

Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society

Annual Report

2011

Tena kotou, tena kotou, tena kotou, katoa.

Radio New Zealand is currently celebrating 100 years of radio transmission in this country. Last week they announced the winners of their competition to find the sound which best reflects us as New Zealanders. Of the top 5 sounds, 4 were native bird calls, with the top slot going to the tui and bellbird. Clearly, our native birds are central to who we are as a nation, and Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society is right behind ensuring that they remain so. This evening we are holding our 9th AGM with some impressive environmental achievements to celebrate. Our pest control work continues to deliver successful results, we won a major award in 2010 and we have some exciting new projects on the horizon.

Our pest control activities centre on a bait station grid on Mt Pirongia. A pilot area of 250 ha was established in 2006 and we have just completed the 5th extension in as many years to take the combined area of control to 845 ha. Our ultimate goal is to cover 1,000 ha so that Kokako can be returned to the maunga, and we are poised to achieve that objective within the next two years. Our newest addition to the grid, the Ruapane extension, takes in another 130 ha of the forest park, and owes its realisation to the drive and dedication of Steve McClunie and Ken Allen. The society is hugely indebted to these stalwarts and their families who look after the operation. For the rest of us, it runs like clockwork, but that is due to all the hard work behind the scenes and I want to offer Steve and Ken our grateful thanks for their care and commitment to the task. The results of our pest control have been fantastic again this year. Starting from a pre-operation high of 66.70%, rat numbers were reduced to a mere 1.1% in December 2010. This result makes it the 4th consecutive year of achieving less than a 2% residual rat population. Native bird numbers are benefiting with blossom trees in Pirongia being black with tuis in the spring last year, and noticeably more bird song on the mountain. St Paul's Collegiate in Hamilton do the rat monitoring for us as part of their Hillary Award Challenge and we appreciate their generous assistance. Our bait station days end with a delicious barbecue and other refreshments, which really adds to the social occasion and those who organise the food etc deserve a special thank you, especially Pirongia Forest Park Lodge who make their bbq available to us free of charge.

It was about this time last year that we were named Supreme Winner of the TrustPower Waipa District Community Awards in recognition of our pest control project. This involved us in a television programme, Volunteer Power and also called for the production of a DVD about our group. I would like to thank TrustPower, Waipa District Council and all those who helped us with these, especially the volunteers who gave of their time to recreate a bait station fill. We were also rapt with the generous support of Pirongia Forest Park Lodge and Heliworx Waikato Ltd for making aerial shots possible for the programme. Dave Owen of TeAwamutuOnline produced the DVD for our society, impressing us with his patience and professionalism. The DVD is only about 6 minutes long and will be shown after the presentation of this report. It can also be viewed from the TeAwamutu online website. A further development in this line has been the gaining of funding from NZ Lotteries to produce a podcast of a commentary for the Mangakaraa Nature Walk. This is to be available in time for the Rugby World Cup in September this year. We appreciate the assistance of the

Department of Conservation, Purekireki Marae, Te Awamutu Community Public Relations Office and Pirongia Tourism Association for this project.

In September last year we hosted an International Environmental Student, Kora Kutschbach from Germany who stayed with us for 4 months. She was totally committed to the environment and helped us with innumerable aspects of our operation. We learnt so much from her perspective and experience coming from Europe to New Zealand and we are grateful for all she contributed to our group, especially in helping us launch our Facebook page.

Other society projects in the last 12 months included the 6th Mt Pirongia Art Awards, preparing to return North Island Robins to Mt Pirongia, landscaping of Te Ngahere Reserve, raising northern rata plants, training for native bat monitoring and our environmental activity centre project. The Mt Pirongia Art Awards are held annually in November as part of the Te Awamutu SCREAM festival. With categories for two dimensional art and creative fibre using natural dyes, it is a great opportunity for us to publicise our organisation and gain supporters. We have great sponsors on side who make the awards possible, especially Waipa Community Arts Council, Goldridge Wealth Management, Gordon Harris Art Supplies in Hamilton and TinyMighty Power. Thank you to you all.

Our plans to reintroduce North Island Robins, or Toutouwai to Mt Pirongia received a huge boost from Waikato Regional Council recently, with funding approved of \$12,000. This will enable us to employ a project leader, and complete the phases of the project involving training, capture and health screening of the birds. We are hopeful that this project will see robins being released on Mt Pirongia next year, and we consider this as an intermediate step to eventually translocating Kokako as well. Te Ngahere Reserve, located here in Pirongia Village is being landscaped using themes drawn from Mt Pirongia and our society is helping manage the project. Support from the community and local schools has been outstanding and so far \$2,035 has been received in donations in addition to in-kind contributions. The first stage of planting has been successfully completed and the second stage is now being prepared. Our project to raise northern rata plants to help reverse the decline of these majestic trees on Mt Pirongia has not seen a very successful strike rate for the cuttings we have taken. We are considering obtaining funding so that we can contract this work to a nursery. Native bat monitoring has been previously identified as a goal for Mt Pirongia by the Department of Conservation and we co-ordinate a group of volunteers for this purpose. This year a training day was held on bat monitoring and we now await details of a monitoring programme which DoC is instigating with the help of Darren LeRoux who was our guest speaker at last year's AGM. DoC are planning to attend our August meeting to present the programme and anyone interested in being involved is welcome to attend. Our environmental activity centre project has become entangled in red tape concerning a decision on our concession application with DoC. We are hopeful that this will be resolved in the near future, and in this regard we are grateful for the assistance of Councillor Diane Sharpe, Sabina Owen, Haupai Puke, Sally Uerata, Ros Empson, and the co-operation of Peter and Shirley Kewish.

On an operational level, we are pleased with the continued growth of our support base. We have 78 members and 99 sponsors who make up our sponsor a hectare programme with 137 hectares sponsored. Our volunteers number around the 80 mark. All of you are incredibly important to us in sustaining our activities and making the on-the-ground

difference to our native ecosystems on Mt Pirongia. A number of you will receive presentations in appreciation of what you do for our society, but what I say now applies equally to all of you. Individually you may think that the part you play is insignificant, but when viewed collectively, it's simply awesome what we are achieving. Be proud of being involved and on behalf of our society I thank you all.

Our ability to secure funding has continued despite the difficult economic conditions and we acknowledge with grateful thanks the following funders for the 2010/2011 year:

Source	Amount	Purpose
Environment Waikato	\$5,000 \$12,000	Pest control work re bait station grid Robins project
Lion Foundation	\$7,000 \$5,000	Bait station extensions
Department of Conservation	\$3,000 \$3,000	Pindone baits for pest control Bait station extension
Pub Charity	\$1,000 \$2,000	Annual insurance of envirocentre building Bait station extension
NZ 2011 Festival Lottery Fund	\$2,000	Production of audiovisual podcast of guided walk on Mt Pirongia
Waipa Community Arts Council	\$930	Mt Pirongia Art Awards
BP	\$800	Gift vouchers for volunteers
Waipa District Council	\$500	Admin grant
Mt Pirongia Lions Club	\$500	Brochure for membership and sponsorship
NZPost		200 postage paid envelopes
	\$42,730	

I like to save the last word for the committee who are such a privilege to work with. All of you show amazing dedication and passion for what we are trying to achieve which I appreciate so much as Chairperson, and special thanks go to our vice Chair Steve McClunie and Secretary Dianne June. We have lost two committee members this year, Linda and Nicky and I want to acknowledge their fine contributions and wish them well for the future. Restoring the native ecosystems on Mt Pirongia is going to take a long time. We knew that when we formed our society in 2002, but that mountain is a uniting force that challenges our hearts and minds to explore the possibilities, find the people and resources to help, and journey together towards a future where tui and bellbird song isn't confined to radios and ipods. As Henry Ford said, "If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself." I think that is what our committee is doing. Thank you for building a shared vision for a future Mt Pirongia full of thriving ecosystems, and for caring enough to make a success of that vision.

Clare St Pierre
Chairperson
14 July 2011