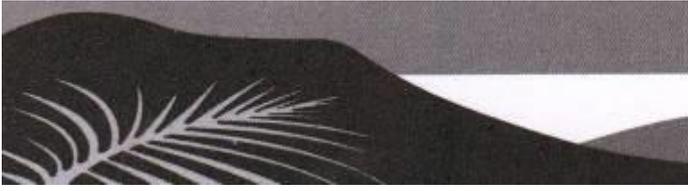


WINDY HILL ROSALIE BAY CATCHMENT TRUST



Windy Hill Sanctuary Newsletter #39 December 2020

Season's Greetings

Much of the focus for this ridiculously unsettling year has been about saving humans from the ravages of a global pandemic. But spare a thought for the challenging year it has been for our biodiversity both on a global and local scale. In David Attenborough's final statement documentary, he signals the loss of biodiversity as the most pressing issue for our planet. It is the biodiversity that underpins all the natural systems that support human life on earth.

On Aotea, the biodiversity has been most impacted by the long predicted drying of the east coast of NZ. Here there was 30% less rain than normal in 2019. In 2020 we are also well down on our normal rainfall and going into summer with the ground moisture deficient. That lack of rain has impacted measurably on the forest vegetation, birds, lizards, and invertebrates. Dead mature taraire trees, as seen in the picture below, are a common sight, and the undergrowth has died off leaving bush areas sparse and more vulnerable in the event



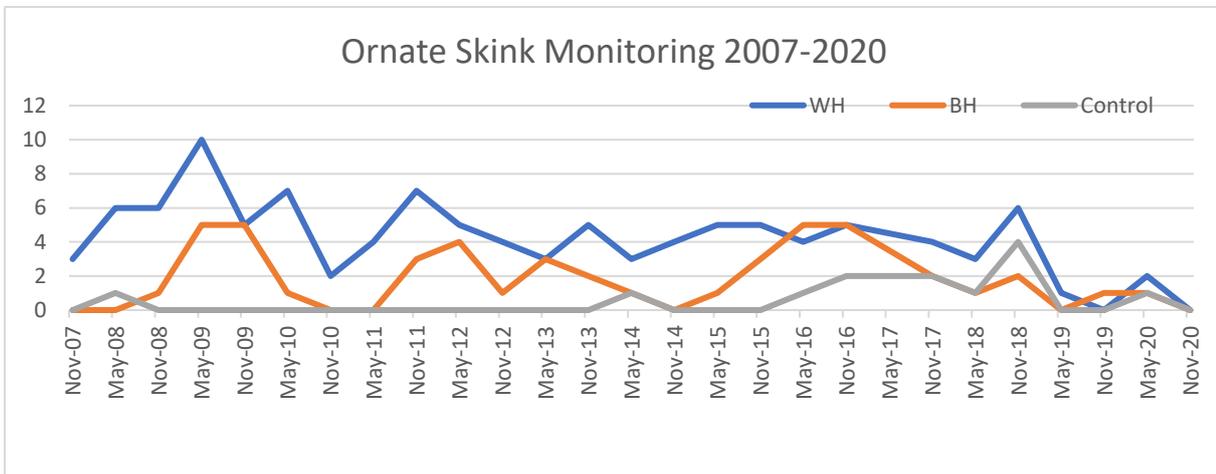
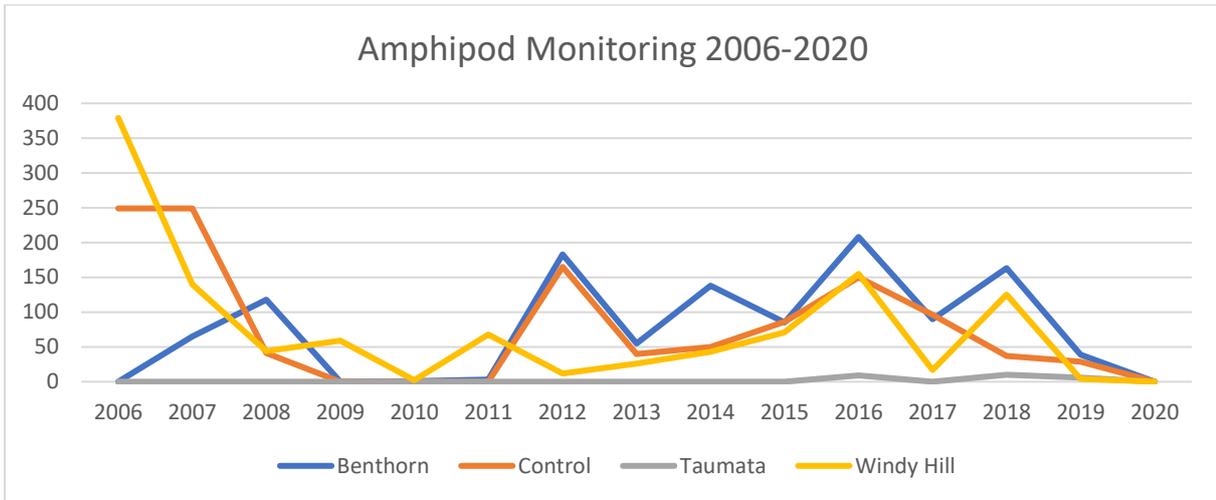
of fire.

Starvation was the most identified issue for birds taken into bird rescue over the 2019-20 summer. Forest seeds are shrivelled or even absent. In unmanaged forests infested with rats, like the majority of those on Aotea, the situation gets more dire as the rats out-compete native species for the little food there is. A double whammy.

The role of the Windy Hill, Glenfern, and Motu Kaikoura Sanctuaries, community projects, and individual landowners in suppressing pests is now extremely important if we are to hold our biodiversity through these trying times. Thankfully, the area of protected habitat on Aotea is growing: 30 hectares of new property is being developed for pest management in the Windy Hill Sanctuary; the Oruawharo Medlands Eco-vision project is growing in the Medlands area, including the DOC wetland: and more private landowners are purchasing property with restoration, particularly of wetlands, planned. Murray Staples Rat-

Attack business manages over 100 private properties for rats. The proposed northern Tu Mai Taonga project is focussed on eliminating feral cats and suppressing rats over a huge area in northern Aotea Great Barrier and is at the community consultation and feasibility stage.

While vegetation is the most obvious drought impact, our monitoring of invertebrates and lizards also shows a sharp drop off in drought conditions. Invertebrates and lizards are monitored twice a year in ground based lizard 'motels' and have been since 2006. The graph below of monitoring outcomes for Ornate skinks and Amphipods show the impact of the drought in both 2010 and 2019/20.



In the field

An interesting year in the field with the impact of the drought over the last 2 years evident in the lower number of rats trapped and limited bait take. A total of 2129 rats were trapped to end November and rat tracking tunnels showed suppressed rat numbers with a Sanctuary annual average of 5.6% - very pleasing result for this unfenced Sanctuary with leaky edges and sited in contiguous forest.

The team has trapped 13 feral cats and our volunteer pig hunter has taken out 16 feral pigs this year. Low feral cat numbers have been partly due to the additional trapping on our boundaries by Auckland Council – 14 cats have been caught on walking tracks that may otherwise lead these animals into the Sanctuary.

The Trust highly appreciates the hard work put in by our field team - Kevin Parsons, Henry Cookson, Lotte McIntyre, Abby Naismith, Corey Hardstaff, Dan Williams, and Dave Harland - and congratulates them on their systematic and thorough work as the engine room of this Sanctuary.

Tieke Translocation

We are still at the early stages of this exciting research based project. In the New Year, project lead Kevin Parker of Parker Conservation will meet with iwi at both Glenfern and Windy Sanctuaries to partake in a forest suitability survey. Further to this, and with the blessing and commitment of iwi, a more formal approach to DOC will be made. This project is a collaboration between the Sanctuaries, Parker Conservation, Massey University, and Landcare Research. The goal is to test the ability of tieke to survive in good habitat with low rat and cat presence, and to monitor bird dispersal from the sites.

NZ Biosecurity Awards

The Biosecurity Awards are an annual series of awards recognising the efforts of groups and individuals in the biosecurity space from throughout NZ. This year the Windy Hill Sanctuary was a finalist in the Department of Conservation Community Kahiwi Award which was won by the Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust who did call us out in their acceptance speech as being part of their inspiration.

Visit from Minister of Conservation

We were delighted to host Eugenie Sage to Windy Hill in August for a Sanctuary visit. She was on island to celebrate the declaration of Rakitu (Arid island) as rat free.

Aotea Community Native Plant Nursery

The Nursery, developed and managed by the Trust, has now been open for 15 months. Sales have exceeded the projected budget as have the number of plants propagated. This is a pilot project designed to reduce the biosecurity risk of people bringing plants and their associated pests onto the island, and to find out what plants are most needed and in what sort of numbers. Wetland and hedging plants have been identified so far as most requested with Nikau palms and rengarenga lilies always popular.



Funding

Throughout 2020 we have been well supported by our funding organisations, **Auckland Council, Aotea Great Barrier Local Board, Foundation North, and the DOC Community Conservation Partnership Fund**. We were able to sustain our field team and Native Plant Nursery Manager through the Covid lockdowns thanks to the support of these funders. The Trust has secured several three year grants which makes planning and job security so much more achievable.

Sponsors

Fantastic support from **Sealink Logistics** (freight), **Living Simply** in Newmarket (team equipment), **Scott Macindoe** (education fund), and **Kelvin Floyd** (mapping). Thank you.

Volunteers

One of the highlights of this year has been the increased hours committed by volunteers. In the Sanctuary the number of landowners now living on their properties has grown and some have volunteered to undertake rat trapping on their property. Thank you to Helga Speck, Dave Harland, Rachel Wakefield, Deb Badraun, and Bruce Macnee who all manage their traps and report the data back to our base.

Wishing you all a lovely holiday season

Judy

On behalf of Windy Hill Rosalie Bay Catchment Trustees – Rose Harland, Derek Bell, John Ogden