



Kia Ora and Festive Greetings

The Windy Hill Sanctuary has turned 21 and we are certainly coming of age.

This year has been exceptional for the support that the Sanctuary has received from funding organisations – our track record of ecological restoration, the longevity of relationships, and diligent reporting have been recognised with unprecedented levels of funding support, particularly from Auckland Council.

The Sanctuary is now part of a network of Aotea Great Barrier biodiversity focussed areas within the Auckland Council Environmental plans. We are the only one that has a history of integrated pest management making the Sanctuary a good investment for the Councils targeted environmental rate. Additional funding means that over the next three years we can plan to expand our Sanctuary area, add to our field team, survey Hochstetters frogs in Te Paparahi, manage the continued development of the Aotea Community Native Plant Nursery, and trial the new Double Tap rat bait. Funding from Council has also been made available for administrative and new project costs.

The Aotea Great Barrier Local Board approved funding to keep our field team equipped and safe – each member now has a personal locator beacon – and funded a survey of birds at Hiramimata (Mt Hobson) and the banding of the North Island robins that have established there. Dr Kevin Parker will undertake this work in January 2020.

The DOC Community Conservation Fund approved a three year application ensuring we have two part time field team members for that time frame. Foundation North continues to be a stalwart supporter of our Sanctuary.

Tieke (North Island Saddle Backs) on Aotea Great Barrier?

We are very excited by the preliminary discussions between Massey University and the Trust regarding the prospect of translocating tieke to the Sanctuary as a research project. The research objective is for the University to monitor the outcomes for this species in the absence of stoats (a major threat) in mature bush habitat with low levels of rats and feral cats. The dispersal patterns of the birds will also be monitored. In preparation, our plan over the next year is to increase checks of rat bait and traps from monthly to every fortnight and increase cat trapping efforts with the goal of reducing these pests as close to zero as we can.



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Field Work

It is no easy task to manage pests to low densities in an unfenced Sanctuary located in contiguous bush habitat and it is a testament to our dedicated field team – Kevin Parsons, Henry Cookson, Lotte McIntyre, Selina Ward, Phil Estrada e Santiago, Dave Harland, and volunteer Helga Speck - that this year we achieved a Sanctuary annual average rat Tracking Tunnel result of 8.1% . In November, out of 80 tracking tunnels in two pest managed areas, the result was 0% - the sweet spot.

Our volunteer pig hunter, Dean Medland, has taken out over 20 feral pigs this year from at least 50 hunts. Great work with our landowners and field team members enjoying many a good, personally delivered roast. Our feral cat programme is benefitting from the additional trapping by Auckland Council on our boundaries that align with Council walking tracks. Tracks and roads are routes often used by cats.

It is this collective effort and commitment to sustaining the biodiversity of this area that has been the signature of this project and we are most appreciative of the trust and increasing support we receive from landowners, volunteers, and funding organisations to keep active on the ground where it counts. A full record of our pest species culling can be found on our website www.windyhillssanctuary.nz

Aotea Community Native Plant Nursery

The creation and manifestation of this project under the Trust umbrella has been a treat. Thanks to Helen Kemp for her fine planning, budgeting and promotional skills who worked with me to get this project off the ground. The Nursery is established in a renovated cowshed in Mulberry Grove, Tryphena, and opened in August. It has been generously funded by Aotea Great Barrier Local Board and Auckland Council. A key goal of the Nursery is to supply native plants sourced on the island and reduce the biosecurity risk from plants being brought to the island which almost certainly harbour such nasties as Argentine ants and Plague Skinks.



The Shade House



Landowner and Trustee Derek Bell with Nursery Visitors

This project has benefitted from outstanding levels of volunteer time – Henry Scott almost lives at the Nursery and has not only built much of the infrastructure but also has the plant and propagation knowledge to pass on to volunteers. Nursery Manager, Magenta Axam (currently on maternity leave) has beautified the Nursery and created great systems for recording all levels of the Nursery activities. Phil Estrada e Santiago, now Acting Manager, has also put in huge volunteer hours caring for plants. We are pleased to work in partnership with Okiwi Green, the island's northern commercial Nursery, and are working together to supply large orders for landscape scale planting.

Acknowledgements to Danvers Devereaux for his generous donation of our irrigation systems and Damian Honiss for our new polytunnel. Thanks also to Derek Bell who allows the Nursery to reside on his property, provides free mulch, and frequent backup support. Seeds and seedlings are being gathered by community and form the basis of our plant collection. The Nursery is open every Saturday from 10am till 2pm or on appointment - aoteanursery@gmail.com

Visitors

It was great to finally get Lou Sanson, Director General of Conservation, to Windy Hill mid-year. Lou has a soft spot for the island and was keen to hear about the history and current outcomes of pest management in the Sanctuary. I stressed to Lou the importance of the long term relationships we have with organisations such as DoC and that there needs to be a system whereby this longevity is recognised so that we don't apply as if we are strangers year after year.

The Auckland Conservation Board visited the Sanctuary early in 2019 as did the team from Predator Free NZ 2050 in May.

Citizen Science guru, Monica Peters, stayed over while here for a Community Monitoring presentation as part of the Great Barrier Ecology Vision project.

Karen Denyer surveyed the Sanctuary for weeds as part of her island wide weed survey for Auckland Council. Weeds were found mostly in our private gardens. Karen and local, Jo Leary, have over many years, surveyed almost every property on the island and mapped the weeds for future management under contract to Auckland Council. An outstanding achievement which will inform weed work on the island for years to come.



WH weeds - Aristea



Watsonia

Turning 21

Coming of Age for this project means a maturing of our capacity, skill, and understanding of the ecology of the area along with all the many inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies that managing pests presents us with. It means that we have proved ourselves, this community based project on the 'back end of the Barrier' and that we can continue to sustain the biodiversity here with confidence.

We have maintained an unwavering commitment to the vision of a rat and feral cat free island and question why we will most likely be the last island in the Hauraki Gulf to finally realise that we have a responsibility to the Planet to achieve this goal.

I'm signing off from another island, Kawau, where my husband's family has had a bach for 50 years. Visiting here provides me with the impetus to put my energy for another year, and yet another year, into the Windy Hill Sanctuary because of the contrast – here is a depauperate forest full of weeds like agapanthus and ladder fern, and until management of the wallaby commenced under the Pohutukawa Trust, there was almost no forest regeneration. Despite being just across the water from the fenced Tawharanui Peninsula Sanctuary, there are few birds. It makes Aotea mighty worthy of the effort.

Judy Gilbert

On behalf Windy Hill Rosalie Bay Catchment Trust Trustees