



TONGARIRO TIMES

The newsletter for the Tongariro Natural History Society
March 2011

A Special Thanks to Craters of the Moon Trust for their Contribution to this Year's Internship Programme

Assistance for the Project Tongariro Internship Programme

Last year, Project Tongariro was successful in gaining a grant of \$8,000 from the Craters of the Moon Trust to help put towards our summer internship programme in the park. The students who took part in the internship are all studying environmental management at University of Waikato. The aim of the programme is to provide New Zealand students the chance to gain hands-on experience which is relevant to their chosen area of study. The grant enabled Project Tongariro to host four interns working over three months of the 2010/2011 summer. The interns worked on a range of projects within Tongariro National Park alongside Doc staff and Project Tongariro volunteers. They focused especially on the Rotopounamu Restoration project and assisted with pest control and monitoring flora and fauna. In addition they played an important role in informing visitors to the site about the restoration project by acting as roving interpreters, especially supporting school groups and visitors over the school holidays.

Project Tongariro is extremely grateful to have had the support of the Craters of the Moon Trust and hopes to be able to continue to work together in the future. The Trust offers a fantastic service to the Taupo community regularly investing money back into the local area. Please check out their website www.cratersofthemoon.co.nz



Photo: Craters of the Moon Trustee Eileen Coe, Interns Kris Taipeti, Kaitlin Morrison, Stacey Bryan and Gina Heron, Craters of the Moon Trustees Phil Battersby and Alistair Hobson

About the Craters of the Moon Trust

The devastation from the 1987 Bola Cyclone resulted in a large number of radiata pine trees being blown down. The Department of Conservation was required to spend the "windfall" of monies raised by the subsequent sale of timber back in the park. One of the main activities was to change the entrance to the Craters of the Moon thermal area. The provision of the formed sealed access road, some magnificent indestructible concrete toilets, plus two large sealed car parks some 2km from SH1 were a direct result of the monies raised by the sale of the timber.

However, DOC, in providing the car parks, didn't take into consideration the isolation of the area. It quickly became a feeding frenzy for the less lawful in the community. There were constant

break-ins of cars left in the car parks while their owners were taking the 30 - 45 minute walk around the thermal area. Outraged local solicitor Jeremy Nash decided something needed to be done. He consulted the local newspapers and radio stations and ran a promotion seeking volunteers who would sit in their cars in the car park, thereby maintaining passive security during daylight hours.

And so the Craters of the Moon Trust was formed in 1991; starting from small beginnings to currently having two thriving kiosks at Huka Falls car park and Craters of the Moon car park. The monies raised from donations, admission fees and the sale of souvenirs has enabled the trust to donate to a number of charities as well as offer scholarships.

Appointment of Project Coordinator



The Executive of Project Tongariro are very pleased to announce the appointment of Nina Manning as their new Project Coordinator. Project Tongariro's President Karen Williams said 'This is a pivotal position and role. Nina brings a great set of skills and experience both working in conservation and with the community around the central North Island. We are very excited with this appointment. Nina is well known and connected to the people and communities surrounding the lake and the mountain. We know she will make Project Tongariro stronger as an active community group working in the region.' Nina's

response to the appointment was 'Wow! I am absolutely delighted. I have really enjoyed the summer months that I have already spent temporarily working in the role. It's exciting to know that I can continue working with the members and the community of the region on exciting projects that are so important like the Rotopounamu and South Taupo Wetland Restoration. Everyone from Project Tongariro staff, members, interns, DOC staff, community members and sponsors have been so supportive and helpful, so a big thanks to you all. I am looking forward to working with you all into the future.'

Nina's story... I started off my conservation journey in 2003 when I was first appointed Supervisor of the Whakapapa Visitor Centre where I spent three and a half years. What a fantastic way to learn not only about Tongariro National Park but all the different projects going on in and around this area. Wanting a new challenge, I took on working with the management of concessions with the DOC Ruapehu Area office for another year before gaining the opportunity to become the Tongariro Taupo Conservancy Didymo Coordinator.

This role enabled me to really develop the Didymo campaign in the local area and make it one of the most successful and proactive Didymo campaigns nationally. It also opened my eyes to working with the community and community groups. This experience showed me the power of a motivated community to make a difference. I was able to join the national "Check Clean Dry" advisory board, national DOC Didymo group and coordinate our local regional partnership group. I stayed in this role for two years until I had my son Ben.

This is an amazing opportunity to work for Project Tongariro and I am looking forward to working alongside the executive committee to bring Project Tongariro to its next phase and closer to the regional community. I look forward to meeting more of you in the near future.

From Pests to Profit - Our Very Own Shirley Potter was Featured in the Waikato Times

by Jeff Neems (Waikato Times)

Shirley Potter's roadside sign points to her battle with an Aussie Pest. Potter, a Tauranga-Taupo resident, is on a mission to eradicate the Australian brush tail possum from the area and she is turning the pesky critters into goods for sale. Appropriately enough, the day I whizzed by, there was a possum squashed on the road a metre or two from the sign. "Oh, good," Potter said when it was pointed out. "I don't know how it got through our arsenal of traps though." Potter's white and red sign is a 100% recycled item. She made it herself from an old baby's cot and the wheels came from outdoor furniture a nephew was getting rid of. The sign goes out "just when we are going to be home for a good stretch of time". Potter's been punishing the marsupials for some time and is closely involved with possum education around Taupo. "We started killing possums because they started eating all the walnuts on our tree about five years ago. Then I saw some beautiful skins in Opossum World in Napier and thought 'this is crazy'. Why would we want to waste all these beautiful skins?" Potter used to bury her furry victims, but after that visit had a friend showed her how to skin the animals. "It was moderately grim the first couple of times but you just get over it." Potter sends the furs to Merchant Tanners in Woodville. They are shipped back to her to be turned into throws, cushions, lumbar rolls, hot water bottle covers, scarves and other items. Prices vary according to the quality of the time and the fur used. "I had to buy an industrial sewing machine and teach myself to sew - I wished I'd paid more attention in school." The family cats eat the possum meat, which Potter says gives them lovely shiny coats. "Carcasses go to the pigs and nothing goes to waste." Potter's hobby business has yet to really take off, although she is selling a few items through the store at nearby Te Rangiita. "We've sold two scarves at the gate, but we haven't

really had the sign out too often - it hasn't really got much attention yet. But I think over time, we'll get a few more people to stop." Potter chuckles as she explains that the one person who did stop after seeing the sign didn't actually buy anything: "They wanted some knitted [possum fur] stuff." The district's possums aren't the only pests in Potter's sights. "We've got quite obsessive about killing rats and stoats in the area. Through Project Tongariro, we got some funding from Environment Waikato and we've got 50 DOC200 traps throughout the area." The result has been increased regrowth of native plants and protection of native birds in the area. "People are noticing the change." Just like they should notice the sign, when it's out on the corner on State Highway 1.



The Station Gallery & Railway Museum, Ohakune



Ohakune's newest tourist attraction has recently opened in The Station Gallery & Railway Museum. The Gallery is located just along from the railway station at Ohakune Junction. Project Tongariro member and gallery owner, Tracey Thornton who lives in Ohakune has done an amazing job with the help of friends to convert old NZ Railway buildings into a combined gallery museum complex. "The Station Gallery was originally called by the quaint name "The Ways And Works Building" and was built around 1908" says Tracey. "The museum building was built around 1930 for railway sheds and came from Waiouru via Rangataua and re-located to Ohakune around 1990."

- The Gallery offers wildlife and nature artwork and endangered species from around the globe and our Brown Kiwi with Whakamanu Wildlife Trust and DOC.
- The Museum (a work in progress) offers some amazing displays of railway items and a special display of the 1953 Tangiwai disaster. Part of a train engine, now in front of the museum, was found on the site earlier this month.

Tracey believes the gallery could become a base for promoting the Old Coach Road, Hapuawhenua Viaduct and Project Tongariro. For this to happen a lot of input is needed. Tracey would love some help with the museum and displays.

Contact her on tracey.thornton@xtra.co.nz and check out her website on: www.traceythorntonimages.com

Auckland Islands Trip - 16 and 17 April

Saturday 16 April Tiritiri Matangi Island



The island sanctuary offers many walks and points of interest so you can choose whatever suits your fitness level or your interests. The sheer number of endangered birds is quite incredible, you can watch them feeding from cages and troughs around the Island. Check out the most friendly Takahe and an enormous pohutukawa tree.

Cost:

From Auckland

Adult \$66.00, Senior \$59.00, Child \$29.00

From Gulf Harbour

Adult \$49.00, Senior \$44.00, Child \$24.50

Contact: Frank Katavich 09 620 6650 or fkatavich@xtra.co.nz

Sunday 17 April Motuihe Island



Pest-free Motuihe Island has been undergoing restoration for 10 years under the direction of Motuihe Trust in conjunction with DOC. It is a little jewel in the Hauraki Gulf with white sand beaches, easy walks, remnant kohekohe forest and 360 degrees views. Kakariki and tieke (saddleback) abound. We may also see North Island robins and whiteheads. Maori inhabited Motuihe for about 800 years. The island was a quarantine station from 1872. It was also a prisoner-of-war camp and a children's health camp.

Cost: Family \$66.20, adult/senior \$25.20

Contact: Margi Keys 09 443 6919 or
makeys@nettel.net.nz

The Interns Take on Biodiversity

by Jess Scrimgeour Technical Support Officer Fauna - Kai
Maatanga Ao Kararehe Department of Conservation,
Tongariro Whanganui Taranaki Conservancy

In the world of conservation, there always seems an unending amount of work that needs to be done, but never enough time and money to do it all. So when faced with four fresh-faced interns from Project Tongariro, the opportunity for them to help us (DOC) with our work was quickly seized.

Stacey took on the unenviable task of finding green geckos in an unprotected swamp, thought to be a stronghold for this species. However, we had no information about their abundance or distribution, or even whether they were still there. So Stacey trialled the use of tracking tunnels, artificial covers and spotlighting at the swamp, and compared these methods at Pukawa where we knew there were good numbers of the species. Unfortunately none of these methods were successful in detecting the gecko, but her efforts have helped us further understand the difficulty of monitoring these reptiles.



Gina was given ten ultrasonic bat recorders and tasked with finding the rare long and short-tailed bats. She placed the recorders along the edges and within the interior of forests likely to contain bats, and mapped the presence of bats as she found them. She had good success with finding some new locations for long-tailed bats, although the short-tailed bats remain elusive. This is a project that will be continued until our gaps of knowledge are filled and we have a clear understanding of where bats are within the area.

Kaitlin spent an entire month down in the beech forest on the Southern slopes of Mt Ruapehu doing five minute bird counts. Her project focused on determining the success of breeding for bird species after a beech mast* occurred two summers ago, with special focus on the endangered kaka. She found that for most birds, the beech mast sparked an excellent breeding

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season, but they failed to maintain the increase in activity this season once the abundance in food decreased to normal level. We now have a better understanding of the effects of beech masts on the bird populations in that forest.



Kris headed out to Rotopounamu to monitor white mistletoe plants and determine the size and foliage density of the plants in response to the possum control that is occurring. He compared his results to data from 2007/08 to see whether management has benefited the threatened plant. He found that in general the condition of the plants had noticeably improved. He found new plants as well. His work has confirmed that the management occurring has improved the condition of the mistletoe, and using it as an indicator species, the health of the forest as a whole.

My role with the Department as a wildlife

ecologist means that having this work done is invaluable to increasing our understanding of what we're trying to conserve and protect. We will always have a long "to-do" list, and need all the help we can get. I look forward to working with future Project Tongariro interns on similar projects – I already have some goodies up my sleeve!

- In NZ Beech forests (*Nothofagus* spp.), huge production of seeds occurs irregularly and infrequently; when this phenomenon occurs it is called a mast year.

Internship - Reports from their Point of View

by Kris Taipeti

So the best part about doing my placement with Project Tongariro was living in Turangi and meeting all the interesting characters. I feel like I've developed as a person by meeting so many different people and listening to what they say about our environment, and our country's precious wildlife.

Other highlights include the range of work we took part in:

- Rafting to monitor blue duck/whio
- Kayaking through the wetland as part of the DOC summer programme
- Marshalling The Goat and The Tussock Traverse (even though the conditions were miserable, the terrain and surroundings were amazing)
- Chasing kiwi in the wild with the kiwi team
- Running up and down the Rotopounamu lines during bird calls and tracking tunnel days

Everything was awesome. I feel both jealous and excited for the interns next summer!

by Kaitlin Morrison

I am a fourth-year student at the University of Waikato, studying animal biology and ecology. I have had an amazing three months working with Project Tongariro. Some of the highlights from my internship were:

- Undertaking five-minute bird counts and kaka distance sampling in Karioi Rahui
- Working with the DOC kiwi team catching kiwi and releasing chicks back in to the forest
- Working around Lake Rotopounamu doing bird counts, checking weta boxes etc; as well as being involved in many other interesting tasks.

This internship has been a great experience for me, making me even more interested in working towards a career in conservation. I enjoyed my time at Project Tongariro so much and I am lucky to have been able to extend my internship and stay to work in the area for another few months.



Photo: Interns Kris Taipeti, Kaitlin Morrison, Gina Heron, Stacey Bryan and Project Tongariro Summer Coordinator Nina Manning.

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T42 Mountain Bike and Off Road Run/Walk Event



Saturday 7 May 2011

New in 2010, "The T42" is staged on the legendary 42nd Traverse track across the North Island's stunning volcanic Central Plateau. This award winning event offers the following options:

- 45km mountain bike
- 42km off road marathon run
- 24km adventure run / walk
- 11km trail run / walk
- 6.5km family friendly trail run / walk

The inaugural 2010 T42 event won the "BEST EMERGING EVENT" at the annual 2010 NZ Association of Event Professionals national Event Awards. Project Tongariro has the opportunity to have a tent at the finish of this event at the end of the 42 Traverse at the Owango Domain. This is a great fundraising and profile opportunity as there is a real buzz at the finish line. If you are keen to be involved to help with getting our message out there then please email info@tongariro.org.nz . For all other event information go to www.t42.co.nz

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Project Tongariro - Our New, Easy to Say, Everyday Name

by Karen Williams

The first logo of the Tongariro Natural History Society was black and white and designed by Jeremy Bennett of the Wellington Polytechnic School of Design in the 80s. In time a more colourful version was adopted based on the initial sketch of the park's volcanoes.

The evolution continues. Like many organisations we have refreshed our logo but retained key elements. While the official name of our incorporated society still stands - Tongariro Natural History Society - it has always been a bit of mouthful. This led many people to call us "TNHS" which president Karen Williams believes does nothing to help our profile or tell people about the amazing work we do. "We've been a bit of a secret society and I believe the move to a new and more active brand will help us attract members and partners. Our patron, Sir Tumu te Heuheu understands the reason for the change and says he is pleased to support the committee in its decision to promote a name change to 'Project Tongariro'."

The executive is leading the charge and believes using the new name will eventually result in greater awareness and understanding about the work of the society in Tongariro National Park. So while the name on our constitution and chequebook hasn't changed, please support us by adopting our new more active name of 'Project Tongariro'.



TONGARIRO
NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY



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