



Mokomoko Newsletter

Number 8
15 March 2010

Hello everyone

Otago skinks are now back in the wild in the Alexandra basin!!

We had a perfect day last November for releasing 12 Otago skinks into the Mokomoko Dryland Sanctuary near Alexandra. The day was well attended, the skinks were happy to escape into the wild, and the celebratory food and drink afterwards were delicious!



Karakia (prayer), mihi whakataua (greeting) and speeches outside the Mokomoko fence before the skink release.



Volunteer, Jan Kelly, officially opening the fence and about to cut the 'skink ribbon' created by Alexandra Primary School students.



Releasing one of the skinks



Kinky enjoying the freedom and the sun

We've searched for the skinks on 12 occasions since their release by walking around the site quietly and photographing them. We've seen 11 of the 12 so far which is excellent, and all look in good health. As a precaution, we have provided supplementary food (mince meat and pureed fruit) and water to ease their transition into the wild, but all indications are that the skinks are feeding on wild insects and fruit.



Visitors from Spain and France searching for the newly-released Otago skinks

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Darkie venturing out from his new rock crack



Lightning checking out the view from her new condo

The Trust would like to say a special thank you to DOC, in particular Lesley Judd, for keeping the skinks in quarantine at Macraes Flat for several months before their release. This involved caring for the skinks in captivity and arranging disease screening.

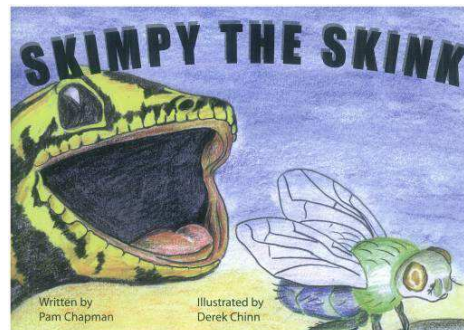
The next big milestone coming up will be the survival of the skinks over the winter. If survival is good, we'll then be looking for signs of successful reproduction (baby skinks) in the following summer. So it will some time yet before we can consider the reintroduction a success. If all goes well in the next 1-2 years, we will consider creating a much larger protected area for these and other lizard species to thrive. We are currently removing weeds and restoring the native vegetation inside a 14-ha herbivore-proof fence next to the lizard fence in anticipation of

expanding our lizard reintroduction programme.



View of the predator-proof fence on the left and the northern boundary of the herbivore-proof fence on the right

Pam Chapman (author of “Shrek the Sheep”) took the opportunity during the release to launch her new children’s book “Skimpy the Skink”. The book is illustrated by COET trustee, Derek Chinn, and tells the story of the plight of Otago skinks in the face of introduced predators. If you’d like a copy call Pam on 03 449 2265 (only \$16, including postage).



Front cover of Pam Chapman’s book

Successful field day during Conservation Week

The Central Otago Ecological Trust and DOC held a joint field day at [redacted] during Conservation Week last September. More than 40 people attended from as far away as Dunedin and Wanaka.

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We planted 140 plants, laid hundreds of rocks along the 1.6 km of fence around the 14 ha re-vegetation site (to keep out rabbits and hares), weeded hundreds of exotic briar, set up 20 photo monitoring points, and re-baited traps and poison stations inside the predator-proof fence. Some key agencies were also present like DOC staff from the Central Otago Area Office in Alexandra and from the Grand and Otago Skink Recovery Team in Dunedin, ECan (Twizel), a University of Otago lecturer, a councillor from the Central Otago District Council, Otago Polytechnic (they kindly donated the plants), and Forest & Bird. It was a great day and DOC put on a BBQ afterwards.

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Volunteers laying rocks along part of the 1.6 km-long herbivore-proof fence to keep out rabbits and hares



Discussing dryland ecology and the programme for the work day



Volunteers going spray crazy



The girls hard at work planting tussocks



Checking out yellow tunnels inside the Mokomoko fence to ensure no mice are present, and checking out the brown plates to see how many common geckos are thriving.



Discussing lizard ecology inside the Mokomoko fence



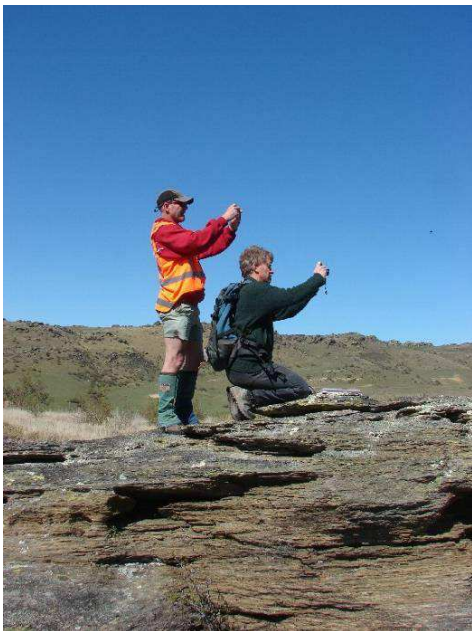
Winding down at the end of the work day – the beers were good!



Jo Wakelin (in cap) and her students from Otago Polytechnic in Cromwell with some of the plants they donated



All good – let's go home!



Photographing re-vegetation sites to provide a long term record of progress

A mate for our Duvaucel's gecko

For some time now, the trust has held a female Duvaucel's gecko in captivity. These are New Zealand's largest gecko. The Kiwi and Birdlife Park in Queenstown have kindly donated a male Duvaucel's gecko to accompany our female. Thanks to their generosity we may now be able to breed this species and one day reintroduce them into the Mokomoko Dryland Sanctuary.



Children love our Duvaucel's gecko, 'Paris'. She's now happily wedded to our new male, 'Gringoire'.

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Field days

A small group recently met on March 7 to do more weeding and hand-watering of planted native shrubs. Thank you to Helen Sharpe who came all the way from Dunedin. The planted shrubs are doing quite well despite very little watering.

We will be holding another weeding day on Tuesday March 30 (mid-week), followed by a re-planting day on Saturday April 10. We will meet at 10 am at the entrance to the Aldinga Conservation Area behind Conroy's Dam. We'll send reminders closer to the dates. We'd love to see you there.

The Trustees would like to say a special thank you to all the volunteers who have helped at our working bees in the past.

All for now.

Trustees of the Central Otago Ecological Trust.

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