

**Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society**  
**Annual Report**  
**2015**

Tena kotou, tena kotou, tena kotou, katoa.

I am delighted to report on another successful year for Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society. Pest control efforts in our 1,000ha bait station grid on Mt Pirongia have reduced rat populations from 68.3% pre-operation to 3.3%. The result is not as resounding as last year's zero result, but reflected unusually high rat numbers. Steve McClunie and Ken Allen have become legends in their management of our pest control work and we owe them massive thanks for their expertise and operational know-how that produces results for us that other groups are in awe of. Bird numbers continue to increase with unbanded robins being reported regularly. Last year I mentioned a cluster being identified along the Waite Rd and Corcoran Rd tracks but for the first time a robin has been seen above O'Shea Rd. Riflemen are also noticeably more abundant.

A highlight of our year was the launch of our kokako project, with a special event involving the Associate Minister of Conservation, Nicky Wagner to announce \$17,250 of funding towards a Pirongia translocation plan. Chris Smuts-Kennedy is responsible for developing this plan, which is progressing nicely. Questions relating to genetic robustness of possible source populations are being addressed with a sampling trip to Hauturu Little Barrier Island planned in August. The National Kokako Recovery Group completed a habitat assessment in our control area in October which demonstrated that the vegetation would be highly suitable for rapid growth of a kokako population, mainly due to the prevalence of Pigeonwood, which is an important food source for reproduction. The success of our pest control work is also a strong positive, while the ridges and spurs form attractive singing locations for kokako.

We have also developed a proposal to strengthen a currently unprotected remnant kokako population at Okahukura which would involve a bait station operation modelled along our Mt Pirongia one and enlisting community volunteers to run it. This will benefit a nationally significant kokako population as well as reducing our waiting time for translocatable birds. We made a site visit to the area in April and Kessels Ecology have offered generous logistical support which will help tremendously. A funding application has been submitted to DoC's community partnerships fund and we have also obtained the agreement of local iwi, Ngati Rereahu. If all proceeds to plan we hope to start pest control in October this year, and are keen to hear from anyone who would like to be involved with weekend trips to Pureora, similar to our robins fieldwork.

Our envirocentre project has only made modest progress this year, mainly due to continuing technical issues with toilets and delays in receiving a grant for installing water tanks. Hopefully these are almost resolved so we can move ahead more quickly. DoC has been very supportive of the project which we appreciate and they have also expressed interest in an ongoing relationship through the centre. Vic Hopkirk has been brilliant leading this project as well as co-ordinating our main

fundraiser, the Te Rore Water Supply Riparian Planting which supports the envirocentre work and our kokako project. Thank you Vic for your fantastic dedication and passion for all this, especially given your other commitments. Our next planting event is scheduled for this Saturday so please let me know if you would like to help with that.

Our projects absolutely depend on grants and donations, and I would like to acknowledge our gratitude for the support from the following funders over the past year:

Department of Conservation's Community Partnership Grant of \$17,250 for a Kokako Translocation Plan

Department of Conservation's Community Conservation Grant of \$4830 for envirocentre water tanks

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

Pub Charity \$5,000 grant for envirocentre structural work

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: \$500 for administration costs

Our society has also been active in other areas. Our bat monitoring programme will benefit from the recent purchase of 5 automatic bat monitors of a more advanced design which will streamline the processing of the monitoring data, and this purchase was made possible through the remaining funding held from Meridian Energy. Display panels on Pirongia Forest Park's history have been completed and can be viewed here this evening. They are usually on display at the Pirongia Heritage and Information Centre. Representatives from our society were part of the opening of the new hut near the summit of Mt Pirongia in April and participated in a field trip to search for a rare bracket fungus *Ganoderma Awaroa* only found in Pirongia Forest Park. We have continued our environmental education and advocacy through presentations and forums, and benefit from a diverse and committed support base. We currently have 110 members, 107 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 3,872 views while our facebook page has 225 likes. We are grateful for the steady stream of new volunteers wanting to be involved with our projects, and this year volunteer hours came to 1498 involving about 75 people. This is less than last year because the time put in by our French intern Melia Rodriguez last year boosted those figures considerably. 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. Alison Sellars, Elizabeth Elliot-Hogg and Anna Whitmore have helped me this year with publicity and administrative tasks which has been a boon. Later in the programme we will hear about *dactylanthus* and how volunteers might be involved in improving prospects for that distinctive plant which is still present on Mt Pirongia. Volunteers are our lifeblood – without you we wouldn't have a show of being able to tackle the tasks we have set to restore our maunga. So thank you for coming on board with our mission, we are rapt that you support us and totally appreciate your personal efforts for our natural environment. Keep it up please!

My report would not be complete without thanking and congratulating all those on the committee. These people are exceptional, always totally committed to doing whatever they can to boost biodiversity on Mt Pirongia and promote the society's work and it is such a privilege to work with you all. I want to single out for special mention Vice-Chair Steve McClunie, Secretary Dianne June and Treasurer Ed Brodnax, especially for getting to grips with the changes for external reporting for Tier 4 Charities which apply to us. Selwyn and Vic have also shown leadership on our health and safety plans, which has been great. You all make up a superb team that is successful because we can work so closely and constructively together. I love being a part of it and thank you again for making our journey in realising our vision for Mt Pirongia so rewarding.

Pope Frances has recently written about how working for ecological restoration of our common home is in reality the garment of God's creation where the divine and the human meet in the smallest detail. He goes on to make a point that I am sure all of our supporters are well aware of: Caring for ecosystems demands far-sightedness,... the values involved are incalculable, and these are things that need to be reflected in our everyday personal and business life. This is the challenge for our times.

Clare St Pierre  
Chairperson  
9 July 2015