tunnels tracked



Feb 2017 - all areas - % of tunnels tracked



The above graph highlights the excellent reduction in rats achieved as a result of the control operation. At times, we get a reasonably good knock down of mice with this method (Waitutu operations in 2010 & 2014 for example) and at other times not. While mice were not specifically targetted it is preferable to get a good reduction in this species. Also, as we learn more about bait application rates, mast levels and timing of operations, we may see a more consistent reduction in mouse abundance.

Stoat traps

All stoat traps were rebaited with fresh salted rabbit meat.

	November 2016			February 2017		
	Waitutu	Poteriteri	Total	Waitutu	Poteriteri	Total
No. of trap boxes checked	201	58	259	201	58	259
Mice	4	7	11	11	3	14
Rats	74	20	94	11	10	21
Stoats	4	3	7	20	11	31
Weasels	1	2	3	1	0	1
Total	83	32	115	43	24	67
% of trap boxes with animals	41.3%	55.2%	44.4%	21.4%	41.4%	25.9%

There were six fresh stoats at Waitutu and one fresh rat in the traps, at Poteriteri there was one fresh stoat, all the rest were old or very old, some are likely to have been caught around the November 1080 operation. Catch rates at Poteriteri were almost twice that of the traps further south and east of the Waitutu River. There were higher numbers of stoats captured within both blocks compared to the November trap check which corresponds with departure of young stoats from dens and their dispersal into the wider environment. As there was virtually no stoat tracking in February the 1080 operation also appears to have achieved an excellent reduction in numbers of this species.

Possum monitoring results

Pre-control possum monitoring was carried out in early 2016. Results showed that possum abundance in the area between the Waitutu and Wairaurahiri River was low (<2% RTC), however the possum abundance in the area west of the Waitutu was 13% rtc, up from zero after the 2014 control operation. It is clear that this quick increase is due to re-invasion as there is no natural barrier on the western boundary of the block. There will be some consideration given to extending the western operational boundary to Big River and Lake Hakapoua prior to future operations.

Results:

Pre control - 2 to 13% rtc

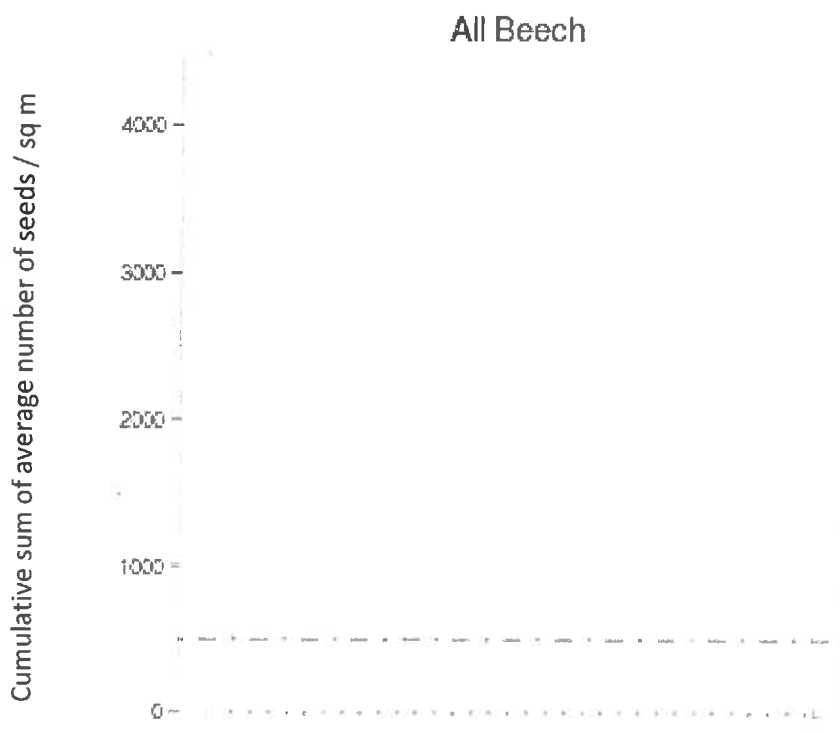
Post control - 0

In search of the Trouser skink

Minnow traps (4) were set around Waitutu Hut in an effort to recapture the skink that Terry discovered in his trousers at this hut on the previous trip (it was photographed before being released into the woodpile). Skinks are rare in Waitutu and after studying the photos experts suspect this may be a new species. Traps were baited with pieces of fresh pear and checked twice a day. No skinks were captured.

Seed rain – how big was the 2016 mast event?

The 2016 mast event in Waitutu was significant. In the graph below the yellow and pink lines indicate number of seeds per square metre, collected in Waitutu. Yellow shows seed rain levels for 2016, pink 2015. Anything above the red line is considered a high seedfall event.



Bird Lists for each site

As conditions continue to improve for native fauna in Waitutu it will be useful to keep a running tally of species richness during the quarterly monitoring trips in addition to the more formal bird counts conducted in November.

Species	Pot.	Crom.	SB	Y22	GB	Comment
SI Pied Oystercatcher						
Variable Oystercatcher					✓	Pair on beach at river mouth
Grey Duck						
Paradise Shelduck		✓	✓	✓	✓	Pair with three juveniles at mouth of Grant Burn
Black Shag	✓			✓		Flying past hut at Pot & Y22. Also at mouth of Grant Burn
White-faced Heron					✓	Pair at mouth of Grant Burn
NZ Falcon	✓			✓	✓	One seen at Poteriteri beech taking interest in observer. Near TT36 at Grant Burn. TT40 & AB19 at Y22
Kereru	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Scattered not that common at Pot. Common at Y22
Kea						
Kaka	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Throughout area but very quiet compared to November. Heard regularly at Y22
YCP	✓	✓				Reasonably common, at least two lots of begging chicks seen.
Parakeet spp.		✓	✓	✓	✓	Commonly heard/widespread
Ruru	✓	✓	✓			Heard near Pot Hut, GB Hut, line 2 in Crombie
Rifleman	✓		✓	✓		Common
Grey Warbler	✓	✓		✓	✓	Very quiet, family with recently fledged begging juveniles observed at Pot. Common at Y22
Bellbird	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Quite at Pot, common at GB & Y22, high numbers at SB
Tui	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Mohua						
Brown Creeper	✓	✓		✓	✓	Scattered groups, common
Fantail	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Very common
Tomtit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Very common
SI Robin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Very common. Big increase in numbers at Y22, GB & Crom
Silvereye	✓	✓		✓		One heard
Blackbird	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Scattered throughout
Song Thrush					✓	
Starling						

Chaffinch	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	One seen on beach few in forest
Greenfinch						
Redpoll	✓					Few around hut
Black backed Gull	✓			✓	✓	
Pied Shag				✓	✓	Knife & Steel Harbour
Long tailed cuckoo	✓	✓		✓	✓	Scattered throughout - calling
Kingfisher	✓					Two heard.
Fernbird					✓	SC track between GB & Y22
Dunnock				✓		
Black billed gull					✓	10-12 flying past rock platform west of GB

Other stuff....

Slaughter Burn

- Slashed all TT lines
- Slashed and marked WTL line from WTL19 to WTL17
- Seed rain collected

Poteriteri

- Bottom end of RV trimmed
- S trap line is very overgrown and needs a lot of work.
- All tracking tunnel lines need trimming and line 6 needs to be marked with pink triangles as flagging tape is disappearing
- All bird count lines need checking and tape replaced with triangles
- All trap lines need cutting particularly top end of RV line (from track to RV8); South Line from Blackwater Stream (bird count line 23) to beach; windfalls on BL line and section on slope between BL 7-8
- Removal of old Fenn traps, metal covers and nova coil pipes from old kaka nest sites (bird count station 21); Trap R3; bird count line 26
- A more permanent fixing for the nova-lite panel on the hut roof
- More yellow markers are required between traps R8 to R10

Waitutu

- Over 100 shark heads were observed on the beach west of the river mouth. It looks like these were dumped by fishermen and washed ashore. I estimate that the heads had been removed from sharks ranging from 3 to 5-foot-long (seven-gill sharks perhaps?). Large numbers of black-backed gulls were mourning the dead.
- Fresh pig rooting between WTL 5 & 6 and WTR 1 to 9
- Landcare gear needs to be stropped out from WTL15
- Cut track from 'P' bird count line to NL10
- Cut parts of 54L to large treefall in Gully & re-routed track around it; cut and re-routed track around large slip at TT33
- Cut and marked 55 line up to trap 8
- Repaired deer enclosure (not breached) one and check all others.
- Deer enclosure 1 and Landcare enclosure could both do with maintenance; required: wire strainers warratahs (short and long) number 8 wire, stainless steel lacing wire, sledge hammer, wire cutters.
- Large number of scotch thistles pulled from in front of hut
- Rubbish collected and flown out from around hut.
- TCE and WTL lines south of trap 12 could do with remarking

Crombie

- The whole circuit could do with a cut-back and more yellow markers in places (especially between lines 4 to 5). Might need two people at this site next trip to tidy route up.

- A good folding saw would be helpful to cut some of the flood debris from around log bridges.
- Only two sand flies seen

Grant Burn

- Walked to Waitutu Hut's TCE & WTL lines and checked and rebaited traps.
- Plenty of pig sign on South Coast Track between Grant Burn and Waitutu and on line 5
- Made improvements to river crossing log on Side Burn.
- Whole tracking tunnel route completely cut/trimmed
- No possum disturbance on tracking tunnels
- A small plane – blue Cessna RHR S6S Coyote 11, was found parked on the beach on Sunday 19th. Nobody about. The Plane was heard to land around 10am and then took off at 2pm with what looked like one occupant on-board.

Note: further investigation identified this as a Microlight class plane