



## **ANNUAL REPORT: 2014**

### *Coming to fruition*

Former chair John Ogden commented once that the achievements of the Great Barrier Island Environmental Trust are rarely due solely to the Trust or its Trustees. However 2014 saw the significant efforts of the Trust over many years come to fruition in the creation of the Aotea Conservation Park, the beginning of community consultation on the environment, and huge progress to protect the black petrel through fishing industry commitments, advocacy by Trustees and support for petrel researcher Dr Elizabeth Bell. More on these below, but here is a summary of the year that was 2014.

### *Making progress on the key issues*

The Trust submitted in favour of the establishment of the Aotea Conservation Park. This gives marginally more protection to public conservation lands on the island but more importantly creates the basis for future increase in year round tourism, which the island's economy desperately needs.

The Trustees have been active in campaigning for Glenfern Sanctuary to be turned over to public ownership. Discussions are ongoing in 2014 between Auckland Council, the Department of Conservation and the Bouzaid family.

As a result of sustained influence from the Trust, the Local Board announced it would begin community engagement on the future of the island's ecology in 2015. Trustees attended or spoke at most meetings of the Environmental Strategic Planning Committee of the Local Board and made submissions to the Unitary Plan as it related to marine protected areas and water quality.

### *Our island: the 100 year flood*

On June 10 the north of Aotea was hit by more than 330mm of rain in three hours. This was not forecast - it appears to have been the result of heavily moist northeast flow colliding with a severe gale strength southerly change. The rain fell on already saturated ground and as a result a number of catchments suffered catastrophic slip damage. The rainfall was highly localised - in particular streams at Okiwi, Motairehe, Karaka Bay, Glenfern, Wairahi and the Kaiaraara became logjams within hours, with all vegetation stripped from the creek beds as the slip debris literally avalanched down to the valley floors taking all and any infrastructure - bridges, culverts, tracks, fences and roads - with it. In other parts of the island there was little damage other than from the wind, but in the north the roading repair bill alone was more than \$7 million.

The effect on DoC has been severe - not least the forced abandonment of the Port FitzRoy office due to an unstable slip above the road - which was also completely washed out. The lower kauri damn was obliterated. Many tracks were closed and some remain closed. At the same time DoC staffing fell to an all-time low of five on the island, with a core group of staff remaining, but with little funding for biodiversity protection and a split in the management of the island between DoC Auckland and DoC Whangarei. More than \$2m in rebuilt infrastructure has been committed, but as a result the proposed eradication of rats from Rakitu stalled, as did work on a reintroducing kokako to Te Paparahi.

### *NEXT Foundation Application*

In June the Trust partnered with Ngati Rehua/Ngati Wai ki Aotea, the Local Board, and a number of specialist third parties on a proposal to create one of the world's largest predator free and inhabited island sanctuaries. The programme of work we proposed to be funded by NEXT included community engagement and support first and foremost, an innovative series of local technology pilots and projects to make an impact on pests and biodiversity locally. These included local rat control projects, supporting iwi to progress the reintroduction of kokako to Te Paparahi, research and education facilities and protection of Hirakimata. We developed and submitted this application with the full support of the Department of Conservation locally and regionally. Unfortunately we were not successful, but the process of developing the proposal with our partners has led to increased level of trust and better working relationships, which are already proving to be the basis for future collaboration.

### *Succession of Trustees and Officers*

Dame Anne Salmond visited the island in November and agreed to be patron of the Trust.

This year saw the beginning of a renewal of the Trustee group and co-ordinator. The chair was rotated between Emma Cronin and Kate Waterhouse during 2014. John Ogden who retired at the end of 2013 as Chairperson, Des Casey, Halema Jameson and Emmy Pratt formed the Trustee group in 2014. Liz Westbrooke, a founding Trustee, resigned to focus on issues closer to home. The Trustees, past and present acknowledge the dedication Liz showed, particularly in recent years. Sculptor and carver Peter Edmond of Schooner Bay also resigned as Trustee to focus on other priorities after serving for 2 years. Fenella Christian resigned as Trust co-ordinator, having taken up full time employment with the Department of Conservation on Aotea. Fenella served with passion and dedication in this role since the establishment of the Trust and was replaced by Jo Leary in 2014. Unfortunately Jo also found other employment at the end of 2014 and has been replaced by Kay Stowell.

In 2014 the remaining Trustees reviewed and focused on establishing a low cost operating model which is time efficient for Trustees and volunteers and minimises meetings and administration workload. The effect of this has been to free up more time for community engagement, projects and advocacy. Further additions to the Trustee group are planned in 2015.

### *Rebranding and website development*

The need to signal a new direction was embodied in the Trust's new brand and identity and development of a new website in 2014. Our purpose is unchanged. But we know that to achieve it will require us all to draw on the love we feel for this place, the instinct to protect it, and the belief that it can be restored. There is more to be done to improve content across the new site and to drive traffic to it, but the platform is now in place.

### *Community engagement and communications*

In January the Trust participated in key community events – the Port FitzRoy Mussel fest, New Years' Picnic, and Santa Parade. We partnered with the Local Board to make rat traps available to the local community, launched the Great Easter Rat Hunt at the Easter market (partnering with Auckland Council) and mapped the pest control and restoration projects of locals.

The Trust again participated in the Walking Festival (April; Local Board/Auckland City) and in the walks and presentation organized by DOC during Conservation Week

(November), in the Love Birds walks and the Garden Tour. Trustees gave talks and lead walking groups.

Bush Telegraph found its niche in 2014 as an easy read for locals and members alike, with short updates on island conservation efforts, and plants, birds and animals that share the island with us.

Environmental News is now biannual with in-depth articles on conservation issues of interest and relevance to the island. Two were produced in 2014, including reports on key research and advocacy projects (see below) and a review of the history of Marine Protection on Great Barrier by editor and resident David Speir to coincide with the Hauraki Gulf Marine Spatial Plan process and associated community debate.

#### *Our supporters*

An on-island event for friends and supporters was held in January and resulted in a number of donations. We began the process of consolidating our member and friends database and reviewed our member communications. There were fewer member communications other than the above in 2014 due to the renewal of the Trustee group and change in Trust administrator/co-ordinator role. At the end of 2014 there were in excess of 20 life members and 150 members. Our facebook page was re-launched in 2014 and had more than 400 likes at the close of the year. Facebook has become a more important channel to communicate with supporters.

#### *Our funders and financial position*

Our financial position consolidated in 2014. We received funding from the ASB Foundation again in 2014 for operational costs, which has allowed us to transition to a lower cost operation and provided continuity through changes in co-ordinator and Trustees.

A grant application to Auckland Council EIF was successful in securing \$16K towards Elizabeth Bells black petrel research on Hirakimata. The results are presently being finalised.

We continue to receive generous regular support from a number of private donors. We are grateful to these individuals for the confidence they show in us as we rebuild the Trustee group and expand the activity of the Trust to include project and education based community engagement.

The Tony Bouzaid Port FitzRoy Protection Society proceeds – earmarked for a cat research project and one other project (tbc) did not progress in 2014 due to lack of Trustee capacity.

#### *Protecting what we have – black petrel, kaka and other stories*

At the end of 2014 the fishing industry active in the northeast of the north island (FMA1) along with NGOs and central and local government agencies signed a pledge to protect black petrels. This was in response to 3 years of advocacy supported by Trustees Kate Waterhouse and Emma Cronin to influence MPI and others to act to protect black petrels while they are in NZ to breed by avoiding bycatch by longliners. The Trust also provided direct support to Dr Elizabeth (Biz) Bell to complete population research at the main colony on Great Barrier (Hirakimata). Trustee Emma Cronin travelled to Peru on a Churchill Fellowship to work with schools on the Peruvian coast educating them on black petrels and black petrel conservation. Emma also worked with the Aotea Art Gallery in Claris on a joint exhibition following this trip and on local school visits to the colony.

Kaka research by John Ogden and Todd Landers of Auckland Council showed the critical role the Barrier plays in regional kaka populations. John has also been

collecting observations of Australasian Bitterns which have been appearing in increasing numbers on the island.

John Ogden again oversaw the cockle count at Okiwi estuary, which is showing a decline in cockle numbers and especially in larger cockles.

Invaders continue to be a risk – rainbow skinks are an invasive fast-breeding species of Australian skink which are thought to have been transported to the island in potting mix. The Trust supported DOC and Auckland Council efforts to contain the spread of rainbow skinks through its communications and through Trustee Halema Jamieson in her own project work.

#### *A new direction*

In his final Annual Report for 2013 as chair, John Ogden commented that *“it has long been an aim of the Trust to shift responsibility for the Island’s environmental future onto those with the power to effect change – the Local Board, Auckland Council and the Department of Conservation in particular”*. This process has continued, and 2014 we again saw significant advances. The Trust has begun the second ten years of its journey and we expect more focus on grass roots conservation and education projects working alongside others in the community. Efforts will continue in influencing decision makers to support the protection of the island’s biodiversity and further development of Great Barrier’s economy based on the environment.

**Dr Emma Cronin & Kate Waterhouse**

*Trustees*

*Great Barrier Island, Autumn 2015*