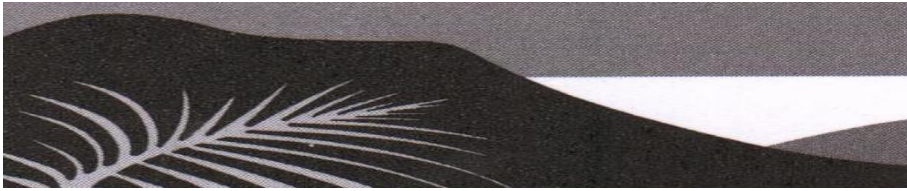


WINDY HILL ROSALIE BAY CATCHMENT TRUST



Newsletter # 14

December 2008

Annual Report Ten Years of Pest Management - A Personal Perspective

It is a decade since the Little Windy Hill Company approved a modest pest management programme at its AGM in October of 1998. Since that time the south eastern Great Barrier Island project has grown to 750 hectares involving 14 landholdings. Over the years of newsletters we have shared much about the positive conservation outcomes of the project and in marking this decade of restoration I would like this report to be a more personal account.

Conservation is about people – it is an enlivening social activity that engages people in actively protecting and enjoying the natural environment. Unfortunately, it has as its downside, the of killing perfectly healthy animals and plants because we have deemed them damaging to the native order we value more highly. It is based on human judgment.

The decade has been for me as Project manager and vision holder, a steep and ongoing learning curve full of surprises, delight (those first Barrier born robins after 140 years was something else), failures, angst about getting it right, heaps of support, and darn right doggedness. Keeping such a successful mammal as the rat down takes ruthlessness.

Getting an inkling of an understanding about the dynamics at play in this regenerating forest has been inspiring – living in it you learn much by osmosis but a great deal more from the science of it. I have loved the learning.

Top of my list is appreciation.

- How amazing it is to live in a place like this and, with the permission from landowners, to be able to pursue my passion of giving the native species here the fullest opportunity I can to flourish and be uplifting to all.
- I thank my husband, Scott, who allows me the freedom combined with a solid financial backing, to do this.
- This year we have a flock of 14 kaka and have seen for the first time juvenile lizards seen in the lizard 'motels'.
- To the field team here – Kevin as field manager and the field workers Dean, Rachel and Dave – thank you, you are outstanding. These hardworking people are the engine room of the pest management and monitoring programme – they are committed, conscientious, and as interested in the results of their efforts as anyone. The sheer size and complexity of the project and the biodiversity gains made are a tribute to them.

- I am also hugely appreciative of the advice, support, and encouragement I get from fellow Trustees, friends, locals, conservation professionals, and local government personnel.
- The restoration work here could not be undertaken without the generous support from a number of funding bodies, landowners, and individuals who are detailed and thanked at the end of this newsletter.

Successes....

- To have so many landowners, both private and public, working as cooperatively as we do towards a common goal I regard as an achievement.
- The translocation of North Island robins to Windy Hill marked the turning of the tide for waning biodiversity on the Island and a thumbs up from DoC as to the efficacy of our programme. I look forward to more birds in March 2009.
- To have developed a committed field team of such a high standard formed from people who have had long histories of unemployment is a bonus. The project has provided an opportunity for these people to shine and to be recognised for their skill.
- The work of the project is highly regarded. We are well known throughout NZ and have been recognised through Awards, the participation of Universities, and the involvement of DoC, the ARC, and Landcare Research.
- To have sustained funding over this period of time is also a mark of the value of our work.
- We have developed a comprehensive monitoring programme with a Control and have a critical approach to research with a robust scientific base. The results are widely shared.
- We have promoted the development of the sanctuary area throughout NZ through newsletters, workshops, and conferences.
- I have proven that biodiversity on private land can be sustained and enhanced over time by community.

.....and failures

We have failed in our original objective of managing pests to low densities in the absence of toxins. After 5 years of trapping our monitoring showed we could not get rat numbers down sufficiently with this method alone. A very cautious introduction of toxins on a twice yearly 'pulsed' basis reduced rat densities markedly over 4 years but still produced inconsistent results. For example, rat tracking tunnel percentages at Little Windy Hill doubled this year in spite of intensive management. With conditional approval from landowners, the project has converted to a toxin base and trapping has ceased. This has meant change to a long held philosophical organic view for me and a new range of challenges.

There have been times when more timely consultation would have been better, when our practice could have been better, and when my management skills have come up short. No excuses, other than such is the human condition of imperfection. We are learning from our mistakes.

Challenges.....

Not everybody likes what you are doing – while I am open to robust debate about our practice and discussion about the ethics of this, I am occasionally distressed at the levels of intimidation I experience - angry and vexatious people who use threats, bullying, and even vandalism of the trapping gear as a way of expressing their opinions.

It is no easy matter accommodating the spectrum of value and belief systems from the 43 individuals who own the properties in the sanctuary area, let alone those of the neighbours to the project. And we do make errors, boundaries being a key one, but where these are pointed out I am conscientious about righting wrongs in as timely a manner as possible.

Trying to get the risk/benefit balance right is a challenge for any activity like this. Finding funding continues to remain a challenge as is meeting the sometimes exhaustive conditions set by some funders.

The way ahead.....

The goal now is to reduce the costs of the project as we head into lean financial times (some funding bodies have ceased giving grants) and improve the efficacy of our pest management, ie: to reduce rats, feral cats, weeds, and pigs even further. These first few months of the toxin based programme we will be used to establish the minimum amount of toxin required for the best results.

The Trust has put in place a retrenchment plan which will unfold over the next 18 months dependent on funding and the determination of the resource required to manage the new toxin based programme.

I have managed the Trust funds fairly prudently and am confident that we are well placed to weather the current economic downturn in the short term and can complete the expansion our restoration sanctuary area to Rosalie Bay.

Thank you to the following Trust Sponsors:

Biodiversity Condition Fund

Kelvin Floyd

ARC Environmental Initiatives Fund

Auckland City Council Heritage Fund

Sealink Ltd

Lotteries Environment & Heritage Fund

Great Barrier Airlines

And to the Great Barrier Landowners: Little Windy Hill Co Ltd, Helga and Peter Speck (Benthorn Farm), Bruce and Cynthia Macnee, Nick Wilkinson, Somerville & Nicolson Families, Blaiklock Family, Robin Henderson, Martina and Pedro Tschirky, Wells Family, Rachel Wakefield, Harland Family, DoC, Rosalie Bay Farms.

After ten years I remain enthusiastic about the sanctuary and committed to continuing to manage it to the very best of my ability.

Kind regards and warm seasons greetings

Judy Gilbert

Trust Manager