

ANNUAL REPORT December 2004

Newsletter

2004 has been another successful year for the Trust and the pest management projects at Little Windy Hill and Benthorn Farm. The highlights for the year were the successful translocation of thirty North Island Robins to Windy Hill from Tiritiri Matangi in April and the winning of the Department of Conservation Stella Francis Award for Conservation Excellence in August.

North Island Robin

Following the release of the Robins in April an intensive monitoring programme was initiated. Most of the birds dispersed over the southern end of the Island with 3 pair and a single male making territory within or close to the managed area. We are very pleased that over this breeding season 7 chicks have hatched and 6 of these birds have made it to fledgling stage. A new nest has just been found with a further 3 eggs. Thank you to Kevin Parsons for his dedication to monitoring these birds so thoroughly and to those people in the community who have been keeping an eye out for banded robins.

Field Work

Around 270 hectares is now managed intensively for pests in the Windy Hill Rosalie bay Catchments. This year a total of rats/mice and feral cats have been culled. Our three full time field workers, Dean Medland, Kevin Parsons, and Rose Harland are at capacity maintaining our trapping systems, creating new tracks, setting up equipment, monitoring the robins and continuing our twice yearly bird monitoring programme. A summer camp has been established on the southern boundary of Big Windy Hill and will be used over the next 6 months as track work begins into the Wilkinson, Department of Conservation, Blaiklok, and Sommerville/Nicolson blocks.

Our rare plant, *pimelea tomentosa*, has flowered well this year and seed has been gathered and sent to the Auckland Botanical gardens to be propagated there.

Thank you to WINZ for their support with our employment programme.

Finances

The Trust has continued to be well supported by funding organisations this year. Special thanks to the Biodiversity Condition Fund and NZ Lotteries Environment. A grant has recently been approved from the WWF Habitat Protection Fund for bird monitoring and the Benthorn Farm Pateke Recovery programme.

Thank you to the following Trust & Project Sponsors:

- ✎ Biodiversity Condition Fund
- ✎ WWF Habitat Protection Fund
- ✎ Scottwood Trust
- ✎ Pacific Development and Conservation Trust
- ✎ QEII National Trust
- ✎ Auckland Regional Council Environmental Initiatives Fund
- ✎ Auckland City Council Heritage Fund
- ✎ Transpower Landcare Trust Grants
- ✎ Lotteries Environment
- ✎ Subritzky Ltd
- ✎ Wilson & Macindoe Ltd
- ✎ WINZ & DoC
- ✎ Great Barrier Airlines
- ✎ Fullers
- ✎ Reubens Water Taxi
- ✎ Great Barrier Landowners
 - ~ Little Windy Hill Co Ltd
 - ~ Benthorn Farm
 - ~ Macnee
 - ~ Wilkinson
 - ~ Sommerville & Nicolson
 - ~ Blaiklock
 - ~ Henderson

Small Projects

The Benthorn Farm Pateke Recovery Programme was begun earlier this year with the objective of assessing the current pateke population more accurately and looking at ways of improving the perceived low productivity of the pateke on the farm. A total of eight ducks have been counted on night monitoring but no young this year. Roosting platforms have been set up on the ponds which the ducks are using. Supplementary feed provided has yet to be taken up by the birds.

The Windy Hill Freshwater Species Project was also begun with an initial monitoring for the presence of freshwater species undertaken in May by Jo Ritchie. There is no current data available on freshwater species presence or habitat health on the southern end of Great Barrier Island. To enable the Windy Hill Rosalie Bay Catchment Trust to include freshwater habitats in their ecological restoration plan, baseline research, training, and ongoing monitoring is required.

The objectives of this project are :

- To identify freshwater species and assess composition and densities present in the main catchment streams at Windy Hill and Rosalie Bay
- To establish a regular monitoring programme over a three year period
- To create a locally trained freshwater monitoring team as a resource for Great Barrier
- To establish a local data base and recording system of freshwater species
- To provide NIWA with information not previously known about this area
- To gain knowledge about the species composition and identify any missing native species that may need to be reintroduced as part of a restoration plan.

NIWA has no record of native freshwater species in the southern end of Gt Barrier so this programme will assist at that level as well as providing us with current knowledge of the health of our stream fauna.

Trapping Review

After five and a half years of fairly rapid expansion it is now time for reviewing the effectiveness of a trapping only regime, including research into the effectiveness of this same method in other parts of New Zealand. 120 monitoring tunnels have been set up on two compass bearings forming a cross through the entire Windy Hill trapping area. So far, two single night readings have been undertaken with disappointing results. In June this year 30% of the tunnels had rat prints and in October just under 50% had prints. These are unacceptably high. The baseline for Department of Conservation is 5%. While rat catches have continued to be consistent, it would appear that the number of remnant rats has risen. There are a number of possible reasons for this:

- food sources will have increased with consistent trapping which may mean the remaining rats have increased their productivity
- the October percentage reflects a seasonal lowering of rat catches as the nikau berries are at their optimum for rats.
- rats may be becoming trap shy

Several methods have been tried to increase the trapping rate - baits are regularly changed, frequency of checking traps increased, and from time to time traps are moved. Judging by the October monitoring these have not lowered the residual rat densities.

The Trust is to research best toxin options and investigate the possibility of introducing an annual poison bait to our management regime. This would need to be approved by landowners and would be carried out in conjunction with trapping for the remainder of the year. The most effective time to poison would be in mid-winter when rat numbers are low and prior to the nesting season.

Relationships with Organisations

We have continued to foster quality relationships with local and regional organisations. The Auckland Regional Council Biosecurity Unit works closely with the Trust and engages the Trust in small contracts for on-island pest management activities such as stoat monitoring. Tim Lovegrove is in regular contact with us as the supervisor of the robin translocation and breeding.

The Department of Conservation is always available for technical and scientific information and has been most supportive of the robin translocation and follow up monitoring.

The Trust liases with several other Great Barrier restoration projects and acts as a resource to them and the greater community on request.

This year, Deline Samaka, completed his Masters at Auckland University basing his thesis on an analysis of the effectiveness of community based conservation focused on the Trust's projects and Glenfern Sanctuary project at Port Fitzroy.

In addition, the Trust is a member of the International Conservation Volunteers organisation and receives about 20 requests a year for students to undertake work with us.

We have a steady stream of visitors, from Polytech students, to the local school, to locals, to scientists. This is managed to ensure maximum privacy for the landowners.

In summary, the Trust is at this time in good heart - productive, successful, and financially viable. The focus for the next year is to become more effective at our work by reviewing and, if necessary, changing our current practices, and to ensure that the landowners, on whose property we work, are fully on board and supportive.

Thank you for your energy and support over 2004.

Judy Gilbert
Trust Manager