

ANNUAL REPORT: 2016

Overview

After a period of consolidation the trust had a successful year in 2016, leading by example in the debate about pest-control on Aotea, and on Hirakimata in particular. A timeline was finally announced for the eradication of rats from Rakitu (Arid Island). After sustained influence by Local Board Chair Izzy Fordham and others, an Auckland Council-lead consortium secured Glenfern Sanctuary into public ownership. This outcome was a huge win for conservation and a fitting tribute to former trustee and Glenfern founder Tony Bouzaid, who died suddenly in 2011.

Progress on the strategic priorities again delayed by the Department of Conservation

Our strategic plan has for four years now identified the following priorities – Rakitu, Hirakimata, the reintroduction of kokako to Te Paparahi (the northern part of Aotea/Great Barrier), and community pest control projects. The role of the trust varies in each case, from advocacy through to project delivery. An update on each project for 2016 as follows:

- *Eradication of rats from Rakitu* - Rakitu (Arid Island) is the ancestral home of Rehua, and sits in a seabird highway with islands to the north and south sustaining up to nine species. A rat-free Rakitu could support a diverse bird and lizard fauna. The eradication remained stalled until the end of 2016 when a new manager was appointed for DOC Aotea/Great Barrier, prioritising the eradication in the department's work programme for 2018. The trust continues to lobby the Department of Conservation on the island, in Auckland, and Wellington to ensure Rakitu can become New Zealand's next predator-free island sanctuary. Questions remain over the removal of weka.
- *Pest control on Hirakimata/Mt Hobson*: Hirakimata is a unique remnant of high altitude rain forest which supports the main breeding colony of black petrels (taiko), tomtits, kakariki and robins, as well as kaka and kereru and a range of unusual plants, Great Barrier tree daisy, mountain toatoa and creeping kanuka. It is one of the most biodiverse sites in the Auckland Region. The Trust installed cat traps using funding from Auckland Council (RENH grant) which were monitored throughout the taiko breeding season in early 2016. Further funding was received from Auckland Council in 2016 to continue the programme (LG1604-210; \$4,421). The Department of Conservation subsequently provided cat trapping on Hirakimata from the end of 2016 for the current breeding season as a result of pressure from GBIET. "Good Nature 24" rat traps were also set up in a 'study area' in the taiko colony on Hirakimata and two 'control areas outside the nesting area. The traps were monitored in November and December 2016, (and in March-April 2017). A comparative nearby area (Hiwitahi) is also being monitored for rodents on a voluntary basis by trustee Alison Walker. Data from this trial is being used to plan pest control on the mountain for the 2017/18 breeding season working with DOC and the black petrel research team from Wildlife Management International Limited. The trust continues to manage the Black Petrel Action Group Facebook page and take opportunities to support taiko population monitoring on Hirakimata through volunteering. We also support fishing industry collaboration to reduce black petrel deaths from longline fishing.
- *Reintroduction of kokako to Te Paparahi*. A Department of Conservation enabled CCPF grant application by Ngati Rehua Ngati Wai ki Aotea yielded a favourable feasibility study from Ian Flux, kokako expert, in 2016. The study confirmed the suitability of habitat for kokako in Te Paparahi. The timeframe for this project is yet to be confirmed but remains a milestone in the Conservation

Management Strategy for the Auckland Region (see below). The trust will continue to provide support to Ngati Rehua as requested.

- *Community pest control projects in settlements across the island.* Mulberry Grove Community Rodent Control Project, remote sensing was completed and extended to continue into 2017, following funding from the GB Local Board towards installation and monitoring of remote sensing devices on the existing community project network. This type of remote sensing has the potential to change the way pest control is done, enabling devices (traps, tracking tunnels etc.) to be monitored from afar, reducing the need for on-ground monitoring, and focussing labour effort on actual caught pests. The same technology will be deployed in 2017 on private land at Okiwi as part of new community pest control activity there.

Summary of other research and projects

- Removal of Awana weir to enhance 4-5km of native fresh water fish habitat was agreed following a campaign by Trustee June Brookes (the weir was removed in early 2017).
- The domestic cat sterilisation programme funded by Auckland Council continued during 2016 and 13 cats were sterilised.
- Review of Department of Conservation data on pateke (brown teal) flock site counts by John Ogden and June Brookes. This shows worrying declines of especially adult survival over time.

Conservation Park progress – slowed by ongoing problems with Department of Conservation staffing, funding and reputation

Due to delays within the Department of Conservation, the Aotea Conservation Park Advisory Committee did not meet until September 2016. Trustee Kate Waterhouse, along with former trustee Judy Gilbert of Little Windy Hill Sanctuary, are Advisory Committee members. The trust made submissions on Hirakimata pest control and Joanne Alley Landowner Research in December. Note that this research showed only 2% of landowners do not support a pest-free island, but that approximately 1 in 4 are not sure. The research shows a clear correlation between experience of pest control and support for a pest-free island (see GBIET Environmental News, March 2017).

The Conservation Park comprises 46% of the island's land area. The terms of reference are ambitious, including *"growing conservations outcomes and engaging tangata whenua and the island community in that work... the management of threatened species, pest control, restoration... and implementation of the Auckland Conservation Management Strategy (CMS)"*. The CMS is a 10 year strategy which includes eradication of rats from Rakitu by 2017, reintroduction of kokako by 2019, and a pest free Great Barrier/Aotea within 10 years. Changes in the Auckland Conservancy have brought the island's biodiversity budgets back into Auckland again. But the investment in resources and budget in 2016/17 for biodiversity protection has not matched the rhetoric of Minister Maggie Barry, when she announced the park at Claris in April 2015. Unless there is a change in tack, new infrastructure and facilities completed in 2016 may attract visitors for walking and biking through quality forest habitat, but visitors will leave without seeing or hearing the birds and other species that will bring the experience to life.

The biodiversity budget for Great Barrier/Aotea for 2016 was again limited to cat control at Okiwi to protect pateke. The Department of Conservation's public image and community relations may have begun to recover in 2016. Acting managers were put in place for much of the year after Geoff Woodhouse transferred to the Whangarei office in early 2016. Only one Biodiversity Ranger was recruited, without budget to support protection of black petrel and other species. At the same time, more than \$1m was invested in the new Department of Conservation headquarters at Okiwi Station and the remainder of the budget focused on weeds. This lack of focus on, and funding for biodiversity outcomes has again affected the trust's work, most

directly in ongoing protection for the main black petrel breeding colony on Hirakimata from cats and rats using Auckland Council RENH funding (see projects) on DOC managed land.

Trustees supported the revival of, and then participated in, the first Community Conservation Network Forum on Aotea in December 2016.

Auckland Council and the Local Board have stepped up for conservation but clear thinking is needed

The “Ecology Vision” social research funded by the Local Board of Auckland Council to further develop Great Barrier’s economy based on the environment concluded in mid-November 2016. The Local Board began community engagement on the future of the island’s ecology in 2015. Trustees’ submissions and contributions shaped the final recommendations to suppress pests and identify further sanctuaries for protection and restoration on the island.

Trustees attended all Local Board Environment Committee meetings and provided the community with candidates’ statements on environmental protection and conservation for the October 2016 council elections. Several pro-environment candidates were successful, resulting in a board that continues to support conservation on Aotea. A memorandum of understanding between the Department of Conservation and Auckland Council along with the purchase of Glenfern are indications of the importance of the relationship between the department and Auckland Council to conservation and tourism Aotea/Great Barrier in future.

Succession of trustees and officers

Dr Emma Cronin again took the role of chair through 2016, working to maintain gains at Glenfern Sanctuary while its sale progressed, and as Seabird Advocate for Forest & Bird. New trustee Emma Waterhouse joined the trust at the end of 2016 having returned to live in New Zealand in March 2016. Emma studied botany, zoology and resource management at Auckland and Lincoln Universities and has over 20 years’ experience in environmental policy, research and management. She has been visiting the island for over 40 years and is actively involved in restoring riparian habitats on the family property at Okiwi. Emma joined existing trustees John Ogden, Alison Walker, Emmy Pratt, Kate Waterhouse and June Brookes. Kay Stowell has continued as the trust’s on island administrator in 2016 and continues to provide volunteer time in addition to her paid role, for which we are extremely grateful.

Our supporters and members

At the end of 2016 there were in excess of 50 life members and over 100 regular, family and senior members. Our Facebook page had more than 500 followers at the close of the year. Facebook remains one of our most important channels to communicate with supporters and share updates on projects. Weekly reach can be up to 1400 (high) or 50 (low) depending on activity. A *givealittle* page and Twitter account operate as further channels for supporters. The trust will need to effectively leverage these platforms to raise funds and build increasing awareness of island conservation issues.

Our funders and financial position

Our financial position remained stable in 2016. This was due to donations and project funds received from Auckland Council RENH, EIF and GB Local Board as outlined above. We continued to benefit from funding from Foundation North (formerly the ASB Foundation) in 2016 for operational costs, which has provided valuable continuity for our low cost operating model.

The Trust again received monthly donations from a major sponsor, other smaller regular donations and an increasing number of one-off donors. We are again grateful to these individuals for the confidence they have shown in our work as we continue to rebuild the trustee and volunteer group. The trust’s presence at local events, such as the annual New Year picnic, generated some funds from merchandising and

competitions, although the main purpose of this activity is to engage the community in conversations about conservation and to generate donations and memberships. We also collected annual fees from members.

We have kept in regular contact with the main grant and donor organisations in 2016 including NEXT Foundation and the Morgan Foundation, with a view to seeking their support for projects in 2017/18. Meanwhile, the Tony Bouzaid Port FitzRoy Protection Society proceeds remain earmarked for a cat eradication research project. Unfortunately this again did not progress in 2016 due to lack of trustee capacity and other priorities.

Communications and Community Engagement

The Trust again participated in the New Year's Picnic event at Claris, the Family Fun Day alongside the Mussel Fest at Port FitzRoy, the Great Easter Rat Hunt at the Easter Market, and the Labour Weekend market. We provided information about our projects and general environmental and restoration information. Residents, ratepayers and visitors continue to appreciate the range of information available at these events and the opportunity to ask questions and share experiences.

In January 2016, we launched the series of six short You Tube videos about private conservation projects on Great Barrier Island to support community and stakeholder engagement. Production Company 90 Seconds produced these videos showcasing passionate locals and their restoration projects. The videos have been used at events by the Department of Conservation and Destination GBI, at entry points and on social media to demonstrate community commitment to the island's environment. The videos can be viewed via our website and on You Tube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKYJCCo5MBA>

Trustees again participated in the Walking Festival (March; Local Board/Auckland City) and in the walks and presentation organized by DOC during Conservation Week (November) For Auckland Council's Love Birds tour trustees gave talks and trustee John Ogden acted as a guide.

Bush Telegraph continued with 5 issues in 2016 as an accessible, quick read for locals and members alike, with short updates on island conservation efforts, and spotlighting endemic plants, birds and animals of our island. Environmental News is the trust's biannual magazine with in-depth articles on conservation issues of interest and relevance to the island. Two issues were produced in 2016 with research and advocacy pieces in support of pest control and species protection on Hiramata in particular and highlighting the key goals of the Predator Free 2050 initiative and its potential implications for the island. We reported in depth on progress (or lack of progress) on the eradication of rats from Rakitu, providing valuable continuity as DOC reorganised and changed managers on Great Barrier. We also covered the latest pateke data and trends and what this might mean for their island population and did a focus piece on the history of Glenfern Sanctuary, now in public ownership.

Our Environmental News publication plays a key role in socialising the analysis and monitoring of conservation progress on Aotea / Great Barrier. Emma Waterhouse succeeded David Speir as the editor (see profile above). Feedback continues to be positive on the content summarising and analysing key scientific and conservation projects and research of relevance to the island. The new editor will explore more regular and web-based content as well as maintaining two issues per year. We thank Auckland Council's Local Board for their support towards the printing costs of the Environmental News and Bush Telegraph.

Looking ahead – collaboration and more commitment

Partnerships will be key in 2017 and the trust will review its strategic plan for 2017-2019 accordingly. Collaboration will be required with the community, all the island sanctuaries, landowners, and Ngati Rehua Ngati Wai ki Aotea, as well as researchers, funders, Auckland Council and the Department of Conservation.

The fundamental value of Aotea/Great Barrier to conservation in New Zealand is clear – and the community’s support for a pest free island is critical, and also clear. As the landowner research (above) showed, directly engaging the Aotea/Great Barrier community in restoring and protecting habitats in which birds and other species can flourish will build support for a pest-free island.

In 2017, we particularly look forward to building close relationships with Ngati Rehua as they conclude their treaty settlement. The settlement will include many, if not all, significant sites for conservation on Aotea/Great Barrier and nearby islands. The strength of Ngati Rehua’s kaitiakitanga and their desire to restore lost species is clear, particularly on Rakitu, Hirakimata and in Te Paparahi, for the return of Kokako. The settlement, and the co-governance arrangement that it brings, will provide a great boost to conservation on Aotea/Great Barrier in 2017 and beyond.

The trend for use of private funds for conservation continued in 2016, with heavy reliance by the government on volunteers and community groups to carry out conservation in New Zealand. Predator Free New Zealand 2050 was announced to progress technologies to eventually rid New Zealand of mammalian pests. As we have previously highlighted, Aotea/Great Barrier’s conservation assets are significant to a predator-free New Zealand agenda. Voting with his feet, current Director General of Conservation, Lou Sanson bought a share of land in the middle of the island and spent time at Glenfern Sanctuary prior to its acquisition.

We will continue to identify and seek funding for on-island projects which progress use of new pest control technologies, partnering with iwi and others to do so. Our work include collaboration with Econode on network monitoring systems that reduce the labour hours required to manage trap networks, building on Tryphena and Glenfern experience at other locations on private land at Okiwi. The potential still exists for a pest free ‘island within an island’ in the key North Barrier ecosystems (Hirakimata, Okiwi, Te Paparahi, and Rakitu).

We will also prepare to update the 2010 State of the Environment Report to provide monitoring data of key species. A gradual but significant decline is likely in key bird and other species populations due to the high densities of rats and feral cats that inhabit Aotea/Great Barrier’s forests.

Finally, we will support the Local Board to progress the Southern Sanctuary in 2017 and to align the GBI community with the government’s “Predator Free New Zealand 2050” programme, as identified in the Local Board’s Ecology Vision Final Report. The Southern Sanctuary Oasis initiative has huge potential. Based in Tryphena, linking conservation, education and tourism and addressing the pest problem in the whole of the southern end of Great Barrier, it could create strong community support for conservation and a great visitor experience. A feasibility study for predator-free Aotea is a logical next step, and would involve collaboration between DOC, Ngati Rehua, Local Government, Conservation Groups and private landowners.

A major focus for 2017 will be to expand the trustee and volunteer group to ensure our capacity to make positive change is matched by our commitment to do so.

Dr Emma Cronin
Chair
& Kate Waterhouse
Trustee

Great Barrier Island, April 2017