

Windy Hill Rosalie Bay Catchment Trust

Newsletter #8 Annual Report December 05

Kia Ora

Another year of pest management, species protection, monitoring, and habitat improvement is being completed as this goes to print. Our translocated North Island robins are breeding well and are benefiting from the introduction of a twice yearly toxin pulse to our pest management programme. The projects managed by the Trust are now well into their seventh year - a considerable achievement to have sustained the field work, the funding, and the vision of creating a sanctuary in this unique part of New Zealand.

Field Work

I am very proud of our team of field workers - Dean Medland, Kevin Parsons, Rachel Vlasich, and volunteers Rose Harland and Des Casey have worked their bums off this year! We have added another thirty hectares into the managed area bringing the total area managed to over 300 hectares, completed two toxin pulses using close to two thousand baits each of which is hand delivered to its site, monitored bird densities in June and December, monitored freshwater species in March and November, nursed the robins and brown teal through the breeding season, all while maintaining close to 2000 rat traps and 80 cat traps spread over rugged terrain. In a recent reference from GBIs DoC the team were described as 'conservation professionals' and rightly so. After six years, Dean will complete his WINZ contract with us at the end of this year. Dean has been a vital component to the success of the restoration work at Windy Hill and we are pleased to have secured some funding from the WWF to contract him to complete the extension of trapping routes into neighbouring properties next year. This will add another 100 hectares to the managed area. We are currently interviewing people to refill his full time position. Work is ongoing with removing remnants of invasive plants - this year we discovered two patches of *Ludwigia palustris*, an exotic water weed, in our Medlands valley stream. We are in the process of removing it but it is proving to be most resilient, growing again from tiny pieces.

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
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- ✎ Reubens Water Taxi
- ✎ Great Barrier Landowners
 - ~ Little Windy Hill Co Ltd
 - ~ Benthorn Farm
 - ~ Macnee
 - ~ Wilkinson

Dean recently checked on our black petrel burrows as the birds have been heard coming in at night and several burrows show evidence of being in use but are too deep to see if chicks are inside.

Toxin Pulse

Currently we are completing this years second pulse of cholcalciferol(Feracol). The first one week pulse in August was sufficiently effective for tracking tunnel indices to have since averaged out at 26%, considerably less than the 49% of last year. This pulse, baits have been left out for three weeks and replaced as taken which should further improve the outcome. The objective is to trial various lengths of toxin pulses until we achieve an average of 5-15% tracking tunnel indices and then to maintain that through a balance of trapping and toxins. I am reluctant to put toxins into this environment full time and believe we can achieve good results using both manual methods and toxins. It may be useful to trial maintaining our perimeter boundaries with toxins to reduce reinvasion more effectively.

North Island Robins

Five pairs of robins have produced 10 chicks that have survived to fledgling stage, been banded and left the nest, so far this season. The first chicks for 05 were hatched in October and one of the young from this nest has just been recorded in Tryphena - just popped over the ridge so to speak.

Last year we retained four of our thirteen fledged chicks in our pest managed area, and all of these have bred this year. Over the winter three of our adult birds from Tiritiri Matangi disappeared so these new Great Barrier robins are most robustly making up the separated pairs and new pairs of their own. Unfortunately, we have to accept some mortality -robins are predated by rats and moreporks and, of course, die of old age. One of our birds here is now seven years old and produced eleven fledged chicks on Tiri before coming to Barrier.

It is a precarious business protecting this small number of birds and the results so far this season have been much more variable than last year. Twenty four eggs have been produced to get our 10 fledged chicks - some eggs were infertile, some abandoned, and others predated, while two chicks have been eaten by rats and two drowned in the nest during the last storm. Each failure feels like a huge loss when we have so few birds however we are pleased that the bulk of the losses have not been from rats.

Much effort goes in to making each nest as secure as possible - trapping is carried out intensively in the birds territories, poison baits are laid out also, and wherever possible the nest tree is banded with a material that rats can not climb over. As the breeding season commences the birds are monitored as the pairs are formed and new territories established. They have predictable patterns of behaviour so we can tell when they have begun nesting. It can take up to two days to find a tiny nest in their territory but once done we settle down and wait for the eggs to hatch after about 18 days incubation. The chicks are banded in the nest at between 11 and 17 days - each chick is carefully withdrawn from the nest into a soft cloth bag and 3 or 4 leg bands gently fixed to their tiny legs. All this is carried out by Dean or Kevin while balanced high up a ladder which is

tied up so as not to touch the host tree! It is amazing how tolerant these birds are - they will take food from their parents within minutes of having been handled and banded. Young are encouraged to stay in the area by being fed mealworms and learn to come in to a call. We are hopeful that the third and possibly fourth nests of this season will be successful so year by year we can build this fledgling population into a viable robin population that does not need to be so intensely managed. We have worked closely with Glenfern Sanctuary in Port Fitzroy since the release of 27 robins there in April and constantly share breeding notes.

Finances

The Trust finishes the year in a stable financial position with funds on hand to cover costs until September of next year. The Trust has successfully applied for funding from Lotteries Environment, Auckland City Environment and Heritage Fund, the Auckland Regional Council Environmental Initiatives Fund, and the WWF Habitat Fund. Thank you. Landowners continue to contribute to the costs of the projects and enjoy the benefits of tracking routes and the improved biodiversity on their properties.

Visitors

- ✦ In December we hosted about sixty enthusiastic members of the Wildlife Veterinary Association on a site visit. All were treated to sightings of the robins on the walk and expressed much encouragement about the work we are undertaking.
- ✦ Matt Baber, a scientist with EcoQuest, visited in November and unsuccessfully searched for Hochstetters frogs.
- ✦ Mulberry Grove school visited to gather native seedlings for their propagation unit.
- ✦ James Fraser and his duck dog carried out an audit of brown teal duck numbers at Benthorn Farm. Eight adult birds were recorded.
- ✦ Teams from the WWF and Auckland Regional Council Environmental Initiatives Fund carried out site visits to assess the projects for funding.

The Trust has joined the Sanctuaries of New Zealand collective which shares information and expertise between a large number of conservation projects being undertaken on both public and private land. I attended their two day workshop at Tawharanui in September to promote our projects and to gather information relevant to our work. There is A LOT of great work being done out there by committed kiwis who care.

So, on that note, on behalf of Trustees Liz Westbrooke, John Ogden and Mike Lee, have a great holiday with loads of laughter and THANK YOU for your support over the year.

Kind regards

Judy Gilbert
Trust Manager