

Introduction

The Waikato Biodiversity Forum has been operating for nine years. The Forum membership stands at 465. The Forum was established as a way of forging closer working relationships between management agencies and all groups working to protect and enhance biodiversity across the Waikato region. The Forum is managed by a Focus Group which assists the coordinator to plan and advance the projects of the Forum. The scope of activities includes:

- Facilitating information transfer
- Promoting coordinated biodiversity policy development
- Promoting synergies between participants
- Energising biodiversity activities by supporting existing and promoting new on-the-ground actions
- Influencing decision making
- Prioritising and scoping projects
- Actioning national initiatives at a local level.

Acknowledgements

The Waikato Biodiversity Forum would like to acknowledge and thank the following organisations for their financial support: Waikato Regional Council, Department of Conservation, Thames Coromandel District Council, Hauraki District Council, Matamata Piako District Council, Waikato District Council, Hamilton City Council, Waipa District Council and South Waikato District Council.

The Forum would also like to thank the staff from Forum member organisations and community groups for their contribution and expertise during Forum events, workshops and the on-going exchange of information with the public and other Forum members. This collective expertise makes the operation of the Forum a success and is valued by Forum members and the public.

Waikato Biodiversity Forum events

One Forum event was held over the past 12 months. It was located in Coromandel and focused on species management. A mix of people attended from community groups, agencies, landowners and interested individuals.

Patrick Stewart (Red Admiral Ecology) spoke about the management of Archey's and Hochstetter's frogs on the Coromandel followed by Rob Chappell from DOC who focused on the information DOC have gathered on the Coromandel striped gecko. Rob also spoke about the work to establish additional populations of the Middle Island tusked weta on two other mammal-free islands in the Mercury Islands group to enhance its long-term survival prospects.

Cynthia Roberts, plant ecologist at DOC detailed the vulnerable vegetation types/ecosystems on the Coromandel Peninsula which include all lowland vegetation, the semi-coastal zone, duneland vegetation, saltwater plant communities, wetlands and kauri forest. Lettecia Williams from Moehau Environment Group (MEG) detailed the translocation of the North Island robin from Pureora in the central north island to Stony Bay. A least 16 of the birds from the original reintroduction have bred on Te Moehau. A focus on predator control with particular on rats has made Moehau a safe place for these birds to return. Wayne Todd and Kathi Parr also from MEG described the work being carried out at the Waikawau wetlands and estuary to protect fernbird, bittern and banded rail.

Doug Ashby brought two cages of geckos for Forum participants to view. This was the first time many people had seen these beautiful reptiles up close. Forum participants visited Driving Creek Sanctuary which contains a secondary coastal to lowland broadleaved forest and wetlands and visited the fernery which provides for the protection of rare and endangered ferns.

The afternoon was spent hearing reports from Forum members on Significant Natural Areas identification, QEII National Trust covenants on the Coromandel, the Harbour and Catchment Management work that the Regional Council is managing on the Coromandel and the management of woolly nightshade and salt water paspalum. Finally Forum members heard about the weed removal being carried out in the Hikuai cabbage tree forest.

0800BIODIV

The Forum coordinator continued to operate the 0800BIODIV number and respond or refer enquiries to an appropriate agency. The 0800 BIODIV number and the Forum website received 20 enquiries. The enquiries ranged from availability of funding, weed and animal pest management, community group projects, volunteering on projects, planting guides and other Councils interested in how the Waikato Biodiversity Forum operates.

Media and Publicity

The Hamilton News agreed to run a Forum column in their newspaper. Articles have been submitted on endangered species and community group projects. The Forum's website was updated on a regular basis and the Flora and Fauna maps have also been updated to reflect the new endangered species classification system. The Forum undertook to work with DOC to run activities for children on biodiversity at Fieldays. These activities included exploring a rotting log, examining life under a microscope, drawing a weta competition and making weta motels out of bamboo. The activity corner was extremely popular. The Forum had a display over three days at the Waikato Show and there was a lot of interest from the public about endangered species and community group projects. The Forum display which included a mounted specimen of a little blue penguin attracted people to the table and provided opportunities for conversations about conservation and protection of flora and fauna.

Presentations

The Forum coordinator gave a presentation to Waikato University Environmental Planning students on how the Forum acts as an advocate for biodiversity and how it carries out the advocacy work on plans and policies.

Conservation Week Events

The Forum coordinator organised two Conservation Week activities including joining in with the Te Pahu Landcare Group to have a bike and bush experience at Kaniwhaniwha stream camping ground. The Forum organised a guided walk to explore caves, electric fishing and a hunt to find bush treasures. An event was also held at Barrett Bush to explore a bush reserve not readily accessible to the public, learn more about native plants, help plant some trees, find and identify invertebrates and do some weeding. The weather was very wet for the Kaniwhaniwha event so it was re-run in February 2012 with over 100 people attending and giving very positive feedback about the content of the day.

Funding

The Forum has given advice to numerous groups to assist them with funding applications to a variety of funders. The Forum acted as the referral for the Regional Council's Small Scale Community Initiative Fund. Assistance and advice was provided to community groups to fill in the application forms.

Networking

The Forum members received four newsletters to inform them of biodiversity related information. The Forum continues to provide a link for community group members and management agencies through email dissemination of information and communication with individual members in answer to queries about biodiversity.

Advocacy

The Forum provided advocacy for biodiversity on the Regional Council and all Local Authorities Long Term Plans. Oral submissions were presented to the Regional Council and most Local Authorities. The Forum also provided feedback on District Plans including South Waikato District Council, Hamilton City, Waipa District Council and Hauraki District Council. Feedback was given for the Hamilton City Council's Environmental Strategy review and the Waikato Regional Council's Pest Management Strategy review.

Community Groups

The Forum maintains a database and map of community group projects which highlights the contribution that these groups make to biodiversity protection and enhancement across the region. The database now has 153 groups working on over 215 project sites. One group has gone into recess and three new groups have been registered on the database. There has been a slight decrease in the number of sites groups are working on as some site plantings have been completed. Information from the database is regularly requested from the Regional Council, District Councils, other agencies and community groups.

Workshops and Conferences

The Forum coordinator was involved in presenting to community groups and landowners at two workshops. The Forum assisted the Whakaupoko Landcare Group run a very successful Trappers Workshop at Andrew and Louise Sinclair's property near Patumahoe. The workshop drew 40 participants with a couple of young boys clearing possums from traps on the way around the lines. The Forum also facilitated workshops on sustaining volunteers and funding tips at the Coromandel community conservation hui at Tairua. The 45 hui participants had a depth of knowledge on both these topics which they shared with others.

The Forum assisted the National Wetland Trust with a field trip for teachers at Lake Serpentine for the New Zealand Association of Environmental Educators (NZAEE) conference. The teachers experienced a variety of activities related to the biodiversity of wetlands and gave feedback on the activities.

World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) Workshop

The Forum coordinator was invited to be a member of the NZ Community Led Conservation Workshop run by WWF and provided information on the operation of the Waikato Biodiversity Forum as a model for the extension and development of Forum in other areas of NZ. The Forum was also invited to have input into a Community Conservation Monitoring Toolbox Project and attended a workshop WWF

and other groups from around NZ to give feedback on entry level nationally agreed outcome monitoring.

Summary

In summary the highlights of year would be working with community groups on funding applications and assisting with the workshops. These aspects of the Forum's work are valued by the community who at times work in isolation. The event at Kaniwhaniwha Stream was a high point in terms of public involvement as it was extremely successful in raising awareness of the importance of biodiversity protection. The Waikato Show and Fieldays also provided similar opportunities. Submissions were made to Council's Long Term Plans and the Forum took the opportunity to present orally to highlight the importance of biodiversity protection on private land.

Maira Cursey, Coordinator, Waikato Biodiversity Forum