

Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society
Annual Report
2014

Tena kotou, tena kotou, tena kotou, katoa.

Once again, Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society has enjoyed a highly successful year, achieving outstanding pest control results and making progress on a number of biodiversity fronts thanks to the superb commitment of our team members.

Rats and possums have been the target of our bait station grid on Mt Pirongia covering over 1,000ha, and this year our monitoring results were a phenomenal success, reducing our rat population from an index of 44% right down to zero. Native bird numbers are benefiting from this. Our most recent five minute bird counts in February along the Mahaukura Track showed an impressive increase in total birds to 62, from 49 in 2007. Tui and Kereru were the big winners, growing significantly since 2007. 62 separate sightings of Robins have been reported since their release, both banded (introduced) and unbanded (next generation) so we are confident that the birds are breeding successfully. The robins seem to be favouring the lower slopes of our control area between the Ruapane and Waite Rd tracks but a few have been sighted at higher locations, similar to that of their former home at Mangatutu, with an altitude of around 870m. Further monitoring of the Pirongia robins is needed to cover our entire control area and will help determine whether food source or aspect are more important for choosing a home territory than altitude alone.

The society is hugely indebted to the effort put in by some key committee members on the pest control and monitoring fronts. Steve McClunie and Ken Allen are virtuosos at co-ordinating volunteers and attending to the vital bait station maintenance and operational requirements. Selwyn and Dianne June have taken the lead on bird monitoring, while rat monitoring is handled by Ken and Steve, assisted by Peter Elley and other volunteers. Dianne and Peter have also worked through a massive amount of data on long tailed bats from bat detectors set up in Pirongia Forest Park to help determine their presence. Thank you to you all, and I'd like to give special mention to Kessels Ecology for providing training and equipment free of charge to us, which we appreciate greatly.

We have been fortunate to have the services of a French intern for six months this year. Melia Rodriguez arrived in February and has been a real asset for us, especially for monitoring birds, bats and then analysing the associated data. It's been wonderful to have her here with us, and we wish her all the best for the future. Other highlights for the year include winning the Supreme Award for Biodiversity in the Waipa District Biodiversity and Heritage Awards in October last year, completing the first stage of the Te Rore Water Supply riparian planting as a society fundraiser and progressing our Kokako Project which we promoted at the launch of the Waipa District's 150th commemorations. Our Kokako colouring-in competition proved to be popular there, and I'd like to thank Catherine Kelly who kindly did the art work for the design we used. We were hoping to have a definite timeframe for translocating Kokako to Mt Pirongia by this stage, but recent research on the genetic diversity of

existing populations has prompted DoC to adopt a cautious approach to establishing new populations. Discussions with DoC have identified ways we could assist with improving the robustness of those populations while building skills for our translocation project. We hope to create some constructive opportunities for our supporters in Kokako field work over the next year. Completing consultation with iwi for the project and securing funding for the development of a translocation plan are also on the list. Our other major project, the envirocentre in Pirongia Village has seen slow progress this year due to issues regarding composting toilets. I want to thank Vic Hopkirk for leading that project this year, and although the delays with toilets appear to be resolved, Vic has advised he is unable to continue in his role due to family commitments. We have appreciated all you have put into the project Vic and hope you will still be involved as time permits.

Our projects depend on funding being provided, and I would like to acknowledge our gratitude for the support from the following funders over the past year:

Waikato Catchment Ecological Enhancement Trust: \$16,000 over two years for pest control

Pub Charity: \$1,300 for envirocentre insurance and \$6,600 for track maintenance

Meridian Energy: \$8,036 for pest control and native bat protection

Waikato Regional Council: \$4,900 for display panels on the history of Pirongia Forest Park

Department of Conservation's Biofunds: \$4,500 over three years for pest control on the private land within our bait station grid

Waipa District Council: \$800 for administration and envirocentre costs

During the year we learnt that Meridian Energy were challenging their need to provide long term funding which is connected to environmental mitigation for their Te Uku Windfarm. To cover our needs, we have been fortunate enough to secure two years of funding from Waikato Catchment Ecological Enhancement Trust while this issue is resolved.

We have continued our environmental education and advocacy through presentations and displays, and the support base for our society continues to grow steadily. We currently have 89 members, 110 individual and corporate sponsors of hectares with 174 hectares sponsored in total. Our Mangakara podcast, available for free on the internet <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZO-Gxc1yfWk>, now has over 3420 views. We are grateful for the steady stream of new volunteers wanting to be involved with our projects, and this year volunteer hours came to 2118. Voluntary contributions cover bait station filling and providing refreshments afterwards, monitoring for rats, birds and bats, planting and releasing work, and tasks related to our envirocentre building and the landscaping of Te Ngahere Reserve. Those hours are a towering witness to the incredible commitment ordinary people in our community are making to Mt Pirongia and the other environmental restoration work

we are involved with. I know you don't do it for praise or recognition, but we think the world of you and applaud even the smallest things you do to further the society's objectives. I hope you get the idea that we appreciate every single one of you and want to encourage you as much as possible in how you decide to make that personal difference for the environment.

Finally I turn to the committee that makes our hopes and ambitions for Mt Pirongia a reality: those humble, determined and inspirational individuals who quietly do the work behind the scenes to keep everything running smoothly. I want to single out for special mention Vice-Chair Steve McClunie, Secretary Dianne June and our new Treasurer Ed Brodnax, but all of the committee are an absolute pleasure to work with. I couldn't ask for a better team to support me, to be so united in our mission to restore Mt Pirongia's biodiversity and turn the tables on environmental decline. Words can't express my admiration and appreciation for the untold things you make sure get done to help our cause. Thank you.

This year saw community conservation groups being given a more prominent role in the Government's conservation strategy. It acknowledges the effectiveness of groups like Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society and foreshadows more use of partnerships and collaboration to maximise environmental benefits. Our achievements this year demonstrate the outstanding results our operational model can deliver and we hope that the Government's new policy direction will provide our group with greater opportunities to leverage local environmental benefits. Still, in my mind, the reliance on environmental community groups needs to be matched with support for their continuity and sustainability. This is essential to avoid the risk of our natural environment becoming a casualty of economisation and to ensure it continues to receive the priority and consistent attention it deserves going into the future. After all, any future that we aspire to is inseparable from the natural environment on which we all depend.

Clare St Pierre
Chairperson
10 July 2014