

Hikaroroa / Mt Watkin Conservation Group

Community Newsletter - Sept. 2025

Kia ora koutou katoa / Hello Everyone!

It's been a busy month or so for the Conservation Project! August monitoring round, trapping, and lots of events to attend. We have been ticking away and getting things in place for the busy field period coming up once lambing is over.

The HMWCG Happenings

The Hikaroroa / Mt. Watkin Conservation Group has had an amazing month and a half of events. A huge thank you to all the organisations who have included us, invited us, or given a platform to share. Here are some of the highlights.

- **Predator Free Sector Hui – Wellington.** In August, a few HMWCG team members attended the Predator Free Sector Hui in Wellington. This national gathering brought together community groups, Predator Free Projects, scientists, and government agencies to share learnings and set direction for the Predator Free 2050 journey. It was inspiring to see our local mahi in Otago connected to the bigger national picture. It was a great opportunity to share knowledge with other groups, and get insights into technological developments in the predator control space. These included: automatic traps, thermal monitoring devices, drone work, new toxins, and trapping tips.
- **Keep Dunedin Beautiful Awards.** HMWCG was honoured at the Keep Dunedin Beautiful Awards this year, recognising the dedication of our landowners, community volunteers, and partners in protecting local taoka species and restoring biodiversity around Hikaroroa.
- **DOC / DCC Volunteer Event.** Our group joined the joint DOC/DCC Volunteer Day and the “Mobilise for Nature” campaign. Jamie Hickling, HMWCG Project Coordinator, gave a talk about the work at Hikaroroa to an audience of around 90 people from the DCC, local DOC office, and local volunteers, hopefully leading to more opportunities for Dunedin volunteers to work and learn across projects.
- **Te Hikapupu / Pleasant River Pest Management Strategy Workshop** Jamie and David Smith had the opportunity to talk with locals from the pleasant river catchment about coordinated pest management, landowner collaboration, and the benefits of

working together. Many thanks to the East Otago Catchment Group for inviting us to talk about our work and how it has been going from a landowner perspective. We hope that the pest control our project is undertaking in the north branch catchment of the Waikouwaiti and top of the Pleasant can lead to cross catchment collaboration.

- **New Field Base Developments** Exciting news! With support from **Port Otago** and members of **Waikouwaiti Community Care**, we have secured a container and shed space to establish a more permanent field base for equipment and volunteer gear. This good step towards making logistics smoother for our growing mahi. Thank you for your contributions – we will put a progress photo in our next newsletter.



Predator Free New Zealand Trust – Predator Free Sector Hui

August Monitoring Round

- **August Pest Monitoring**

Our team completed the August monitoring round, with tracking tunnels, wax tags, and cameras set across the Hikaroroa reserve and surrounding properties. Here is what we found:

- Rodent Survey: 6.7% rat tracking and 13.2% mouse tracking
- Possum Survey: 15.3% Wax Tag index
- Camera Survey:

	Possum	Rat	Mouse	Weasel	Stoat	Ferret	Cat	H Hog
Average Number of Detections per 1000 camera-hours	2.8	14.9	8.15	0	0.49	0.7	8.4	0

These numbers don't mean heaps by themselves but when shown as change over time they will give us really useful information about how populations are responding to our efforts. Jamie is in the process of compiling all the data that has been collected since 2022 and collating it into a pest report that will give us a picture of how things have changed since the beginning of the project – we hope to share the results soon.

A core team of volunteers and MCU staff conducted this monitoring round with the objective of setting up the monitoring network to be more accessible and easy to run with a larger team the next round. We recorded tracklogs for making maps and workplans, reflagged overgrown lines, and put permanent markings at monitoring stations.

Our next monitoring round will be in October/November where we will host a weekend training workshop for anyone who would like to come and help with fieldwork.

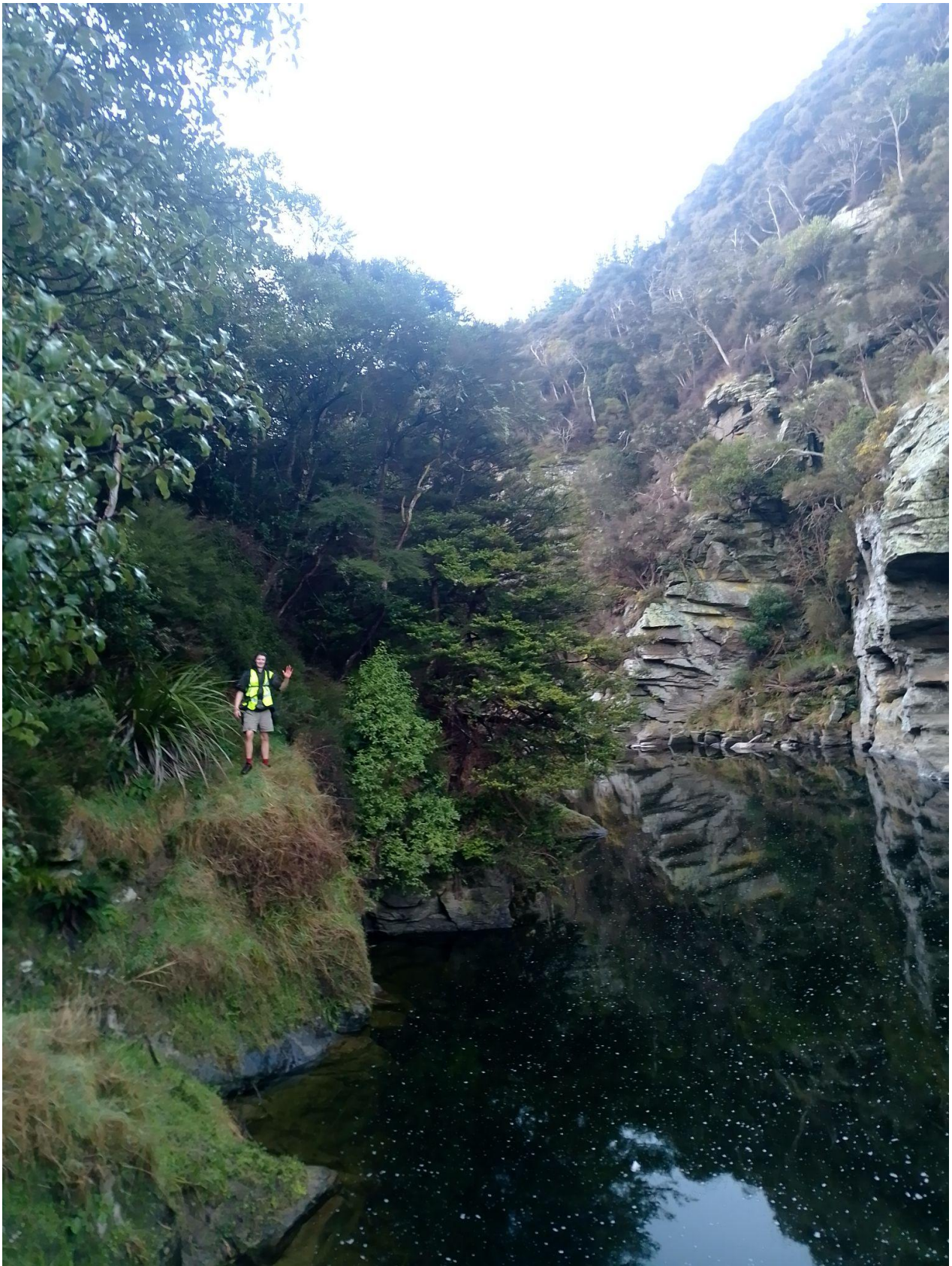
Trapping

August marked a special month as it was the first month that conservation group had the responsibility of servicing the Doc200 trap network inside the DCC reserve. In the last week of August we serviced all 234 mustelid traps in the Hikaroroa area spanning across the reserve and the surrounding farms. About 34km worth of trapline. Here's what we caught:

Month	Hedgehog	Mouse	Rabbit	Rat	Stoat	Total pests
Aug 2025	5	1	3	28	7	44



Double set Doc200 baited with hens egg / fake nest and fresh rabbit head! Hopefully this one catches the next round!



Hari (Volunteer Work Experience Team Member) in the Waikouwaiti river gorge coming back from a monitoring transect.

Volunteer Spotlights

- **Hari**

Hari first learned about the Hikaroroa Conservation Project up in Wellington when he attended the PFNZ Hui. He was keen to get into conservation but was struggling to find roles in Wellington. He flew down to do a month of volunteer work experience with the conservation group and received training for monitoring, trapping, and data analysis. He's back in Wellington now with a letter of recommendation and training certificate from HMWCG. We have just heard he has now received not one, but two, job offers in the conservation industry. Thanks for your mahi Hari, and congratulations!

- **Jesse**

Jesse has been paired with the HMWCG through an ACC partnership. After a head injury Jesse is working part time with the conservation group to build back up to being able to work at full capacity. Jesse is showing real resilience in his efforts and determination in learning new skills. He's been helping not only with field work but with all the behind the scenes organization and planning. We are very grateful to have him be part of our ongoing regular team for the next chapter of the project!

Upcoming Events and Fieldwork

- **No Trapping weekend in September (lambing)**

- **10 October: Community Event and BBQ**

Friday 10 October, from 3pm at the Eastern Rugby Club in Waikouaiti we will be co-hosting a community event with the East Otago Catchment Group. This will be our first proper community event of the year and will be our first chance to share all the details of our new Department of Conservation Community Fund Project. There will also be experts and guest speakers talking about work that is happening across the Waikouaiti catchment area.

- **11 Oct: Guided Hikoi at Hikaroroa (TBC, spaces limited)**

- **Week of Oct 13th: Avifauna (Bird) Monitoring (spaces limited)**

- **17-18th Oct: Pest Monitoring Training Workshop**

- **Week of Oct 20th: Monitoring deployment**

- **25 Oct: Trapping weekend! Doc200s on private land and DCC Reserve**

- **Week of Oct 27th: Possum Survey**

- **Week of Nov 10: Camera Survey**

- **22 Nov:** Advanced Trapping Training Workshop
- **28-30th Nov:** AT220 network service – Possum Trapping 3 day trip

We're teaming up with Manaaki Whenua - Landcare Research scientists and field team for our multi-day community trapping trip this round. They will be putting out cameras to collect behavioral data on post control possum populations and observing trap interactions. Come along for what is already a fun time with the extra chance to learn from some experts.

- **6 Dec: TBC** Trapping weekend! (End of year wrap-up, cleaning up any Doc200s that didn't get serviced the previous weekend)

(Any updates, date changes, or additional info will be posted on our [facebook](#) events page!)

Our momentum keeps building – thanks to each and every volunteer, supporter, and partner. Whether you've been checking traps, attending hui, or lending behind-the-scenes support, everyone's contributions make a real difference.

Kā mihi nui,

Jamie Hickling

Project Coordinator – HMWCG

The group is still looking for leaders and volunteers to get involved. If you are interested in being involved, please email us for more information: HMWconservationgroup@gmail.com

Feel free to forward this email to anyone who might like to read it. If you want to know more about anything specific in this issue, please reach out. If you have been forwarded this email, you can sign up for our Newsletter by reaching out via email.

A huge thank you to all of our funding providers and collaborators!

