



Waikato Biodiversity Forum

Ngā Kaihāpai Rerenga Rauropi o Waikato

Spring Newsletter 2022 Number 72

Kia ora tātou,

An update on some of the work undertaken over the past three months:

- Edited, published and gathered articles for Summer edition of the Forum Newsletter
- Chaired and took minutes for Forum Focus group meetings
- Sent bio-forum emails, and updated website and facebook page
- Responded to enquiries from email and 0800 bio div service
- Organisation of A, B & C's of Riparian planting event

DOC Waikato Update

The summer season has been a busy one for the Waikato Office. Our Whangape team took to the air to carry out aerial Cuscuta and willow surveys. Cuscuta was found in the areas where we know it's present and aerial control has already begun for the season. Aerial willow control will begin late January/early February.

A team of DOC staff and volunteers from the Pirongia Te Aroaro O Kahu Restoration Society (PRS) carried out annual *Dactylanthus* flower monitoring and hand pollination on Pirongia maunga in January. Much to the excitement of the team, ten new plants have been found. Kookako nest monitoring also continues on Pirongia with PRS volunteers and ecologists, Dave Bryden and Amanda Rogers, putting in the hard work to identify nests in anticipation of chick season. So far, there are four active

nests, two fledged nests and eleven failed nests identified.

And in some light-hearted and encouraging news, a local Cambridge couple were surprised by an elusive avian visitor. The St Kilda subdivision couple called the Waikato Office in January with news of a young Australasian bittern striking a pose in their backyard. The young bittern is likely to have come from one of the two wetlands situated behind the property, and DOC scientists are heartened by this news as it indicates the birds are breeding.



*Bittern discovered in Cambridge backyard.
Photo: John and Jude Bowen*

Cooks Beachcare Group

For Cooks Beachcare this is the 10th year of operation and the results of our efforts over the years are very apparent. This year around another 5000 plants – grasses, flaxes, pingao and coastal shrubs - have gone into the ground and their growth has been enhanced by a warm wet spring. The group is made up of volunteers who meet each Thursday to put in a couple of

hours removing weed pests or planting in the season. We have wonderful support from TCDC. We are in recess now until February but would love to have more residents join us. We will lift our profile on the Facebook community page in the new year to keep you better informed.

One of the results of our plantings over several years is that Cooks Beach is now a major provider of coastal plant seeds and our group is involved with the collection. Before Christmas it is pingao with the brown seed heads being cut off the stalks which shoot up in the plant. It grows on the front edge of the dunes and is an important sand binding plant. Its stiff leaves were used for traditional Maori weaving. In January it is the spinifex. The seed heads are the tumble weeds which blow along the beach and this year there is a good crop. Through January it is the time for pimelia seeds, small black ball- bearings which can be difficult to spot. All the seeds are collected for the council to dispatch to Coastal Plants Nursery in Whakatane where Jo Bonner is another good friend of our group. The seeds are grown on and the seedlings are returned to the eastern Coromandel beaches to continue planting programmes.

Members of our group are also involved with protection of the dotterels which nest on our beaches. With fewer people and dogs on the beach and with the birds at last nesting higher up the beach and in the dunes, this should have been a good season for these endangered birds which number only around 2500 for the whole of the country (they are more endangered than the kiwi). Alas it was not to be, as from 22 eggs only 3 chicks have survived with 2 nests still to hatch right at the busy holiday season. While having dogs on a lead is the right approach it would be even better if people could keep dogs away from

fenced nesting areas altogether. As soon as the sitting bird sees a dog whether on a lead or not it jumps off the nest ready to defend its territory leaving eggs exposed and not getting the required warmth.

Last summer we had the rare sight of a pale banded rail at Cooks Stream with some stunning photographs taken. This bird has not been sighted this year and it is possible that it moulted and then resumed normal plumage. However, we have had a pale chick instead being mothered by a normal coloured parent. Another rare event.

We presently have 2 oystercatcher chicks at the Cooks Stream end of the beach. They regard the beach as their own and wander everywhere. Please watch out for them. May you all have the holiday you need.



Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society

Things are now in full swing and the PRS crews are making the most of the fine weather to do

all-important mahi around the maunga (and beyond).

January is prime *Dactyloctenium aegyptium* (a.k.a wood rose) monitoring time as this is the main flowering season for the rare native plant. The team reported that their trip to Hihikiwi and the Cone on Mt Pirongia was successful, with lots of flowering seen and hand-pollinating completed.

Dactyloctenium aegyptium are primarily bat-pollinated, however bat numbers on the maunga have decreased significantly over the years. Hand-pollination by volunteers gives *dactyloctenium* this much needed assistance. The aim now will be to cage them all so that the flowers can be protected from browsing animals, increasing their chances of survival even further.

Another keen group of volunteers recently spent several days in the Okahukura Valley at Pureora Forest to tackle pot-hole repairs, bait station maintenance, whio and *dactyloctenium* searching, rat line monitoring, and DNA sample collections. Although there was no luck on the *dactyloctenium* front this time round, there were reports of one or two whio sightings which was rather exciting.

Lastly, we have had some kōkako chick banding sessions from our eleven pairs. The bandings have been a very special experience for volunteers who have been able to get up close and personal with our beautiful kōkako babies. We even called in the services of some stellar arborists to climb to an otherwise inaccessible nest. Join our mahi at www.mtpirongia.org.nz/join-us. By Parva Zareie



Okahukura whio. Photo credit: Dianne June

Kokako chick banding with volunteer Greg Hill. Photo credit: Amanda Rogers



The NZ Landcare Trust - Mammalian Pests Eradication Around Rotopiko South and North lakes

The NZ Landcare Trust supports local community volunteers who trap mammalian pests around Rotopiko South and North lakes. Since 2016, volunteers have removed at least 1,838 animal pests from the wetland margins of the lakes. This work supports the National Wetland Trust, Waipā District Council, Ngāti



A ferret caught by one of the DOC 200 traps around South Lake, Rotopiko Lakes Complex

Apakura and DOC's work in keeping East Lake mammalian pest free.

For more information about this project, visit.

Pirongia to Maungatautari Ecological Corridor - Taiea te Taiao Mā Mangapiko, mai i Maungatautari ki Pirongia ahu ake

The Pirongia to Maungatautari ecological corridor project hit a new milestone last month when key sites were blessed in a small ceremony, where it was also gifted a new name.

The corridor is set to run along the Mangapiko Stream and provide 'stepping stones' of natural habitat between the two major conservation areas Maungatautari and Pirongia mountains.

Gifted by Dr Tom Roa, Haupai Puke and kaumātua of Pūrekireki Marae on November 16, it's now called 'Taiea te Taiao Mā Mangapiko, mai i Maungatautari ki Pirongia ahu ake' or Taiea te Taiao for short.

Translated it means to cherish the environment following the Mangapiko, from Maungatautari to Pirongia and beyond.

The project is now being led by NZ Landcare Trust – overseen by Waikato regional coordinator Nardene Berry, project coordinator Bexie Towle and Matauranga Māori facilitator Te ao te o Rangi Apaapa – but several community groups have already been putting in the mahi.

Bexie said the project will build on the work started by groups like the Lower Mangapiko Streamcare Group, Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society, Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust and others.

"A lot of organisations have already put some time into this, so this project blessing was the start of having some funding from Ministry for the Environment and Department of Conservation through Jobs For Nature."

Taiea te Taiao received funding in January to the value of \$800,000 for a five year period but Bexie expected the project to be an ongoing one.

"Everyone in the project sees this as a multigenerational project so we're not going to get this done in five years. Seeing the full

benefits will be in about 50 years and for generations to come.

"A lot of people say there has been generations of damage to the environment, and so it's going to take a few generations to fix it as well."

ECOLOGICALLY SOUND

Bexie said the five years of funding guaranteed the project could get a start, and a really good one at that.

Maintenance combatting weeds and drought could be a commitment for a few years after initial planting is complete before the corridor planting becomes self-sustaining, Bexie said.

The point of ecological corridors was to give wildlife the ability to travel between ecologically sound areas, of which there were many, but they were separate.

"If you look at what the landscape used to be, there was connectivity throughout the whole land, so ecological corridors connect-up these areas of environmental work, whether it's restoration planting or pest control or hopefully a combination of them both.

"In the case of this, we've got two amazing mountains in Maungatautari and Pirongia that have some amazing bird species on them as well as other wildlife.

"That birdlife in 10 to 20 years will be spilling out over the boundary or over the fence in the case of Maungatautari.

"So we're looking to get a little bit ahead of the game by trying to plant areas and restore bush along the Mangapiko stream, which is what we're using as a kind of a line on the map for the corridor which connects the two mountains."

Because the idea was to create stepping stones, there would not be planting the whole way along the stream and people would not see one "big green hallway," Bexie said.

The corridor would both allow birds a larger flight range and give them the opportunity to

mix with populations on the other mountain, the effect of the latter being a genetically diverse population which is more resistant to disease. Efforts to help the birds would also benefit all life in the stream, Bexie said.

"[The stream] crosses a lot of land that has problems with erosion and just general degradation of the water quality.

"So everything we do for the birds will also improve that stream and will help with bringing species back."

She said everyone spoken to so far including landowners and iwi were excited about and on board with the project.

They knew the stream well and had seen it be impacted by erosion and loss of its eel population, so were keen to see it revitalised.

"All the landowners I've met so far are really excited about it. They all care a lot about the stream."

STAKEHOLDERS in the ecological corridor project linking Pirongia with Maungatautari attended key sites for its blessing last month, where Dr Tom Roa shared stories along the corridor. By Brioanna Stewart



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Purangi Conservation Trust - KAITIAKITANGA WITH LAURA - Trap boxes

Kaitiakitanga has been described as guardianship or protection. The basic meaning of 'tiaki' is to guard, but depending on the context in which it is used, it also means to preserve, keep, conserve, nurture, protect and watch over. The prefix 'kai' with the verb 'tiaki' denotes the agent of the action of 'tiaki'. Therefore, a kaitiaki is a guardian, keeper, preserver, conservator or protector. The addition of 'tanga' denotes preservation, conservation and protection.

Kia ora, my name is Laura, I see myself as the (unofficial) Kaitiaki of the 'Darkside' -the



Laura doing her 'Darkside' mahi.

Purangi Conservations Trust's contract pest controller. I like to say huntress as it sounds awesome. With currently 10,798 hectares of the most wonderfully diverse landscape and people to oversee, I thought it was time to share some knowledge. Knowledge that I have learnt along the way; from fellow trappers, long time locals, amateurs giving it a go, professionals and a whole lot of reading, sharing, discussions and a genuine interest in eradication of pests for Predator Free 2050.

I arrived here in 2016, the year Predator Free 2050 was announced. It was then that I decided my back yard wasn't just the property I was fortunate to own, but it was the bush behind me; Maramatotara track, the ancient tapu forest besides the Pā, the Pā itself with the Whitianga Rock, the wetland and the springs and water holes. So in 2018 I started volunteering as a trapper for the trust.

Four years later, I am working full time in a job I love. Just this week I am pleased to say, with the help of monitoring equipment such as trail cameras, the trust has been able to purchase, and advice from other experts, this area is flourishing and the rats are under control. The odd possum has turned up on the camera set up, a couple of mice, a feral cat... which we will attend to with the right tools. But the nikau, puriri and other seedlings are now thriving. With kererū, tūī, kōtare, pīwakawaka and ruru, just to name a few - very much enjoying this space.

Mātauranga refers to the knowledge, comprehension or understanding of everything visible or invisible that exists within the environment. Knowledge is best shared. So I have decided to send out tips, tricks and tools we use in [weekly or bi weekly newsletters](#). I will endeavor to keep these informative, with a touch of life from me in my own words, concentrating on one topic at a time.



TRAP BOXES

There have been three instances recently where my volunteers have said they are just not catching. There are so many things we can do in this situation, like monitoring with chew cards and tunnels and then using our new trail cam with pre feeds and pest night clubs, change of traps, toxins, lures and on and on (so don't give up!). All these techniques will all be covered at later dates. But in my first instance I do a site visit to assess the trap box and placement. And every instance I have found major issues with the trap box.

Did you know..

Pests have neophobia, fear of new things. So be patient. But you only have one chance!

Pests can be trap shy, I was once told that 70% of pests are trap shy, essentially meaning that it is super hard to get numbers down without toxins. So again, we have to aim to get 100% of the 30% that want to go into the trap.

Trap shy can be a learned behaviour, if a pest observed another pest having a bad experience, and not engaging with other traps since it became trap shy, they will also start steering clear of the traps because of the learned behaviour. And very quickly you could find yourself with a trap shy population of pests.

What to do...



kept getting poked. So a pest will feel the same.

Boxes should be stable.

We have plenty of volunteers that have and continue to make up exceptional boxes so please reach out if you need a new box. I am slowly getting around to check boxes and recall the ones that aren't acceptable. We do need help with trap maintenance, if any one has time to tidy up boxes slowly as we replace them also reach out and we can drop them to you. Maintenance is key. And we all have different strengths.

If your boxes have exposed wire, trim down or grind back. We have plastic in our shed which you can use to slide on the edges. Think to yourself; would you like to be poked by this sharp wire on the way to dinner?

The holes in the wire should be 4 x 4, you will also get hedgehog in this size entry, but it will keep your bi catch down.

Double skin DOC200 boxes - all entries should be snag free. It should look inviting. Some of the boxes I was scared to put my hand in as I

Thank you for your time! Next week I will introduce you to one of toxins we are using, FERACOL, from my perspective and experience. Also I post regularly on our socials, and some posts incite some wonderful discussion from other trappers and conservation groups from our area and further afield.



PURANGI
CONSERVATION TRUST

Owhango Alive – Kiwi Egg Retrieval in Tongariro Forest

I wanted to share my experience with collecting kiwi eggs with Jerome, Owhango's resident DOC Kiwi Ranger. I must be on his volunteer list, as I got a call on Saturday night asking me if I would like to go with him to help bring some kiwi eggs back. They were over the bridge and close to the road – I said "ok, no worries!"

So, up at 6.00am, on a 3-degree drizzly morning. Armed with plenty of warm layers and a raincoat – Jerome picks me up at 6.30am in his side-by-side buggy and off we go, across the Whakapapa bridge and into the Tongariro Forest. Ferrets are roaming about at this time of year, looking for a mate and their own territory – and they can cover a huge (several thousand hectares) area. An adult kiwi had been killed by a ferret several weeks prior to our excursion, so extra traps had been put out which we checked on our way. We passed the Top track intersection, which leads on to Ten Man Hut, 22kms in – a little bit further and we stopped. Jerome got his tracking gear out and we set off to find the tagged kiwi.

Once located, he got the transporting gear for the eggs out, which was a chilly bin with 2 egg shaped hollows cut in a block of foam, lined with two old possum fur socks. Jerome pulled the eggs out of the nest and with a torch, located the air pockets, marking them with a pencil. Placing them into the possum lined nooks in the chilly bin, taking care that the air pockets were facing upwards, Jerome

carried the golden eggs to the buggy, instructed me to get seated and belted in. I was given the task of holding the precious cargo, facing it in a certain way. A slow journey back, avoiding the many potholes and bumps ensured the eggs made their way out of their natural habitat in perfect condition. The next stage was to hand the eggs over to a DOC colleague in Whakapapa. From there, they were going to Rainbow Springs in Rotorua where they will be incubated until hatched. The two eggs were 60 and 45 days old when we picked them up and should hatch at 78-80 days. Normally, the male kiwi sits on the eggs until hatched – this kiwi was called Jocko. Fingers crossed the eggs hatch, now safe from predation. - Andrew Dewing



Photo – Jerome Guillotel



Photo – Jerome Guillotel