



Biodiversity Bus Tour May 14th 2025 – On-Farm and Community Biodiversity Projects a Plenty in South Waikato

The Waikato Biodiversity Forum (WBF) held its autumn forum event in South Waikato on 14 May 2025. This event was a bus trip with a focus on visiting sites and groups with a focus on water quality and biodiversity. There were a mix of sites from the beautiful Te Waihou springs, cared for by kaimahi from Raukawa Iwi. A visit to a local dairy farm to learn about an on-farm tuna eel pond habitat project, and a visit to the Whakauru Stream planting site at David Foote Park, Tokoroa. They have been supported with advice from DairyNZ and scientists in planning their tuna pond and planting site. About 40 people from around the Waikato region attended the bus trip.

Tuna specialist Dr Jacques Boubée said there are three types of eel in Aotearoa New Zealand. Two of them are indigenous to NZ and one is Australasian. The short fin eel and long fin eels will be familiar to many people. Eels migrate up and down rivers from the sea and are thought to breed near New Caledonia. Barriers on waterways, like dams and other blockages interfere with this cycle. The tuna ponds on this Waikato farm provide a home for tuna to stay while they wait for nearby paddocks to flood. Eels feed on worms, insects and small animals on the flooded paddock. Long fin eels are larger and more dominant than short fin eels.

The land owners have planted native shrubs and trees around the ponds to shade the water and provide protection for in-stream bugs and other creatures living in the streams. Vegetation around these ponds attract birds and insects to the area and provides habitat and shade.

Raukawa people said that the past 3-5 years there has been a big focus on planting and pest control along the banks of the Te Waihou Spring and walkway. These plants are now shading the river and helping the wellbeing of the spring. Walkways and viewing platforms have been important for encouraging visitors to keep the paths and allow the plants to grow. The team have been carrying out pest control and learning a lot. Having people working in the area every day and keeping 'eyes on the stream' has meant the realization of a dream for elders they said.

At the Whakauru Stream, the Raukawa team have been monitoring the health of the water by checking for the presence of freshwater koura. This is done through submerged bracken bundles instream (Tau koura/Tau Kewai), that provide good hiding places for the koura, away from eels.

Waikato Biodiversity Coordinator, Sam McElwee, says that "Each of these projects has been a team effort, with local people helping with planting, weeding and pest control. This is what makes the projects special. People get to be in nature, meeting other community members and making a difference in a tangible way". Some sites have local business involvement, like Manulife, picking up the maintenance of the stretch of stream bank near their offices at Tokoroa.

Poikaiwhenua Catchment Group Coordinator, Hadleigh Putt, said that "the best thing about the job is meeting people and making a difference. He's learnt about many special places there is in the South Waikato and gets to connect with people in a really meaningful way".

Getting Involved - Bringing back the healthy streams and rivers is a community effort and there are many ways to contribute. "You don't need experience—just enthusiasm," says Hadleigh. "Catchment groups love sharing knowledge with people who are new to environmental projects. It's a chance to learn, make friends, and spend time outside in some of the most beautiful parts of our community. Whether you're planting trees, tackling pests, or simply enjoying time in nature, your involvement helps sustain these shared treasures." Written by Wendy Boyce and Hadleigh Putt, Wai Connection, Waikato

To get involved or find out more, visit:

- www.waikatobiodiversityforum.org.nz
- www.pokaiwhenuacatchmentgroup.org.nz
- www.piakocatchmentforum.co.nz
- www.Raukawa.org.nz

- www.goeco.org.nz
- www.waiconnection.nz (National project sharing environmental skills with local people)
- www.southwaikatodistrictcouncil.govt.nz
- www.matamatapiakodistrictcouncil.govt.nz
- <https://sites.google.com/view/mokaihaha/home>

