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Kiwi Deaths in DOC Traps.

How do we make Trap Boxes safer for Kiwi and Weka.

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The recent death of another North Island Brown Kiwi in a DOC 200 Trap, Northland 29th Jan 2025, has once again brought into question the safety of current DOC Best Practice Design of Trap Boxes.

DOC have reported that the Trap Box in question meets all of their current Best Practice criteria. The only logical conclusion one can draw from that is that Best Practice needs to be reviewed.

Normally when these events happen it is talked about then the conversation dies away, as it is all too hard to deal with in the current system. The work is hard enough as it is without losing Taonga species to traps.

It is time everyone in the conservation community stepped up, owned the problem and worked together to come up with cost effective workable solutions.

My view is that the group that originally developed best practice for the 200 and 250 series Traps mucked up. Trap Boxes where there are Kiwi should have been required to be the same longer length as is required for Weka. Which should be part of a revised best practice.

Almost certainly Kiwi deaths caused by DOC type traps will be greater than we realise. If a Kiwi Bill is damaged just on the Tip by a trap then the bird can wander off and die five metres into the bush, unless it has a transmitter we will never know. Also for obvious reasons people may choose not to report deaths.

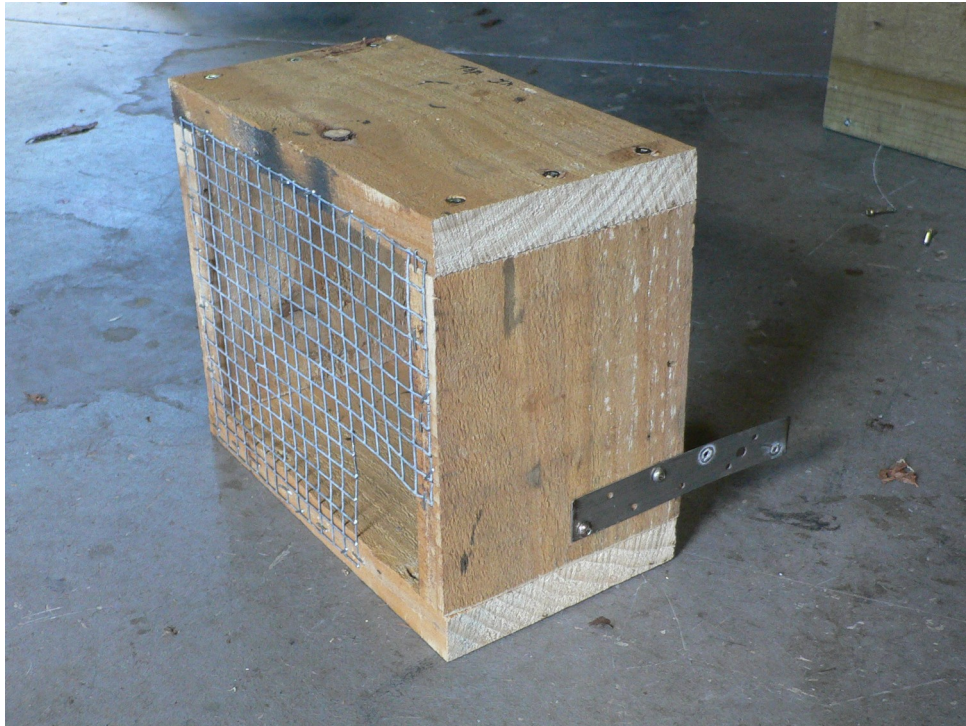
As a first step to hopefully start the process of finding solutions, I will put forward a Prototype design to Retro Fit existing standard length Trap Boxes to help improve Kiwi safety. This modification could also be used in Weka areas as Weka are spreading at a fast rate in the central North Island.

Obviously NO design is going to be 100% safe, how you protect a 3 month old Kiwi I don't know, but someone might have a great idea.

The idea with putting forward this design is that hopefully someone in DOC will step up and take a lead role. Community groups, DOC, Contractors, Landcare can review and improve the design, or come up with alternative designs for consideration. Next step field test designs and accept as a best practice option. There may even be the option of coming up with complete new designs, no reason why there only has to be one DOC approved Trap Box design.

Working together will be a better option than people flying under the radar doing their own thing.

The Design I put forward for consideration to Retro Fit existing Trap Boxes is made from 25 x150 mm H4 timber, screwed together, with standard wire mesh on the front. Opening is on the side of mesh NOT in the centre, the diagonal creates a longer safe distance to the Trap.



Using the Stainless Brace Strap on the sides allows for small variations in width of Boxes, but due to variations in Boxes that groups make, the dimensions of extension would need to be fine tuned to suit.

The extensions could be pre made by groups to suit your Boxes and fitted in the field, simply remove the old outer mesh and fit the extension.

Depending on materials used and trade discounts etc. a budget price per extension would be approx 6 to 8 dollars.

The existing DOC best practice design with the entrance in the centre of mesh gives approx 135mm shortest distance from outer opening to Trap.

The extension design with the opening on the side of wire mesh, when fitted to a standard DOC Box gives a shortest distance outer opening to trap of 290 mm. There will be small variations dependant on timber and existing Boxes, but it will still give a safe distance greater than current Weka Best Practice.



The extension shown is 145mm long and fitted to one end of an old 200 Trap Box.

The extension is fixed at the top to the existing Box using three 65mm Wood or Tek screws, fitted from inside of the Box going through the top plate in Box and screwed into the extension.

The sides are fixed in place using stainless construction Brace Strap either 25 or 50mm wide and secured by Wood or Tek screws. (25mm strap shown)

The extension height is about 8mm lower than the Box to allow the lid to freely rotate.

Even just using the narrower 25 mm strap which I had on hand and just a couple of screws the Extension to Box fixing is rock solid.

It is really going to be up to Kiwi groups if they want to push DOC to review Best Practice. Should DOC decide to review it, then I would urge you to consult and involve Community groups and others, as that is where many of the initiatives are now coming from.

Another example where design could be better with DOC traps is the Kea caught in a trap, Feb 2025, The Box had a broken lid, it should Have been made from Ply. But also of interest in the Herald photo is that the inner mesh is around the wrong way, so the trap was never going to catch anything anyway. The lid is still screwed in place, so the mesh can't have been moved.

This actually happens more often than you think. One community group came up with a zero cost fix to stop any chance of the mesh being put in the wrong way around. Things like that could be incorporated into a Revised Best Practice.