



Newsletter

[www.motukaikoura.org.nz](http://www.motukaikoura.org.nz)

# Motu Kaikoura

## *Chairperson's update from Mel Galbraith:*

From the chair ....

Most of us love getting presents, and when an email arrived from Clint in mid-December 2021 with the subject "Early Christmas gift from Kaikoura Is", I rushed to open the message. And a fantastic Christmas present it was – the sighting of a gecko on Motu Kaikoura. And the email came with photographs, from which the species has been determined to most likely be the Pacific gecko (*Dactylocnemis pacificus*).

This is fantastic news on a number of fronts. Not only does it lift our reptile species diversity, but it adds another taxa to the list as up to now we were aware of only skinks being present on the island. The discovery is also confirmation that our rat control is having an impact, and the delayed appearance of the gecko is consistent with other projects. For example, it took 11 years following the rat eradication on Tiritiri Matangi for the Raukawa gecko to appear. These species have hung in over the decades of degradation and disturbance on their respective islands, just surviving in small isolated populations. The removal of one pressure, rat predation, is sufficient for the population to make its comeback.

On islands where the Pacific gecko is well established, it can occur in very high densities – this is the promise of things to come as the population continues to recover. And what else might "crawl" out of the habitat as we progress the restoration? A further benefit of the discovery is that it illustrates Motu Kaikoura's potential to contribute to New Zealand's conservation goals, and thus will add strength to our funding applications.

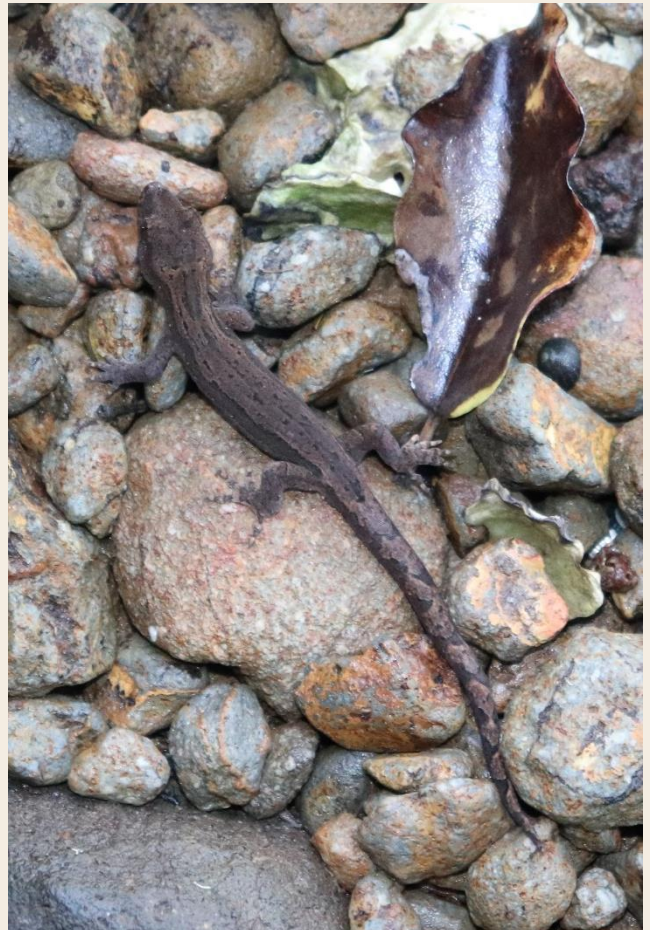
On funding, I am delighted to report success in funding from Foundation North for our operations costs (\$41,363) and from Auckland Council Regional Environment and Natural Heritage Grant to support our biodiversity surveys (\$5,000). We gratefully acknowledge these funders for their support of our project. And we welcome your ongoing support too – please find the details for making donations the back of this newsletter.

Thank you for your enduring support.

**Mel Galbraith**

**Chairperson**

Pacific gecko (photo Clint Stannard):



## Introducing Trustees:

### Mike Lee

Mike Lee (MSc hons) was a founding member of the Trust, originally representing the government Nature Heritage Fund which funded the purchase of the island in 2004. He had also been part of an earlier public campaign to buy the island in 1995/96.



Mike was chairman of the Auckland Regional Council from 2004-2010 and served as Auckland Councillor for Waitematā & Gulf from 2010-2019.

Mike is a keen natural scientist and oversees the island's rat management programme. He is the author of a number of papers on natural history and conservation biology.

He has also written the critically acclaimed 'Navigators & Naturalists - French exploration of New Zealand and the South Seas (1769-1824)'.  
*French exploration of New Zealand and the South Seas (1769-1824).*

### Rosemary K. Barraclough

Rosemary Barraclough, PhD: I'm a native Aucklander with a long commitment to conservation research and work. My ecology and conservation study took place on Tiritiri-Matangi Island for my MSc and then in the Northern Te Urewera for my PhD. Both of these studies involved adapting ecological survey techniques to NZ habitats and questions, which was an interesting and satisfying challenge.

I'm also very interested in One-Health, the overlap between ecosystem-animal-human health, and was extremely lucky to be able to move into researching vector-borne blood parasites of birds while in Madagascar with the Institut Pasteur de Madagascar and at the

Field Museum, Chicago, then continue this in New Zealand.

After some years away from biology, I am pleased to be part of the CatchIT team, and I am also working with the mEpiLab, Massey University.

I value being able to contribute to the restoration of Motu Kaikoura as part of the Trust. I also appreciate the opportunity to work with such a positive, dedicated, and mutually-supportive group of fellow Trustees.



### Brown teal/pāteke on Motu Kaikoura:



## Fauna news:

### Resident NZ fur seal/kekeno:



While the plight of New Zealand fur seals/kekeno (*Arctocephalus forsteri*) came to public notice last Spring with the mysterious and tragic mass die-off of fur seal pups, some 50 of which were found washed up on beaches in and around the Gulf, we can report our own resident fur seal, called by his neighbours, the Stannard children 'Mr Lobo' (Spanish for wolf) is safe and well. Fur seals once existed in northern New Zealand in high numbers but were hunted to extinction in the distant past. In recent years there are signs that fur seals are trying to re-establish in their ancient domain. Mr Lobo of Motu Kaikoura is one of the pioneers.

Mike Lee

### Weed control:



Elephant ear and lily have been thriving this year in the moist conditions. Motu Kaikoura ranger Clint Stannard will continue to keep on top of these pests over the coming months.

## Motu Kaikoura history:



### HMNZS Bellona visit 1950:

*The cruiser HMNZS Bellona (named after the Roman goddess of war) visiting Port Fitzroy, Great Barrier Island in 1950.*

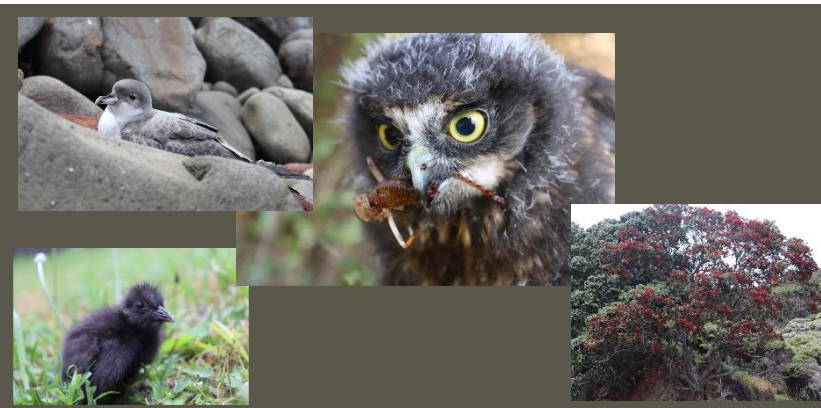
*Six years previously Bellona had played a leading role in the World War II D Day landings. As HMS Bellona, she was assigned to cover the landing of US forces at Omaha Beach, an operation depicted in the opening segment of the movie Saving Private Ryan.*

*Because of the severe casualty rate being sustained by US troops the operation at Omaha Beach was nearly abandoned. Bellona played a crucial role in ensuring success shelling enemy gun positions. After running out of ammunition she returned to England to replace worn gun barrels and ammunition and steamed straight back to the battle. Under cover of darkness Bellona came in very close to the beach, all guns firing.*

*Bellona also took part in the highly dangerous Arctic Russian convoys.*

*After the War she was loaned to the Royal New Zealand Navy during which time she called in at the magnificent harbour of Port FitzRoy and so became part of our history. Here she is passing through Man of War Passage between Aotea and Motu Kaikoura. A hero ship.*

**Mike Lee**



### Information for donations:

Direct credit is via our ASB Motu Kaikoura Trust account: 12 3077 0580668 00  
Please message us if you have made a direct payment so that we can issue you with a tax deductible receipt: <https://www.motukaikoura.org.nz/contact>

## Pest control update:

*The Trust is pleased to have effectively eradicated ship rats from Motu Kaikoura, but in their place we still have a kiore population. While less harmful to the island ecosystem, kiore are more difficult to manage because of this species' reduced foraging range.*

*Nevertheless, our original goal of a 5% rodent index level was first achieved in the all-important August and November quarters of 2015 and has been routinely achieved every Spring quarter since 2019. The year round quarterly index level was 9% in 2018, 7.5% in 2019, 6% in 2020 and 5% in 2021. Our most recent quarterly monitoring, August 2022, was 2%. So, again, we are on track to achieve 5% this year, or perhaps an even lower figure.*

## Road Improvements:

Over the last year Clint Stannard has invested a huge amount of time and effort into improving road ways across the island: ruts, rocks and bumps have been removed, vegetation has been cleared, the roads surfaces have been nicely crowned to allow water runoff, and ditches have been cut to drain that water away. This has been part of a large and ongoing project for which we are grateful for funding support from the Aotea/Great Barrier Local Board.

*Before*

*After*



*Airfield entrance road:  
Left: before maintenance  
Below: after resurfacing*

