

Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society
Annual Report
2021

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

Despite the continued challenges of COVID, our Society has chalked up some incredible milestones in the past year, which all of us can be proud of. Our kōkako mahi for Mt Pirongia continues to do well, while the surveying of kōkako numbers at Okahukura confirmed the amazing benefits our pest control there has delivered. Our collaboration with Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari is expanding, we have begun our environmental education journey, continued upgrading our envirocentre and the Society's structure is maturing.

Turning first to Mt Pirongia, our standout achievement for the year was the successful breeding of the second generation of kōkako. We banded chicks whose parents were unbanded, which meant the parents must have hatched on Mt Pirongia themselves. In all, 9 breeding pairs were monitored this season and at least 23 chicks were fledged. That compares to last year's 5 pairs and 7 chicks fledged. Ecologists Dave Bryden and Amanda Rogers have done an outstanding job for us in locating the birds, tirelessly checking nests and banding chicks, and we are immensely grateful to them for their dedication and generous assistance. Volunteers willing to monitor nests and undertake extra pest control around the nests have also stepped up for us. Thank you to each one of you for your tremendous support, especially those stalwarts who took on the Kaniwhaniwha pair's monitoring.

Kōkako could not be on our maunga without the critical pest control that has been completed year in and year out by volunteers since 2006. Our 1030 bait station grid was extended by 280ha in the Sainsbury Rd area this season, thanks to the co-operation of Waipa District Council and the Pirongia Mountain Bike Club. It has been fantastic to have Joanne and Tony Roxburgh take on the Team Leader role for this area with Fonterra Te Awamutu also supporting the new extension. We trialled a new bait this year, Double Tap, which produced a disappointing 8.3% post-operational index, down from the pre-operational figure of 16%. We'll be looking at alternatives this coming Spring. Massive thanks go to Steve McClunie for the superb job he does leading this pest control endeavour and those that support him especially Ken Allen and the volunteers who look after rat monitoring and grid maintenance.

Mustelid trapping is another string to our bow on Mt Pirongia and we now have 70 trap boxes strategically placed through our bait station grid serviced by our fitter volunteers. The meticulous work to calibrate and record details by Richard Still and Brian Bowell is paying off with a total of 219 kills so far. They have also been working on an easy-use alternative trap design being trialled with Hancock Forest

Management and we appreciate the positive support Hancocks are giving us. Richard is stepping down from the committee from this AGM but will continue as Team Lead for mustelid trapping, for which we are very grateful. I understand he has plans to expand his empire, I mean trap lines, in the coming months.

Completing the pest reduction side of things, a 1080 operation covering the Forest Park beyond our control area was completed in September last year, successfully reducing possums to a zero index. Any kōkako outside our grid benefited from this work, especially the pair that nested successfully at Kaniwhaniwha, so we appreciate the collaboration for this operation with the Department of Conservation and Waikato Regional Council.

Monitoring of *Dactylanthus taylorii* populations on Pirongia continues as a partnership with DoC. This year, 9 new plants were found, and good seed set confirmed at a number of sites, which is really encouraging. A big thank you to Alison Sellars who co-ordinates the small team who look after this quirky native parasitic plant.

Moving now to our Okahukura pest control project to protect kōkako at Northern Pureora Forest, we broke another record this year for the most volunteers participating in a baiting day: 75. Our mahi reduced rat populations from 34% before baiting to 4%, a pleasing result. A census of kōkako there was completed in May, which showed numbers increasing to 92 pairs compared to the last census in 2016 of 45. This is a strong endorsement of our 1,000ha pest control and wouldn't be possible without the terrific commitment of Dianne and Selwyn June who lead the project and the magnificent support from Gerry Kessels, DoC Maniapoto Office, the University of Waikato's Science Students Association and the Waikato Tramping Club. Heartfelt thanks to you all. Because of our kōkako mahi on Pirongia and at Okahukura, we were selected recently to feature in Predator Free 2050's 5-year report as being an exemplar of courage. We're thrilled to be recognised in this way.

On the environmental education front, we treasure the great working relationship we have with Purekireki Marae and Nimbus Media in developing online resources about Mt Pirongia and allowing mana whenua's stories relating to Mt Pirongia to be told. Local iwi representatives Tom and Hariru Roa and Haupai Puke have been most gracious in sharing their cultural perspectives, and the professionalism and generosity of David Woodcock and Dawn Tuffery from Nimbus Media has really carried the project. We're hoping to launch the resources later in the year. In the meantime, Joanne Roxburgh has been an absolute star in helping us meet the increasing requests from schools for day visits to Pirongia maunga while Selwyn June's regular trips up the maunga remain popular with the Pirongia possum boys. Andy Bryant has been a great mentor and more on all things education and strategy – thank you for your sound advice.

We are able to showcase Oliver McLeod's Map of Pirongia's Volcanic History at our envirocentre now thanks to Peter Smits' framing workmanship and we also undertake eDNA sampling of local streams, often involving schools, as this technology can identify the myriad life forms present in a catchment. We're even helping the South Island Kōkako Charitable Trust by taking eDNA samples from the sites we manage with low densities of kōkako to give them an idea of population thresholds needed for a kōkako signal to show up.

Collaboration with Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari continues with exciting developments on two fronts. Firstly, an ecological corridor is being proposed that would link Pirongia maunga with Maungatautari along the Mangapiko Stream. This will be a landscape-scale restoration project involving iwi, NZ Landcare Trust and others and has the potential to be transformational. Initial funding has been secured for two staff members and ground works with NZ Landcare Trust the employer, and we are hopeful that momentum will gather pace as others join in. Secondly, 40 Titipounamu/Rifleman were translocated from Pirongia to Maungatautari in May to re-establish New Zealand's smallest native bird species there. It has been a first for us to be a donor site for a translocation and is an important reminder that many small and unseen species benefit from our pest control.

From an organisational perspective, we have been working on restructuring the Society to separate our governance and management roles, and to also give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Tom Davies and a subcommittee have done a sterling job in leading the rule changes and the Special General Meeting processes. Sincere thanks for your efforts. We have made progress with our envirocentre upgrade but aren't ready yet to be officially open to the public. From a staffing perspective, we farewelled our operations co-ordinator Gemma Fernihough, and welcomed Mihiwaatara Hohepa as her replacement.

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

Grants		Purpose
WRC Natural Heritage Grant	\$ 74,400.00	Pirongia Pest Control and Operations
DoC Grant Pirongia Kōkako	\$ 30,118.00	Pirongia Kōkako Monitoring
DoC Grant 5-218: Okahukura Project	\$ 22,500.00	Okahukura Pest Control
DoC Grant 4-025: Okahukura Project	\$ 9,200.00	Okahukura Pest Control
Waikato Catchment Ecological Enhancement Trust	\$ 6,500.00	Pirongia Grid Maintenance
Trust Waikato	\$ 9,000.00	Environmental Education Ecological Corridor Project and General Expenses
Waikato Ecological Restoration Trust	\$ 5,000.00	Okahukura Pest Control
WRC SSCIF Grant Okahukura	\$ 5,000.00	Okahukura Pest Control
Pacific Development and Conservation Fund	\$ 4,200.00	Iwi Specialist Input to Environmental

WDC Pirongia Ward Discretionary Grant	\$ 2,000.00	Educational Development
COGS Grant	\$ 1,500.00	Envirocentre costs
Total Grants	\$ 169,418.00	Volunteer expenses
Donations		
DV Bryant Trust	\$ 25,000.00	Environmental Education
Waipa Networks	\$ 700.00	Mt Pirongia Pest Control
Total	\$ 25,700.00	
In-kind Support		
Frontier Scaffolding Ltd:	\$9,000.00	Preparing and repainting envirocentre roof
G Kessels	\$ 2,390.00	Vehicle use and fieldwork expenses at Okahukura
Total	\$11,390.00	
Grand Total	\$ 206,508.00	

Another crucial resource for us is volunteers – you are all awesome! Our registered volunteer numbers now stand at 393. Volunteer hours came to 10,639 this year involving 219 people representing a 14% increase on last year’s hours, mainly due to the kōkako mahi, mustelid trapping and dactylanthus monitoring. At present, we have 164 members and sponsors of hectares, and 60 hectares of pest control are currently sponsored. Our Mangakaraa podcast, available for free on the internet <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZO-Gxc1yfWk>, now has over 4,864 views, while our facebook page has 1,719 followers and 1,538 likes.

The powerhouse behind all this work is my committee. Each of you are a jewel in your own right: brilliant, sharp, and precious beyond price. You are all totally committed to our mission of bringing our maunga back to life, and the phenomenal achievements we are racking up as volunteers is a testament to your passion and perseverance. A humungous thank you to you. Regrettably, we are losing a few of you: Parva Zareie, Richard Still and Greg Hill are all stepping down from the committee but thankfully are continuing with the society as volunteers. We appreciate the massive input you have made to our operations.

Outside of the committee we have others that need to be acknowledged too: our key collaboration partners DoC Hamilton office, Anne Aitken for HR services, the MenzShed Te Awamutu for mustelid trap box production, Waipa District Council and Pirongia Forest Park Lodge. Thank you for your superb support.

At a Government level we are seeing more policy being produced to get serious about protecting native biodiversity, but realistically the scale of the issue means landowners and volunteers will need to play a significant part in it all. It is obvious to me that everyone, no matter who they are or what they do, has a role in ensuring

papatuanuku has a healthy future. So, it becomes a personal call to each individual – will you actually take the step to get involved with environmental protection and enhancement initiatives, and will it be now? To take a quote from Benny Lewis: “There are seven days in a week and ‘someday’ is not one of them.”

Kia kaha

Clare St Pierre

Chairperson
2021

22 July