



Weka Watch

newsletter

July 2018



An unbanded weka at Waiti Bay foraging in debris washed down the creek in the January storms

In this newsletter you can read about:

- The thirteenth year of weka counting at Kawakawa Bay,
- weka sightings in our area and our changing weather,
- trapping a huge number of rats,
- new road signs,
- some citizen science

DISAPPOINTING RESULTS IN THIRTEENTH YEAR OF WEKA COUNTING AT KAWAKAWA BAY

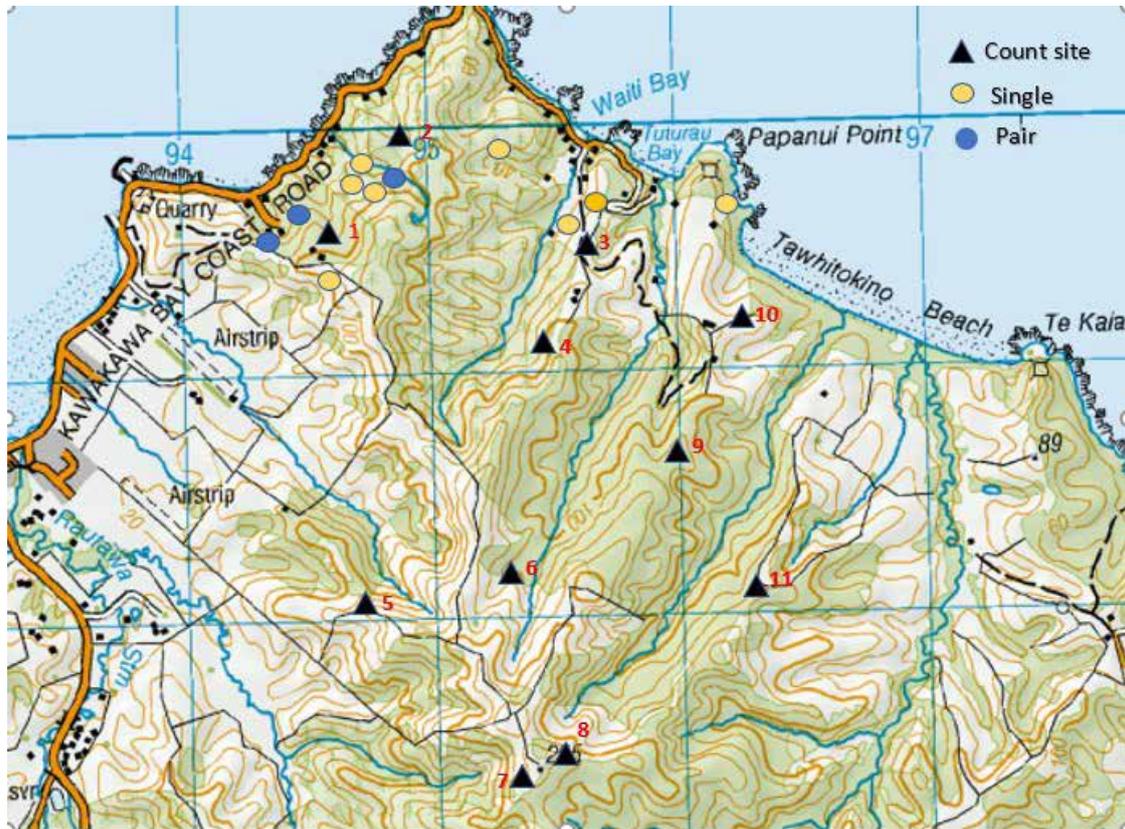
Hughie the weather man was not on the side of the weka counters this year. We only needed three fine Saturdays and two of the four we selected meant a postponement. Some of the weka were calling, but not all that we knew about. However the results over the three count nights are the ones that must stand. We have recorded the lowest total ever; even the first exploratory counts in 2005 recorded 16 birds. The major difference from

last year is the non-detection of weka back from the coast. No weka were heard from Sites 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11. (refer to the count map)

It is possible WekaWatch will conduct a second count later in the year. We have not done this before but we feel that we might need a second weka count considering this decline in numbers.



Fig 1 – Total number of weka counted at 11 fixed sites at Kawakawa Bay in March-April 2010-2018



2018 WEKA COUNTS



2018 counters get ready to set out

STOP PRESS: A SAD ACCIDENT - AND A LOSS TO OUR SMALL POPULATION



After this bulletin went to 'press' in early July the population in Te Papa Road suffered a blow - literally - from a badly placed snap trap. Sheila, partner of Tipene, appeared with her bill clearly damaged. She was unable to pick up food with its tip though we learnt that she could manage a raisin or a small piece of cheese. Unable to forage on her own she would eventually starve. After 4 days of trying we

caged her and took her to the NZ Centre for Conservation Medicine at the Zoo where they confirmed that the injury was severe inside the bill too and 'not salvageable'. She was euthanized. With her death the number of known breeding pairs in the area is down to 2.

There is video footage of Sheila in happier times on our Facebook page www.facebook.com/wekawatch.co.nz

SIGHTINGS OF WEKA IN OUR AREA

Now in July there are two weka pairs in Te Papa Road (one pair called loudly during our most recent committee meeting) and a chick - just one fleeting sighting of it; we hope it survives the winter. There is a third pair just over the ridge, Kermit and Roxy; though they have been seen mating more than once there is no sign of these antics being productive.

We are very interested to note that in contrast to the many weka, there are now no Californian quail in Te Papa Road - where have they gone?

Rainfall is recorded daily in Te Papa Road. In the first 6 months of 2018 we received 849 mm. This is more than 33 inches in 'old rain' which somehow sounds a lot more. So our impression that the weka habitat is damp are borne out by the numbers. This continuing rain means weka do not need to come to gardens for water as often and the natural food supply is abundant in the damp leaf litter and so they are not seen as often.



A weka visiting our treasurer

We get weka news from the rest of Kawakawa Bay Coast Road, and residents give us reliable reports of weka at Waiti Bay and behind Tawhitokino Beach. A kayaker told us of recent weka calls from the inaccessible point one bay beyond Tawhitokino. Weka seem to be back at Orere Point (3 reports) and we even had one report of a weka crossing the road well south of Orere. So please do keep all reports coming; we like to know what is going on! Post news on our Facebook page or contact us through our website.

TRAPPING

The lines in the core weka area are cleared every month, and some more often. Like everyone else we have caught huge numbers of rats so far in 2018, more than 270 up to the end of June.

A rat matures sexually at age three to four months, has 8 to 10 young per litter and can have up to 6 litters per year. So one pair of rats can produce as many as 2,000 descendants in a year if left to breed unchecked. Our traps must have made a huge dent in the potential rat population.



Left: Rat. This screwdriver is 23 cm long!

Rats are omnivorous; they forage for things like seeds and grains, small invertebrates and worms. These are just the things that weka and other native birds like to feed on. Rats also raid birds' nests for eggs and eat the young.

So even though rats are not a direct threat to adult weka, any way you look at it, every dead

rat is a good rat and our 270 trapped are fantastic!

We encourage the use of rat poisons that have no secondary kill and we let local residents know that through WekaWatch they can buy a small box (100g) of weka-safe Racumin (coumatetralyl) for the same price as in the shops.

And are we trapping our target predators, the mustelids? Just 2 stoats and 2 weasels in the past 6 months.

SOME CITIZEN SCIENCE

We reported in the January newsletter that we were trialling a loaned Good Nature A12 possum trap. After 6 months it had caught one possum while the nearby Timms traps continued taking a number of them. We have returned the trap to its owner.

So now we are running a different trial. We were unable to answer two questions :-

1. 'If a trap has killed a predator, how long ago did the trap fire and how long has it therefore been unable to trap again?' and
2. 'What do we know about the age of the mustelid population in our area?'

First we reluctantly carried out a test to see how long it took a dead rat to go from fresh to smelly-maggoty to dehydrated!!! We are now recording the state of decay of all trapped animals and know that most rats have been in the trap for at least 3 weeks before they are cleared.

Even more reluctantly, we retrieve all mustelid heads (or whole bodies) to double bag and seal tightly in a box in the freezer for further study (by Tony, our weka man!). The age can be determined from the skull. This is real citizen science - done with thick

gloves and breath on hold!

Read on for a story direct from some trappers . . .

As they say on The Chase, "Just another day at the office Bradley."

He climbed the fence, she stayed well away. He opened the trap, she asked what was in it.

He said 'A horrible rotten maggot ridden weasel'. She said 'We need to take back the head!'

He says. . . "Yes - as the requirement to retrieve all mustelid skulls for identification was mandatory, decapitation was the only possible way to secure our trophy head. A make-shift mortician's operating slab was now sought. On spying a convenient horizontal manuka log, the unfortunate weasel was laid out for direct attention of the sharp French blade neatly folded in my pocket. (There are some cases where the French Connection is very helpful.) She was now totally upset and abandoned ship as the blade came down. The severed head, tossed on the grass for collection, now had 'she' in rapid retreat, you get the picture!!!"

She refused to carry the trophy back so he put it multi bagged in his trapping caddy. Now it is securely locked in an airtight box in a freezer.



Above: *Tipene out foraging along a bush track*



ROAD SIGNS

Thank you to Auckland Transport for two more weka warning signs on Coast Road. It took 15 months but they are now there for all to see.



PAINTING THE FLOCK

Further weka shapes for our weka flock are available. Undercoated weka are available at the garage for \$10 each. Beautifully and uniquely painted weka ready to install are \$25. They can be viewed by texting 027 2925175 and arranging a time to select one (or more!). They will also be available at a WekaWatch market stall once the Saturday morning weather improves.

THANK YOU

Thank you to the Kawakawa Bay Community Association for their generous grant to cover the cost of 400 more freeze dried rabbit baits for our traps. This is sufficient for another three months of predator control in the weka area.

COMMITTEE

Our small committee meets regularly to plan for the future and to share news and observations. We made a submission on the Proposed Regional Pest Management Plan to Auckland Council, addressing those sections where their protocols and funding could affect the survival of rare species like the North Island weka.

There is a vacancy on the committee should there be someone out there who would like to support our efforts to improve the natural environment for all wildlife in Kawakawa Bay.

Want to be involved? Contact us on

<https://www.facebook.com/wekawatch.co.nz/>
<http://www.wekawatch.co.nz/>
wekawatchkbc@gmail.com

Your committee hopes you have enjoyed this short update on the happenings at Kawakawa Bay!

COMMITTEE:

Rosemary Cotman - Chair
Barbara Strong - Secretary
Nadine Burgess - Treasurer
Trish Simmonds - Publicity
Denise Moyle - Website, Facebook
John Cotman - Trapline management
Michelle Hollings - Orere liaison
Lindsey Britton - Links us to the wider conservation world

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