



# Waikato Biodiversity Forum

Ngā Kaihāpai Rerenga Rauropi o Waikato

## Annual Report from the **Waikato Biodiversity Forum** 2019/20

### Introduction

The Waikato Biodiversity Forum has been operating for 15 years and has a current membership of approximately 550. The Forum's membership is comprised of research and management agencies, iwi groups, private landowners, community groups and individuals who work towards improving indigenous biodiversity in the Waikato region. The Forum believes that the combined synergies of people working together provide a valuable contribution to improving biodiversity across the region. The Forum speaks on behalf of biodiversity. However, it does not necessarily reflect the views of all Forum members on every biodiversity issue.

The Forum operates independently of its constituent organisations. It is run by a part-time coordinator who receives support and guidance from a Focus Group. The Forum's work includes:

- Engaging with agencies groups and individuals to network, share ideas and work together to protect and enhance biodiversity
- Acting as a referral agency for Waikato biodiversity information and contacts
- Organising forums to discuss biodiversity issues and focus on local projects
- Organising workshops for community and agencies on a variety of biodiversity topics and activities
- Disseminating relevant local and national biodiversity information and notices through the Forum's website, facebook, email and local media sources
- Providing support to community initiatives which protect and enhance biodiversity.
- Advocating for the development of sound policy to enhance biodiversity protection at national, regional and local levels

### Acknowledgements

The Waikato Biodiversity Forum would like to acknowledge and thank the following organisations

for their financial support: Waikato Regional Council, Department of Conservation, Waikato District Council, Hamilton City Council, Waipa District Council and South Waikato District Council.

The Forum would also like to thank the Focus Group members for their support and contribution to the work of the coordinator's roles. Their advice and guidance provides a valuable contribution to the success of the Forum.

Finally, the Forum would 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

Due to COVID19, the 19/20 year saw only one Forum event take place. This happened on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 2019 in the South Waikato District. The event was a collaboration between the Biodiversity Forum and Waikato River Trails.

As well as checking out restoration work done along the trail. The event also featured guest speakers from two other organisations involved in tourism and biodiversity restoration, plus Raukawa Charitable Trust who shared their exciting new Marae-based kaitiaki program. We would also be lucky enough to explore some stunning bush remnants on the river trail and to learn about how the QEII National Trust was formed and continues to protect thousands of forest blocks on private land nationwide.

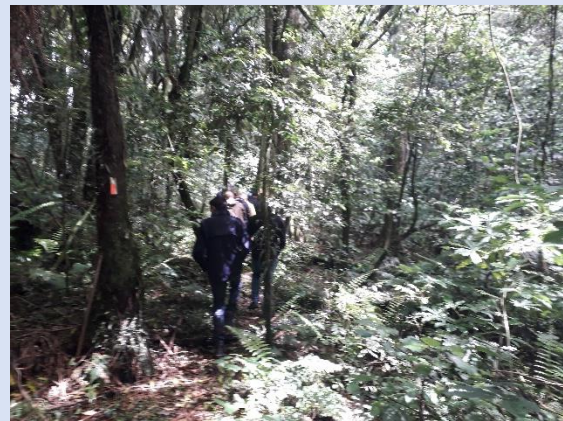
Managing director of River Trails, Glyn Wooller, explained that the key driver for the trail at its 2006

outset, was about economic development for the South Waikato Region, but environmental enhancement has now become an integral part of the trails, with the realisation that healthy economies need a healthy environment to sustain them. The trail has also opened up access to the river in areas where restoration may not have been possible – such as at Huihuitaha Wetland where we could see a significant amount of planting and weed removal had taken place in order to rehabilitate this stunning site. Last year marked the planting of 100,000 native trees on the trail, all of which were planted by volunteers. Volunteers have also been heavily involved in invasive plant species removal, especially at Huihuitaha where a huge amount of Willow and Privet have been drilled and injected and blackberry cleared to make space for plantings.

Our next stop was Jim Barnett reserve in Waotu, a spectacular original and restored indigenous forest block, which the River Trail runs directly through. Gaye Lamb, a local land-owner and QEII covenanter explained that Jim Barnett Reserve was originally part of a 1000ha bush block, spared from the destruction of the 186AD Taupo volcanic eruption by a low hill which interrupted the path of the resulting ash cloud. In 1979 they became the first landowners in New Zealand to covenant private land, opting to protect 4 hectares of remaining Waotu native bush fragment on their farm. They then encouraged the South Waikato District Council to buy the remaining 16-hectare block from the Barnett Family, containing the remnant but damaged forest fragment in Waotu. A further 7 hectares of covenanted land purchased by Forest and Bird now also adjoins this, which has been almost fully planted in indigenous species by Forest and Bird and local volunteers. Since this time the forest has been fenced off and pest management has taken place since 1992. The area is now also a popular spot on the River Trail to camp overnight and enjoy the reserve, with the recently built toilet and shelter facilities, provided through the South Waikato Investment Funds Trust.

After Gaye had taken us on a tour through the reserve we were lucky to also visit the 4 Hectare Stephenson Family QEII block, which was the first

ever covenant back in 1979. Gordon and Celia Stephenson's daughter, Lynn spoke of how her parents had fallen in love with Aotearoa's native bush and how through the creation of the QEII Trust had fought successfully to protect these Waotu bush fragments, as well as countless others all over the country. She also spoke of how the health of the block increased dramatically when they began predator control. This was well evident on our walk through the block as from the forest floor to the canopy, foliage was dense and lush.



**Stephenson's 4Ha bush block was dense from floor to canopy due to long term trapping.**

After lunch at Jim Barnett reserve, Jessica Meade from Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari, started off as our first of three guest speakers. The Sanctuary is currently attracting about 17,000 visitors per year, with a range of tours based within the southern enclosure and Tautari wetland. Jessica Meade from Maungatautari explained that the Sanctuary is trying to create an attractive tourist product by sharing the story of the Maunga with visitors, from its mythological and geological beginnings, all the way to today. Also, by having enigmatic and popular species such as Tuatara, Kiwi, Kokako, Kaka and, possibly soon, Kakapo, they can not only help the survival and proliferation of endangered species, but also provide a huge attraction for conservation minded tourists. A further revenue stream is also now beginning to come from the sanctuary being hired as a venue for yoga and meditation retreats. In fact they are constantly on the lookout for opportunities to create revenue that feeds directly into the amazing conservation work taking place on the Maunga.

April Haika from Raukawa Charitable trust explained how the Pūtake Taiao group from Raukawa Charitable Trust has established a rōpū of Raukawa uri who share a passion for and commitment to the Raukawa environment as kaitiaki. The rōpū is a way of building capability of Raukawa tribal members by developing environmental skills, knowledge and experience. This will enable the rōpū members to be involved in and lead initiatives which seek to restore, protect and enhance the Raukawa environment. It is intended that, in time the rōpū will be the heart of environmental matters within the takiwā.

Rōpū members are provided with the opportunity to participate in workshops, education programmes, seminars, development and implementation of projects, and work experience. Some of the mahi the rōpū has been involved in to date includes learning how to use the Stream Health Monitoring Assessment Kits and dwarf galaxias monitoring at Te Waihou, Blue Spring.

Rotorua Canopy Tours is very much a leading example of tourism and biodiversity enhancement working in unison. Every customer who goes on a Canopy Tour helps to restore the native forest by automatically donating a portion of the fee for each tour purchased into conservation efforts. In fact over half a million of tourism funded dollars have gone into a 250 hectare pest management operation in the Dansey Road Scenic Reserve where Rotorua Canopy Tours operates. As well as tourists automatically donating a portion of each tour fee, many local booking agencies have also generously donated their booking fees to Canopy Tours to help further fund pest eradication-work.

Paul Button of Canopy Tours spoke of how in the beginning stages of their predator control work, they immediately realised that the problem was far bigger than initially anticipated while laying out their first trap line, when some of the traps could audibly be heard snapping shut just minutes after being laid out. This not only made the team aware of the scale of the issue, but also made them more determined to get on top of it. Paul also described how, in the beginning stages of the business, the amount of effort going into the predator management was

cutting heavily into their profit margin, as they had not yet calculated for the seasonal nature of tourism. Through some tough times, the situation was eventually remedied with improved planning, as well as a partnership with DoC, who have contributed financially to Canopy Tours' pest eradication efforts, after seeing how committed they were to the task. The business and forest are both now very much thriving and we will watch with great interest to see how this and other tourism and conservation success stories develop in Aotearoa.



Beginning the day on the Waikato River Trail

## Advice, Referral and Networking

The Forum network continues to provide a link for community group members and management agencies through dissemination of information and communication, with individual members to answer queries or refer them to other sources of information. A resource person register is maintained so that Forum members can be put in touch with the right person for advice and assistance. The Forum coordinator has a list of Forum members who can act as "Biodiversity Champions" on particular issues.

The Forum coordinator operated the 0800 BIODIV line and email service who meets the needs of enquiries or refers them to an appropriate person. 68 enquiries were responded to over 2019/20, mainly from Forum members, through the 0800 line and email. The enquiries continue to range from funding, weed and animal pest management, details of community group projects, volunteering on projects and planting information.



The Forum coordinator organized, chaired, and took minutes for 6 Biodiversity Forum Focus Group meetings, and 4 Project Echo Meetings.

The Forum Coordinator attended the Ngati Mahi Trust Open Day and Working Bee (24/07/19), Acre Meeting 28/08/19), Kirikiriroa Restoration Network (24/9/19), Landcare Networking Field Day 19/11/19.

## Community Group Database

The Forum's database and map of community group projects was maintained which continues to highlight the contribution that these groups make to biodiversity protection and enhancement across the region.

## Workshops

Again, due to COVID 19, only one rather than two workshops took place in 19/20 year. Our Bat workshop was held on September the 20<sup>th</sup> 2019 at Waikato Museum. The day featured three ecologists who have all done a lot of work on Bat monitoring and research in the Waikato. The workshop kicked off with Kerry Borkin from Wildlands Ecology giving a general talk on bats which looked at species from all over the globe, then finally focusing on our local two species and how we can help them proliferate. The next talk came from Hannah Mueller, which went further into NZ bat species and what we can do to protect them. Pest control, preserving of potential roost trees (both native and exotic) and the general conservation and restoration of indigenous habitats were the take home messages. Finally, Weia Van De Zwan presented results from the Hamilton City wide bat surveys findings and steps to be taken when mitigating bat habitat loss in development projects.

After the talks and having enjoyed a delicious morning tea supplied by Momento Café in Victoria St, the workshop attendees and bat experts went out the back of the museum to identify potential bat habitat and roosting trees.

## Support for Community/Agency initiatives and events

27/07/19 Free fm radio interview to discuss and promote Waikato biodiversity issues and events;

## Media

At the conclusion of 2019, the Waikato Biodiversity Forum went online with their new Website. The purpose of the website renewal, was to update the content, functionality and look of the site, which was over 10 years old – a long time in internet years! We are very pleased with the results – Please [Click here to see the site](#)

The Forum members received four newsletters (Summer, Spring, Winter and Autumn editions) containing updates, findings, and stories from biodiversity projects across the Waikato Rohe. [Click here to see all editions of the newsletters.](#)

24 Mailchimp emails were sent out over the 19/20 year to approximately 450 Waikato Biodiversity Forum Members to inform them of relevant biodiversity events, dates, notices and information.

## Summary

The Forum has continued to involve itself in advocacy, networking and advice to organisations and groups across the region. It has worked with other organisations and groups to support biodiversity work and provide opportunities to add value to the work of member organisations, groups and individuals. Sam, on behalf of the Forum, would like to acknowledge and commend the work that agencies, community groups and individuals carry out to improve biodiversity. They would also like to thank the Focus Group members for their support and contribution to the Forum's work.

Sam Mcelwee, Forum Coordinator

