



Presidents Report 2015 - 2016

RIMUTAKA
FOREST PARK TRUST

Regenerating
our natural
habitat

Annual Report 2016

Presented by the President on behalf of the Executive Committee

This Annual Report is presented to the 28th Annual General Meeting of the Rimutaka Forest Park Charitable Trust Inc. to be held in Petone, Lower Hutt on 22nd September 2016.

Highlights of the Year

This has been another busy and memorable year for the Trust. The year will be discussed in some detail below, but the highlights from my perspective have been:

1. Successful completion of the first stage of the Community Fund project that we know as JtD2. Melody McLaughlin has continued as the part-time Project Coordinator, and is well on the way to achieving all the Project milestones we have to report against in the first year of the 18-month project. Her skills in driving this project, as well as managing the peripheral issues that arise, are simply amazing.
2. The Catchpool Valley has again become a focus of our efforts as a 350 hectare “Eco-hotspot” has been created with an intensified trap network, enhanced monitoring and focussed restoration work proceeding. It was the centre of attention for our Earth Day involvement with the US Embassy.
3. Our trappers continue to do amazing stuff. The annual average kill is just over 1,000 pests, not including possums or feral cats. Multiply this number by your estimate of what each of those pests would consume in a year and you have a good indication of the value of your efforts to the bird life of the Park.
4. Nevertheless, after the mast year when we lost most of our Kiwi chicks to predation, and with DOC predicting another one this year, we decided to revert to Operation Nest Egg (ONE) again to ensure the continuation of our Kiwi population. Melody has negotiated contracts with Rainbow Springs in Rotorua for egg hatching, DOC in Turangi for using the Kiwi crèche, and with Air New Zealand for the important task of transporting the eggs to Rotorua. Although outside the year being reported on, we must acknowledge the small group of incredible volunteers collected the first 3 eggs early in September.
5. As the result of a generous US Embassy grant, Ian Armitage has led a small team to design, build and erect a series of bird interpretation panels near the car park. They will show and describe 13 prominent bird species in the Park. Arrangements are well advanced and we had hoped that these would be built by the AGM but the Team ran into unforeseen issues beyond our control. It is likely that they will be built in October.
6. Melody and Kelly have led a project to bring the brand of this Trust into the 21st Century. Using the funds donated by UPS, this Team engaged professionals to produce a new brand that will be used on all our documents, signs and communications. Kelly will be formally introducing it to this AGM.

7. The Health & Safety policy and revised procedures have now been introduced and are being implemented. We have introduced Health & Safety as a standing agenda item for our Committee so that we have a committee record of all the reported incidents. I am very pleased to report that we had no Serious Harm incidents during the past year.
8. The Committee continued with the strategic planning work that was started last year, and the Strategic Plan continues to be the driving force behind our annual work programmes.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee met regularly during the year and acted in a governance role for the various activities undertaken by groups within the Trust. These included the management of the JtD2 project, the Kiwi Translocation Project, the Catchpool Restoration Project (which now includes the Dawn Chorus Project), the trapping programme and funding-raising. We also have Health & safety as a standing agenda item.

The 2015/16 Committee elected at the last AGM was:

President	Geoff Cameron
Vice President	Rosemary Thompson
Secretary	Grant Watt
Treasurer	John Cranefield.
Committee members	Ian Armitage, Janet Lawson, Melody McLaughlin, Penny Evans, Kelly Anso, Pierre Tellier and Peter Harvey.

During the year, Melody, Janet and Peter all resigned from the Committee for various reasons. They were all sorely missed.

The Committee members offer a wide range of skills to the task of running this Trust. They provided valuable support to me as President, for which I am very grateful. All remaining members are available for re-election.

We need more Committee members and I hope that you will volunteer your services.

Membership

Financial Membership stands at 109 (52 ordinary members, 7 associate members, 50 Family members), up slightly from last year. We have 2 Life members.

The class of Volunteer Member introduced last year has attracted 45 new members into the "Volunteer" class established at the last AGM. Note that we have 141 volunteers.

We are pleased to welcome new members who have joined during the year and we thank all members for their support to the ongoing work of the society. Financial members are the

heart & soul of any Society, and it is vital that we remain relevant to our existing members. Without you we could not exist.

Grant has performed a sterling job as Committee Secretary and ensured the administration of the Trust runs smoothly. He has made progress implementing a Contact Management System to handle the Trust's interactions and relationships with its members, volunteers, sponsors and other partner organisations. This is a complex task.

Finances

John Cranefield has set out the Financial Statements for the year ended 30th June 2016. This year the Charities Commission has introduced new requirements, and these plus the change in Auditor have resulted in significant extra work for John. The Trust accounts are complex, but the skill and dedication of John to this work are appreciated by all the Committee, and by me in particular. Our thanks to John.

Our financial position continues to be sound and has remained about the same as last year. Grant funding has been at a lower level than previously, reflecting the reduced amount from the Community Fund. As in past years our funds have been used effectively to implement various conservation-related activities. Donations, 'Sponsor a Kiwi', 'Sponsor a Trap' and 'Sponsor an Egg' schemes continue to provide valuable financial support for kiwi translocation activities.

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of grant sponsorship during the year from:

- Department of Conservation,
- New Zealand Lottery Grants Board,
- Hutt Mana Charitable Trust,
- Wellington Community Trust,
- Pharazyn Trust,
- Nikau Foundation,
- Hutt City Council (Kiwi Project and through the Wainuiomata Community Board)
- MOA Conservation Trust.

Village Accommodation have agreed to a three-year sponsorship deal to assist with the Kiwi programme as well as other support, and we certainly appreciate this level of corporate sponsorship.

We are also grateful to Wainui Joinery, Opus International and the Sunday Social Riders for their substantial donations.

A number of other agencies and individuals have provided a range of services and support to us. All have helped to advance the society's goals of achieving improved conservation of Rimutaka forest ecosystems and wider public enjoyment of the forest park.

Our previous Honorary Auditor, Phil Rundle, audited the Society's accounts for many years. We will suitably acknowledge his contribution at a convenient time. We welcome our new auditor Daniel McIlroy, who is also a volunteer member.

Joining the Dots, Stage 2

This year, after a protracted bidding and review process, we were successful in attracting funding from the Department of Conservation's Community Fund for the extension of last year's programme – we have called it JtD2. In this project we have undertaken to:

- Identify key pest hotspots and boost current network of traps to support pest suppression.
- Develop a monitoring plan, and establish baseline monitoring data.
- Begin liaison on the potential impacts of projected 2016/17 mega-mast event.
- Continue the Wellington 'Eastern forum' process.
- Expand stewardship schemes in the Park.

Melody McLaughlin has continued to manage this and the kiwi programme on a part time basis with incredible skill and panache. She has become the face of the Trust and is known nation-wide. I would like to thank Melody once again for her leadership in this important task.

The work in this project is covered under some of the other items in this Report, but I wish to mention one task where our people are national leaders. In the spring of 2015 the Trust, led by Susan Ellis, deployed acoustic recorders at 75 sites in the Park, in order to estimate the relative abundance of diurnal bird species. This was the first time such a comprehensive survey of day birds had been carried out in our region. The Team involved followed the counting protocol used by researchers at Victoria University. The analysis was time-consuming, and results showed the most commonly calling species were tomtits, tui/bellbirds, blackbird/thrushes, grey warblers, long-tailed cuckoos, and whiteheads. Other species recorded include chaffinches, riflemen, fantails, silvereyes and shining cuckoos.

In addition to the main survey carried out in spring 2015, we carried out a smaller survey in March-April 2016 at the 5-minute bird counting stations in the Catchpool Valley comparing the 5 Minute Bird Count data that Ian Armitage started, in order to compare the two techniques. Basically, the work showed that the small, flocking bird species such as Silvereye tend to be under-estimated by acoustic monitoring.

Susan Ellis initiated the project, did most of the analysis and has prepared a very professional paper on the findings, and would make that available if you want a copy. Thank you Susan for an amazing effort.

We also wish to monitor the vegetation response to pest control, and close the loop on the ecosystem by looking at the freshwater ecology. These initiatives are in the early stages and will be part of regional initiatives. It is pleasing to note that Peter Cooper encouraged the Wellington Botanical Society to repeat their 2009 study of the area. Peter and Melody attended a Freshwater Hui to network with others involved in freshwater work.

Kiwi Translocation Project

The Kiwi Translocation Project, introducing and maintaining a North Island brown kiwi population into the Rimutaka Forest Park, continues to be a flagship programme of the Trust. It is the work our Society is well known for. We estimate that over 100 brown kiwi are established in the Park and on adjoining land. Our disappointment at losing so many chicks to predation last year led the Committee to accept a recommendation to go back to the Operation Nest Egg (ONE) system of taking viable eggs from the nests of brooding males, having them hatched in Rainbow Springs, and the juveniles raised in a safe Kiwi Creche until they have reached a weight of 1 kg. This weight is considered a “safe” size at which to re-introduce the young Kiwi back into the wild.

A necessary adjunct to this programme has been the kiwi avoidance training for dogs. Fund raising for this effort was boosted by a generous donation from the MOA Conservation Trust.

Catchpool Restoration Project

Once again we are indebted to Peter Cooper for the considerable personal effort he has put into planning, leading and coordinating this important programme. He has contributed significantly to the thought and practical effort that has gone into the JtD2 monitoring work in this area.

The Catchpool has now been identified as a 350 hectare “Eco hotspot” where pest control efforts have now been intensified and the ecosystem response monitored. This is the essence of JtD2. However, this year, not only did Peter take up the challenge presented by our US Embassy friends with Earth Day where our electronic pin was the first in the world that day, but he introduced the world to the “Wainui dialect” from Bellbirds via the Earth Day Twitter feed!

We have continued the relationship with Project Crimson for the supply of plants, particularly Northern Rata seedlings, and we have been assisted by the QEII Trust in the re-establishment of Yellow Mistletoe (*Alepis flavida*) and White Mistletoe (*Tupeia antarctica*).

A number of corporate and school volunteers continue to take part in various planting, releasing, trapping, monitoring and pest plant removal activities as part of the restoration programme, whilst also being engaged in educational workshops that had a 'hands-on' conservation nature. It is really pleasing to know that the community continues to realise the range of benefits that an indigenous forest ecosystem can provide – hence the catch-line in our new brand.

The bird interpretation panels near the car park will further enhance the community education and involvement with this special area.

The Trapping Programme

Pest control trapping is a continuous and critically important task that focuses on the control of small animal pests, primarily stoats and rats. Possums and ferrets are also targeted in the Catchpool. Monitoring tunnels have been installed to estimate pest density and check the effect of our efforts. This work has been enthusiastically carried out by a volunteer team of trappers throughout the year. Our sincere thanks go to all trappers who put such a lot of effort into the effective servicing of the traps during the past year. In fact, the summer trapping roster was maintained all through the winter, and as well as the extra effort from our volunteers with the extra trap runs, they also cooperated while we tried different baits - which at times complicated the roster.

Penny Evans continued to lead the planning, coordination and operational arrangements for this task, with assistance from Melody & Rosemary. Penny keeps very good records of animal kills by trap and trap line, and this data is used to detect pest hotspots. We used this data to increase trap density in areas with high pest populations in an effort to further increase our protection of endangered species. A total of 38 more traps were moved into pest hot spots.

I also wish to acknowledge the efforts of our volunteer statistician Winifred Long who has maintained a comprehensive database of our trapping successes. Since 2009 our average catch of pests has been:

- Mustelids 119 per year (has been as high as 162)
- Rats 836 per year (has been as high as 1,415)
- Hedgehogs 56 per year.

Thus on average our trappers remove 1,012 animal pests from the Rimutaka Forest Park per year. Thinking about that number: if each of those pests took only 5 young birds or 5 eggs per year, that is over 5,000 birds we have helped.

Trap repair and testing continues to be led by Mike White who ensures that traps are maintained to a very high standard. As the traps age, this becomes an increasingly difficult task. Grant Watt leads a group that checks the operation of all traps in the network. We hope that the gradual introduction of new, A24 self-re-setting traps will reduce the workload of these teams, but there is still a definite place for the older traps and they do still need to be checked.

I would like to thank Penny, Mike and Grant for the dedication and effort they provide to the trapping programme. As reported last year, without a consistent volunteer-supported pest trapping effort there would be no brown kiwi translocation programme at all, and the population and the distribution of other birds and the health of the forests would not be what they are today.

Fund Raising

The Fund Raising sub-committee has considered and arranged several initiatives for raising funds for the Trust. These have been successful in supporting our goals, in particular the flagship Kiwi Translocation Project. Much of the credit for this essential aspect of our work goes to Rosemary Thompson for her enthusiastic leadership.

The delicate nature of our funding situation is well known to your Committee. We are aware that funding for our part-time employee runs out shortly. Fund raising is a skilled task and we are continually looking for long-term options. We hope you can help

Public Relations

Publicity about the Trust to the wider community has been promoted during the year. Our website, www.rimutakatrust.org.nz continues to be popular with visitors in New Zealand and overseas and is the major point of access for information about us. Our Facebook page has more than 300 followers. I wish to thank Peter Cooper and Kelly Anso for their respective roles in managing the society's website and Facebook page during the year.

Press releases were issued, "The Rag" (Re-named "Rimu-Talker") has been distributed and email traffic to volunteers has been maintained.

Cooperation with the Department of Conservation

We have a dedicated DOC staff liaison person Angus Hulme-Moir, and the Committee has met with him formally & informally to progress all the issues we have raised. Angus has been great to deal with and understands our situation as volunteers; we talk about current operational issues as well as starting a dialogue on long-term planning for the future management of the southern part of forest park, including the Catchpool Valley.

Appreciation

On behalf of the Committee I want to give a big Thank You to all who have helped the Society operate successfully as a voluntary community organisation during the year. Members and non-member volunteers have contributed enormously to pest control trapping, kiwi establishment, Catchpool Valley restoration, fund raising, public relations and other activities. A big thank you to you all.

I would also like to acknowledge the friendly cooperation from the staff of the Department of Conservation, particularly Rob Stone and Angus Hulme-Moir, for helping with the implementation of Trust activities. We do appreciate your support and we look forward to cooperating again in the future. Staff of the Greater Wellington Regional Council have also been very helpful.

Last, but by no means least, I wish to thank the members of the Executive Committee for the thought and considerable effort they have contributed towards the effective running of the Trust during the past year. An organisation such as this Trust does not run itself, and the membership at large should be very proud of the efforts your Committee put in on a voluntary basis

Geoff Cameron
President

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