



Nature in the City and Beyond Wānanga May 20th, Kirikiriroa, Hamilton

The Nature in the City and Beyond wānanga took place on 20 May at Te Kaaroro Nature Precinct in Hamilton. Te Kaaroro encompasses both Hamilton Zoo and Waiwhakareke Natural Heritage Park. With the predator-proof fence at Waiwhakareke already well advanced in its construction, the day provided a fantastic opportunity to reflect on and celebrate what has been achieved for biodiversity in Kirikiriroa over the past 20-plus years, while also updating the community on plans for the next 20 years and beyond.

Following a beautiful whakataua from Chris and Rangiuia Riki of Ngāti Māhanga, who blessed the day and welcomed us onto the whenua, Sam McElwee (WBF Coordinator) gave a brief introduction before the first speaker, Baird Fleming, took the stage. Baird is the Director of Te Kaaroro Nature Precinct. Having worked primarily in North America before taking up the role, he remarked on how impressed he was by the local community and the value they place on indigenous biodiversity.



Looking to the future, Baird did not go into specifics about which species might eventually be introduced into the predator-proof sanctuary, noting that these decisions will be made with guidance from the Department of Conservation (DOC). He also reminded attendees that progress must happen one step at a time. The immediate priority will be the successful completion of the eradication programme, which is expected to begin later this year once the fence is completed.

The next speakers were members of the Nature in the City team: Toni Cornes (Biodiversity Planning Advisor), Fraser Smith (Predator Control Advisor), and Clare Beet (Gully Restoration Advisor). The development and adoption of the Nature in the City Plan represent the hard work of many groups and individuals across Hamilton who have championed biodiversity and worked tirelessly to bring more nature into the city.

Since the plan's inception in 2020, significant gains have already been made, with indigenous vegetation cover increasing from less than 2% to around 3%. The ultimate goal for 2050 is to reach 10% indigenous vegetation cover—the minimum level considered necessary to support a sustainably functioning ecosystem. The Nature in the City team spoke about both the opportunities and challenges within their respective roles. Achieving the 10% target will be a significant challenge given the competing demands on urban land use, but with continued public support, it is an achievable vision.



The next speaker, Wayne Bennett from Forest Flora Nursery, was only asked to present the day before the event due to Greg Townsend being struck down by a virus. A big thank you to Wayne for stepping in at such short notice.

Wayne began his ecological restoration journey by collecting seed and propagating plants to regenerate native bush around his new home near Ngāruawāhia. Since then, he has accumulated more than 30 years of experience establishing native forests and observing the natural succession of indigenous plant communities. One of the key points Wayne emphasised was the importance of long-term observation of natural forest processes, including pollination, seed production and dispersal, competition, and succession. Understanding these processes provides valuable guidance for ecosystem restoration and helps build resilient ecosystems. One example Wayne shared was that canopy tree species such as kahikatea and rimu require adequate light and space to thrive. Attempting to establish these species beneath an existing canopy can severely stunt their growth and delay ecosystem recovery by decades.

The final speaker was Jesse Golden, a member of the Te Kaaroro team, who spoke about e-Bird and later demonstrated how to use the app during the field trip component of the day at Waiwhakareke. Jesse is a regional expert in the use of eBird, which has become the global standard platform for monitoring bird populations.

The more people who use the app, the more meaningful data can be generated to help track species populations and identify trends across our region. While developing the observation and listening skills needed to confidently identify birds takes time and practice, the app itself is free and easy to use. It also includes an audio identification feature powered by AI-assisted learning, which continues to improve in accuracy and usefulness.

