

Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society
Annual Report
2019

Tena kotou, tena kotou, tena kotou, katoa.

This year the spotlight has been on the stark state of affairs for our environment. New Zealand's National Report to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity confirmed that more than 4000 of our native plant and wildlife species are threatened or at risk of extinction, with habitat loss a major factor. Climate change emergencies are being declared in the wake of the IPCC's 2018 special report on the need to act now to prevent temperature rise that threatens our ecosystems and our lifestyles. These issues absolutely confirm the critical work we do in protecting the most prominent natural landmark in the Waikato and the native communities making their home there. We are proud of the biodiversity gains we have been able to make in reintroducing lost species and keeping down pests, and in the past year we have been recognised as a leader and model for others to follow.

Last July, as part of our vision to re-establish a kōkako population on Mt Pirongia, 14 kōkako with Pirongia genes sourced from Tiritiri Matangi Island were released onto the maunga. They lost no time in settling into their new home which included one pair picking their territory right at the end of Grey Rd. This meant it was easy for the public to see them, which has been a thrill for lots of people, and a headache for us because of the risk of the birds being injured by traffic. We now have the only road sign in the country asking vehicles to go slow for kōkako, and we appreciate Waipa District Council working with us on this.

With the help of Dave Bryden, our kōkako ecologist, we were able to monitor four kōkako nests and provide additional pest protection by surrounding each nest tree with rat and possum traps. 10 chicks were verified as fledging successfully and one chick banded. With kōkako numbering 45 before nesting began this season, this could take the population up to 55 assuming that there have been no losses. Our long term aim is to have a population of 500 kōkako on the maunga. Learning that our site is the most productive of the new populations being monitored at present by Dave is a promising start.

An extensive survey to locate all the kōkako late in 2018 managed to find about 30. Approximately half were still within our low pest area where they were released and about half were outside. The question of how to protect the kōkako outside the 1,000ha control area is an ongoing conversation we are having with DoC and our ecologists, and I would like to acknowledge the total professionalism of Dave and his team, and the fine support we receive from DoC and Waikato Regional Council for our kōkako project.

Effective pest control underpins the glamour of kōkako management and we continue to deliver on that front at Mt Pirongia and Okahukura, Northern Pureora Forest. At both sites we operate 1,000ha bait station grids serviced by amazing community volunteers. At Pirongia our post-operational possum index was 1.54, and our rat one was 5.8% while at Okahukura we achieved a magnificent zero index from a pre-operational level of 14% for rats (we don't monitor possums there). These results don't happen by themselves. It takes the brilliant team leadership that is

delivered by Steve McClunie and Ken Allen for Pirongia and by Dianne and Selwyn June for Okahukura and involves impeccable planning, operational efficiency and lots of time. Okahukura has the added complexity of remoteness and high maintenance needs for our road access. We were most fortunate this year to have the generous help of Don Finnegan to undertake key improvements there, with Dianne, Selwyn and Gerry Kessels also contributing. DoC Maniapoto give us full on support as well. Thank you to all of you for ensuring our operations run without a hitch. I am also pleased to report there were no serious health and safety incidents for any of our fieldwork this year. As extra protection for kōkako at Pirongia we are preparing to set up trapping for mustelids and feral cats. We are grateful for the input of Greg Hill, Tom Davies and Selwyn June who have led this initiative and we are almost at the point of deploying some mustelid trap lines, following excellent collaboration with the Te Awamutu MenzShed.

In recognition of our outstanding achievements for returning kōkako to Mt Pirongia we won the New Zealand Biosecurity Awards Community category in November last year. It's great that another Waipa group, Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust, was also a finalist in the same category so Waipa stands out in the lead for community based action at keeping New Zealand's outstanding species secure.

Moving on to our other activities, our Dactylanthus team has undertaken more sowing of seed in the hope of expanding populations on Mt Pirongia, this time in 12 plots around existing plants near the summit. This rare plant is almost invisible because it grows entirely underground except for when it flowers, so monitoring during its flowering period is another fundamental we carry out. We are very appreciative of DoC developing a comprehensive Dactylanthus management plan for us this year as well.

In the past year we have progressed with our envirocentre project by holding a number of working bees, where Dianne has excelled herself with organising things. Composting toilets have finally been installed and interior improvements made. Dianne, you and your band of helpers have been sensational! We have started collaborating more closely with other groups especially Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust. Our first joint undertaking with them was a rifleman abundance survey in our Pirongia control area during May, which will help determine whether Pirongia would be a suitable source site for translocations. There were 147 riflemen sighted with 100% certainty in the two sectors surveyed. Further surveys are planned for July, and if a translocation goes ahead, this is likely to happen next year. Another collaboration partner is Pirongia Forest Park Lodge. They help us regularly by making their facilities available to us for free for our events, which is fantastic.

Our full-on programme of projects and activities would not be possible without grants and donations, and I want to give sincere thanks to the following who have generously supported us over the past year:

Source	Amount	Purpose
Grants		
Department of Conservation - Okahukura	\$ 45,609	Kokako protection
Department of Conservation - kokako	\$ 18,400	Kokako translocation and pest control
WWF and the Tindall Foundation	\$ 15,000	Pirongia Pest Control
Len Reynolds Trust	\$ 12,000	Envirocentre and Capacity Building

Waipa District Council - Heritage Fund	\$ 13,800	Mustelid trapping
WWF Learnz Grant	\$ 11,550	Kokako Educational Video Resource
Waipa District Council	\$ 1,150	Administration
Waikato Regional Council SSCIF	\$ 5,750	Okahukura pest control
Subtotal	\$ 123,259	
Donations		
Ministry for Primary Industries	\$ 2,500	Biosecurity Award Prizemoney
Crypto for forests	\$ 1,500	Pirongia kokako
Tamahere School	\$ 1,300	Pirongia kokako
RNZ Critter of the week	\$ 848	Invertebrates
Waipa Networks	\$ 700	Pirongia Pest Control
Feilding North Street School	\$ 350	Pirongia kokako
Subtotal	\$ 7,198	
Grand Total	\$ 130,457	

In-kind support and donations

Kessels Ecology	\$1,500	Office furniture
Waipa District Council	\$100	Kokako road sign
Department of Conservation	\$900	Dactylanthus support
Department of Conservation	\$3,500	Donated traps
Anne Aitken	\$540	Human Resources Consultancy
	\$6,540	

Related party transactions

Ken Allen - Committee member	\$9,600	Grid maintenance contractor Project management and co-ordination payment
Clare St Pierre - Chairperson	\$2,300	Project management and co-ordination payment
Steve McClunie - Vice Chairperson	\$2,300	Project management and co-ordination payment
	\$14,200	

Volunteers are our lifeblood and we continue to be in good heart, mainly because of the appeal of our kōkako and rifleman projects. Our committee takes great encouragement seeing so many people giving back for the benefit of our native biodiversity. I make special mention of the University of Waikato Science Students' Association who send two whole bus-load of young people to help on our Okahukura baiting weekends. Our appreciation for you all knows no bounds because without your openheartedness we would come to a grinding halt.

Volunteer hours came to 8375 this year involving about 110 people representing a massive 169% increase on last year's hours, driven mainly by kōkako monitoring on Mt Pirongia. At present, 285 people are registered for our projects, we have 213 members and sponsors of hectares, and 189 hectares of pest control are sponsored in total. Our Mangakaraa podcast, available for free on the internet <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZO-Gxc1yfWk>, now has over 4,690 views while our facebook page has 1174 followers, breaking the 1,000 threshold this year.

The accolades for this story of success rest with my incredible committee. Special mentions belong to Steve McClunie as vice-Chair and pest control guru who has spent untold hours repairing pig damage to our Pirongia bait station grid and installing pink triangles, Tom Davies has taken up the finance reins so capably this year including migrating us to Xero. Greg Hill is up to his eyeballs in mustelid trapping and gives his all in other areas too. I don't know where to start with Dianne June. She's our Secretary and Co-ordinator extraordinaire, keeps our Okahukura project running magnificently and has taken on extras besides like the envirocentre and fundraisers. Selwyn June has been our *chef de mission* for Health and Safety, fully involved with Okahukura, kōkako, dactylanthus, possum monitoring and leading mustelid trapping with local schools. He has stepped down from the committee which is a huge loss to us, but is continuing as a volunteer. Selwyn's input has been of the highest calibre and all of us are full of admiration for what he has done for the group. Thank you.

Outside of the committee we have some key people doing fabulous things for us: Alison Sellars for Dactylanthus co-ordination, Kane O'Donnell for GIS services, Antoinette Wilson and Parva Zareie for publicity, Susan Emmitt for permissions and Kessels Ecology, Ros Empson, Peter Smits, Ron Collinson, Joanne Roxburgh, Peter Elley, Richard and Anne Still and John Wood for all their contributions to the envirocentre and special projects. Thank you to you all.

Only one in 10 adults actively help with a conservation project according to the latest UN Biodiversity Report, which makes most of you here the crème de la crème of society. Yet community action has been identified as THE leverage to upscale protection efforts for our unique flora and fauna. So come on and let's push up that participation rate. How many others can you get to join in on our mission to bring our maunga back to life, and save the planet at the same time.

Kia kaha

Clare St Pierre
Chairperson

11 July 2019