

# Mokomoko Newsletter

Number 14

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Hello everyone

Apologies for the lack of news in recent times but rest assure COET has been busy! The 1.6 km, 14-ha pest-proof fence was completed in March last year. We have since eradicated the pests, although a few annoying hares remain (but we'll get em!). We are very happy with the new fence. The culverts have been working well but the mesh is quite soft and prone to distortion when the odd feral deer rubs its antlers against it. We will probably install an electric outrigger to overcome this problem.



*John Keene (DOC), Nigel Broadbridge & John McLennan (Pest Proof Fences Ltd), and Selwyn Tomkins (COET trustee) outside a vehicle gate in the new fence.*



*Inspecting a culvert.*



*The fence running across steep ridges.*



*The original 0.3-ha fence next door to the new fence. The small fence is still used for pilot translocations.*

The outlook for introducing grand and Otago skinks from the western part of their range into the new fence has been set back by low breeding success in captivity. We are looking at spring 2018 at the earliest if enough skinks are available. In the meantime, we are considering other species to translocate, such as green skinks and jewelled geckos. Both are beautiful

lizards. We are also considering introducing a large species of weta, the tree weta. We are contracting the services of lizard and invertebrate expert, Tony Jewell, to guide us and prepare applications to DOC.



*A jewelled gecko – an amazing potential addition to the Mokomoko Sanctuary.*

To recap on the skink translocations to date, in spring 2009 we originally introduced eastern Otago skinks into the small 0.3-ha fence that sits next to the new fence. That translocation was successful, but the follow-up translocation of additional skinks was scuttled when mice found their way into the fence and attacked the skinks. Mice were removed, the fence patched and there have been no further incursions since.

These skinks were removed to make way for western skinks in spring 2014. However, the translocation of western skinks was nowhere near as successful as the first translocation, which we believe was due to the fact that we released larger numbers the second time around, and both grand and Otago skinks were introduced together. We suspect we overshot the carrying capacity of the small fence,

by forcing both species to co-exist in a tiny area. This has taught us that future translocations to the bigger fence should be modest numbers of skinks, with grands and Otagos introduced separately in different areas on discrete rock outcrops so that skinks can move between them as needed.

In February last year, we moved our display Otago skinks and Duvaucel's geckos from their small outdoor cages to a larger open cage at the DOC office in Alexandra. DOC staff constructed this facility and the lizards can now happily move freely between different microhabitats. It's a great display for people to see them in semi-natural conditions.



*Constructing the new outdoor lizard enclosure*



*The finished product.*

As far as habitat restoration inside the big fence is concerned, dark green (native shrubs) is gradually replacing



light green (introduced briar and everlasting pea) as trustees and volunteers plug away at removing weeds and planting native species. The Sanctuary is starting to look more 'natural' as we try to accelerate the pace of change. Note, we have more field days coming up, so please pencil these in:

Sundays:

18th Sept

27th Nov

19th March

9th April

Thursday nights from 5 pm:

27 October

19th January

Many thanks to our volunteers, primary funders (Central Lakes Trust, DOC Community Fund, Lotteries Grants Board, Landcare Research, Otago Community Trust, Jean Malpas Estate, Transpower), private funders, and the ongoing accounting support from ICL Chartered Accountants Ltd.

*Trustees of the Central Otago Ecological Trust*



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PO Box 282, Alexandra, Ph 03 440 2936, [www.coet.org.nz](http://www.coet.org.nz)