

# NEWSLETTER July 2020

Greetings to you all,

The world has drastically changed since our last newsletter but rats still keep on keeping on, so here is an update on what has been happening in our neck of the woods ie Ohinetonga Scenic Reserve.

## OWHANGO ALIVE - Chairman's Report:

Covid 19 certainly brought a quick halt to our trapping programme within the Ohinetonga Scenic Reserve. We were lucky to be able to continue with some of our trap checking on private land surrounding the Reserve and north of the village. A big thanks to Dave Edhouse and Gordy Bryan who are trapping along the Kakahi stream and catching a number of ferrets and other predators.

Trap data for the months of March, April, May & June are as follows:

Mice - 12, Weasels - 1, Rats - 349, Hedgehogs - 41, Possums - 15, Stoats - 17, Ferrets - 7, Feral Cats - 15.

There has been an influx of rats into residents' homes in the last few weeks - nothing like a warm human's home to settle in to for winter! Volunteers have helped out with despatching the pesky intruders from some of these homes – many thanks for the generous donations to our cause.

## TRAP MAINTENANCE:

During the lockdown and since level two was introduced, David Johnston has repaired over 40 of our DOC 200 traps. The traps have been carried in and out from the tracks by Tania Coles, Heather Morrell, Sally Lashmar and myself. Some of the repaired traps had been out in the bush since 2013 so it was time to give them a makeover.

Autumn is a great time to forage for fungi in the bush and we certainly have a great variety in the Ohinetonga Reserve. See below and Owhango Alive's facebook page for some of the fungi found by walkers on the tracks.

That's it from me – if any of you feel like getting involved in any way, just email us at [owhangoalive@yahoo.com](mailto:owhangoalive@yahoo.com) .We'd love to have you on board.

Warm regards,

Mark Fredericks and the OWHANGO ALIVE team.



## FUN FUNGI FINDS WITH FRIENDS - Sally Lashmar

Well, "Lockdown Level 3" certainly gave us the freedom to get back out and explore our special Ohinetonga Scenic Reserve - and indeed, the exploring was good for the soul, the body (that had overeaten) and for the fungi fanatics who love this time of year. Yep, guilty as charged and unashamed to boot, re the fungi foraging and the overeating . Best field mushroom season ever! AND I had friends equally enthused about the fossicking for fungi – truly – as the photos will testify.

There were some lovely finds, and having invested in the book "A Field Guide to New Zealand Fungi" by Shirley Kerr; we were able to identify most of our 'shrooms... which I have learnt is the colloquialism for mushrooms, toadstools and other weird fairy tale stuff. Note to self.... get a good camera and learn how to use it. The biggest excitement was to receive a message, from someone who obviously knew about Owhango Alive, saying that he'd spotted blue mushrooms downstream of the Whakapapa Bridge! Now, these are pretty special, so I charged down to the River to search for them – that took some time of walking along what we call "The Boathole Track". When I say walking, think like an SAS soldier ... step, look left, look right, listen, look again, step, repeat.... and so on.... 600 metres on and I SPOTTED THE BEAUTIES, cobalt blue and gleaming secretively on a grounded punga log! What a find! The colour

looks so unnatural – not at all like something Mother Nature would dish up... they're fabulous.... and some of the other gems discovered on our walks.



## Trap data:

Count - Kill	Kill											Total Result
	Bird	Cat	Ferret	Hedgehog	Mouse	Other	Possum	Rabbit	Rat	Stoat	Weasel	
Sponsor												
Anderson-Smith		1			8		1		46	1		57
Claire Stevens					2				21			23
David Partis and Suzanne Wilkinson					5				23	1		29
Derek & Ann Percy (Trap 1)					1	1			40	1		144
Derek & Ann Percy (Trap 2)					2				41	1		145
Fa'i Pudney, Tauranga									40	2		42
Jacob Simmonds		2		5	5			2	13	3		30
Knowles Family				1	2				28	1		32
Margie Riley			1	1	4				21			27
Martin Bond					5				16	1		22
McEntee Family: "Stumbleduck"					7				40	1		48
McEntee Family: "Weasel Vin Diesel"	1		1		2				50	4		260
Nan & Malcolm Pullman									42			42
Ngakonui Valley School					7				27	1		136
Opie Family									8			8
Phil & Kate Taylor					6				15	1		22
Rachel & Marty Cashin					10				32	3		45
Richard & Felicity Porter									35	1		36
Sally & Mark					2				27	4		134
Shirley and Kevin McEntee				1	4				24	4		336
Simmonds family, Melbourne					1				48	4		53
Stent Family									37			37
Taumarunui Auto Centre					5				30	3		442
The Golden Family					2				14	2		18
TMN Hort and Beaut Soc					2				16			18
Weir Family					6				15			21
Total Result	1	3	2	8	88	1	1	2	749	39		13907

## 5000 KILLS!

In the last newsletter it was noted that the total predators despatched since records began (2012) were over 4100. Let's see how quickly we can get to 5,000. Well we did it!!

A milestone in Owhango Alive's endeavours was reached on Thursday 18 June when the five thousandth predator was caught in one of the traps the group has set out in the Ohinetonga Scenic Reserve. The first recorded predator was caught in January 2013.

When Owhango Alive was first set up there were two teams checking trap lines with twenty traps. Now six teams regularly check each week over two hundred traps throughout the reserve which include various types of trap such as DOC 200, A12, A24 and live capture traps. The most common species caught are rats, followed by stoats, ferrets, weasels and feral cats.



Marion Johnston, Heather Morrell, Brenda Martin, Tim Holmes, Sally Lashmar; Mark Fredericks, David Robinson, Jack and Aaron Owen with some of the predators caught in the traps. Two teams not present in the photograph are Tania Coles and James Chaplin. Past trappers include Peter Lacey, Barry and Colleen Boston and Mark Williams. *Photo by John Martin*

## Why are they called Blue dux?



Above - who in early morning light below the Whakapapa bridge.

Left - once the the harsh winter light kicked in...

*Photos by John Martin*



## Pub Night

Local Owhango Alivians met at the Owhango Pub on Friday 5 June for the first time after lockdown to ostensibly catch up on what the group had been doing and discuss future projects - although the lure of burgers and fish and chips in front of a roaring fire might have had something to do with it!

A visit to the Blue Duck Lodge at Retaruke on Saturday 18 July (see photos at the end of the newsletter) was one of the items discussed along with a "Pestival" and World Rivers Day on the last Sunday in September.

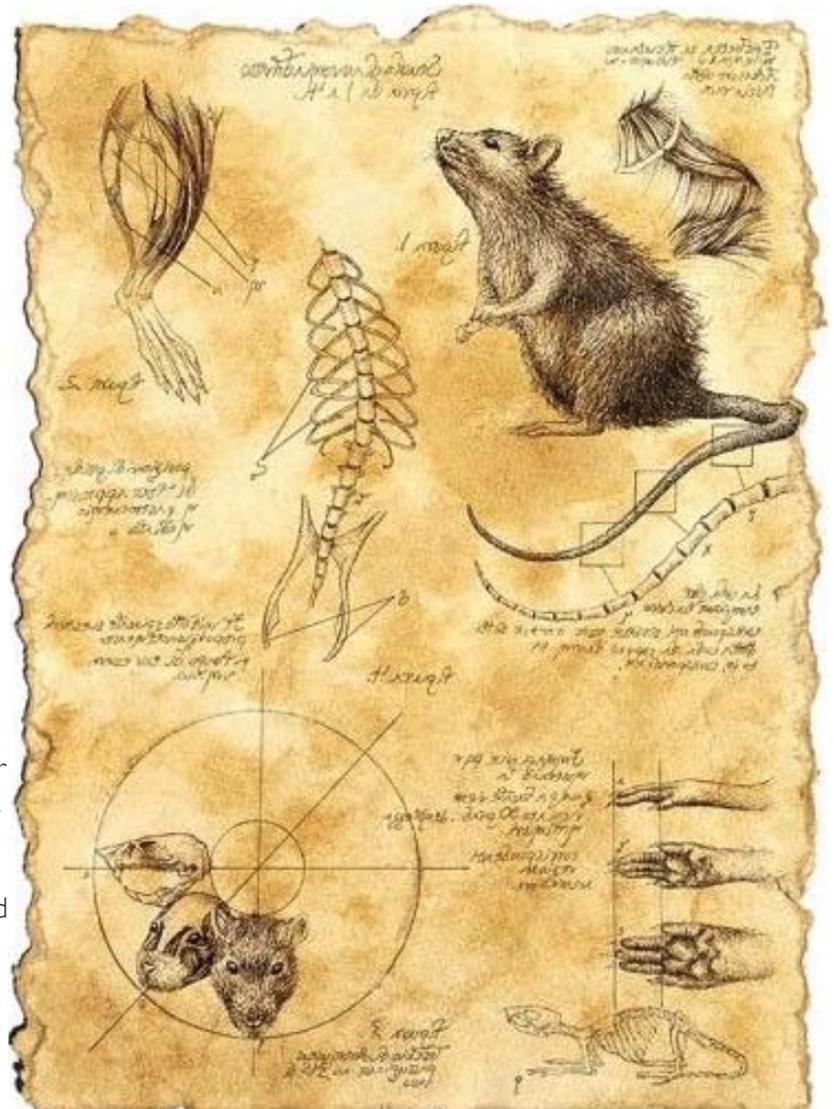
Thanks to Grant Lethborg for providing the convivial surroundings for our get together.

## The Measuring of Rattus Rattus et al. by Marion Johnston

I've only been doing this trapping business for five years and it suddenly dawned on me that I could do with knowing more about rats apart from that the only good one is a dead one – I'm a slow learner. Sally very kindly gave me the loan of a tome on NZ Mammals for me to read all about it. I say a tome because it is really heavy going with tables and figures and words like non-commensal that you have to look up the meaning of in the Glossary – simply it means doesn't live alongside humans, and morph which wasn't in the Glossary. Still, the fact of the matter is that when I really made an effort I realised that I had a little information but all the wrong way round. That ship rats come in several colours, and are almost certainly the kind we are catching in our traps. These are the climbing rats that are so good at raiding nests and they make their own nests off the ground usually.

The other kind which we may have is the Norway rat which is bigger, browner, and hairier and has a significantly shorter tail.

So armed with all this new information Tim and I set out on our trapping lines with pen and paper and a measuring tape. Our first victim had gone into rigour a bit scrunched up so we couldn't see what sex it was but we identified that it had five claws on its rear foot and both body and tail were 180mm. It was blacky grey and the tail was as long as its body so we identified it as a ship rat (morph). Our next customer had been breakfast for something so we had nothing to measure. Then a small grey one and in the last trap on the Swimming Hole line a head only which seemed to have a hairy and larger ear which suggests it might have been a Norway rat but really when examining a bit of rat it is hard to say. This has been happening quite a lot, mainly on the track by the river, and we assume it is stoats, ferrets or cats – going by the surgical neatness I'd say stoat or ferret as cats tend to use their claws and the result is something that looks like bird feathers. We had two more cadavers to measure, both big rats and heavy. The one by the lagoon had its tail shortened but a body length of 210mm and quite a brown coat while the final specimen for the day was grey with a body length of 183mm and a 210mm tail. We thought that only one of our identifiable catch had been female, but that is an area of expertise I need to read more about.



## 2021 Calendar

A shout out for photographs for next year's calendar. We are looking for photos of the fauna and flora of the Ohinetonga Reserve and surrounds as well as activities associated with the reserve and the Whakapapa River. Ideally the photos should be in a landscape format, of a high resolution and taken with a camera although images taken on phones will be considered if they are suitable. Remember that photos may look fine on phone screens but when enlarged for printing can look quite fuzzy.

## Rats will devour your car !!

Karin Brulliard Feb 15 2020 from the Washington Post (edited)

The engine died immediately after Tess Klingenstein turned the key in her Honda Jazz on a mild January day. When she tried again, she said, "every single alert light" flashed. The car was fairly new, so she was surprised. The mechanic who looked under the hood a few days later was not. "You've had rats," Klingenstein, a speech-language pathologist in Washington, said he told her. The rodents had chewed wiring and defecated in air filters, causing US\$300 (NZ\$466) in damage. "He said I had gotten off lucky."

Very lucky. Rats, better known for inhabiting sewers and dumpsters, also love to settle in the innards of vehicles in cooler months. The warmth and shelter attract them, but it's the wires and hoses that entertain them: rats' teeth grow constantly, and they gnaw on things to keep their teeth trim. Inside an engine bay, they can blow fuses, start fires and even total cars.

No one tracks rat damage to cars, but there are signs it is a growing problem amid a nationwide rat population boom that experts say may be fuelled by a warming climate. In the fall, rats set a sedan ablaze in Manhattan. They've mutilated the cars of college students in Florida. In recent years, a half-dozen class-action lawsuits have been filed against auto manufacturers on claims that today's eco-friendlier wiring is irresistible to rodents. The American Automobile Association (AAA) claims that modern cars offer a "smorgasbord of treats" for rats.

"You take your car 20 to 30 years ago, they didn't have that many wires," said Bruce Jenkins, a service fleet manager for the AAA. "Now you have wiring for everything. There's so many different sensors and computers and modules."

In the absence of official statistics, the best barometer for the scope of this issue may be a man who calls himself "Rat King Dave." Three years ago, David Albin was a regular guy who worked in financial services and owned a house in a residential area. Then rats invaded the family cars - inflicting thousands of dollars worth of damage to his Honda Civic and his wife's Hyundai Sonata - and Albin became obsessed with rat deterrence. He has since outlined his strategy on a website ([HowToPreventRatsFromEatingCarWires.com](http://HowToPreventRatsFromEatingCarWires.com)) and in an e-book ("Let's Get Them Rats!").

Rats are not the only animals capable of dismembering cars. Marmots are known to wreak havoc on the cars of visitors to national parks in California, and weasels have forced automakers in Germany to fund defense research. Vultures strip rubber from vehicles, and a class-action suit against Honda described a rabbit "still chewing the wiring while the car was at the dealership" for repairs.

Rats, however, are the major perpetrators in cities such as Washington, which President Donald Trump calls a swamp, but which often seems more like a vast rat burrow. Complaints to the city about rats have soared in recent years - nowhere more than in Klingenstein's Park View neighbourhood - and officials have waged war using solar-powered trash cans and dry ice.

But the rats appear to be winning. They evicted Erica Spencer, 35, from the basement apartment where she paid extra for an alley parking space near food-filled dumpsters, for example. After detecting a burning odour while driving her 2003 Ford Explorer, she discovered a rat nest under the hood, made of "a panty liner and just gross, gross stuff." Poison did not help, nor did repellent packets that smelled of mint, which the culprits simply used to pad the next nest. After rats chewed more than US\$3,000 (NZ\$4,660) worth of damage, Spencer surrendered.

"I had a moment of self-discovery that I shouldn't be living in a place with so many rats. I could afford a better quality of life for myself," said Spencer, an attorney. She moved to a condo building with garage parking, but she kept the Explorer: "We call it the ratmobile. It basically has no factory parts left in the engine."

Blame is often cast on the soy-based wiring insulation that many auto manufacturers now use, which is considered ecologically sounder than the petroleum-derived insulation it replaced. The lawsuits have argued that it is also tastier to rodents and therefore defective, and that car warranties should cover rodent damage. Defendants have countered that warranties do not cover damage from "environmental conditions" and, as Toyota wrote in one court filing, that "rodents chew on things, whether soy-flavored or not." Judges have sided with the companies.

Andre believes a rat was in the process of multiplying inside his Honda Civic hybrid. It was late 2016, and Andre said he woke up early and put on his "happy warrior face," because he planned to spend the day moving out of his apartment.

But his car wouldn't start, so he popped the hood. "And there on my engine block is, I mean, the largest rat I have ever seen in my life. It's big, it looks pregnant, it makes a kind of rat hiss noise," he said.

The car was "digitally totaled," the mechanic at the dealership told him later - repairs would cost US\$7,000 (NZ\$10,900). Andre said he talked his insurance company into covering it as an "act of God."

The maybe-pregnant rat story is one of Andre's icebreakers at parties. He says he's just glad he found no rat babies.

"That would have been both more disgusting and much sadder," he said, because then he would have ousted a whole rat family. "Look, we're the ones who built this city in this stupid place and then filled it with food garbage. The rat didn't choose for me to park there."

Another interesting article this time from the New Yorker, "The Big Kill, New Zealand's crusade to rid itself of mammals" can be found here: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/12/22/big-kill>

**That is all from us on the Owhango Alive team for now - stay safe and keep warm.**



Blue Duck Lodge visit, Saturday 18 July 2020. Many thanks to Richard and Rachel Steele for making it a memorable day.  
*Photos by Sally Lashmar*