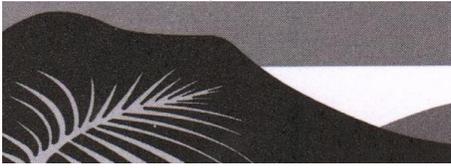


WINDY HILL ROSALIE BAY CATCHMENT TRUST

Annual Report and Newsletter # 10

December 2006



Kia Ora and Seasons Greetings

As another busy year of ecological restoration and pest management draws to a close we celebrate the banding of our 15th robin chick for this season. These birds are a great indicator of what may well be happening out there for all birds species breeding in our managed area of around 450 hectares and benefiting from the much reduced predation by rats and cats.

At the Trusts AGM in October the Trustees assessed the success of their pest management projects and reviewed future direction. The Trust objectives of sustaining and improving the biodiversity of the area, of managing pests at low densities, and of improving the outcomes for bird species in particular, is being achieved. The recently initiated control monitoring project undertaken on neighbouring Department of Conservation blocks already shows significantly greater densities of monitored species present on managed to unmanaged land. The results of this project may provide a practical benchmark to indicate the level of pests that can be present whilst still achieving conservation gains. This has not been established in NZ.

The future direction of the Trust is closely linked to the unfolding vision of a rat and feral cat free island being promoted by the Great Barrier Is Trust, and what future conservation measures the Little Windy Hill Company, the largest landholding we manage for pests, decides upon. A new strategic plan is being drafted with this in mind as we complete all three stages of our initial plan.

Field Work

The team of field manager Kevin Parsons and field workers Rachel Vlasich and Dave Harland have excelled themselves over the year. This month for the first time our rat monitoring tunnels recorded all time lows of 1% at Windy Hill, 3% at Big Windy Hill, and 10% at Benthorn Farm compared with 85% in our unmanaged control area. We have culled 2850 ship rats, 351 kiore, 286 mice and 15 cats from January to the end of November. To achieve this we have over 3000 rat traps and 85 cat traps spread over the managed area.

The initial knockdown of rats in the newly operating Big Windy Hill project area using a combination of traps and/or toxins resulted in a 0% tracking tunnel index. No rats were tracked for the following 2 months and only 1 rat has been tracked since then. This new area covers from the ridgeline and coast from the top of Big Windy Hill south towards Rosalie Bay and is comprised of four landowners. It has stunning bush and dramatic coastal cliffs with a couple of kauri trees spotted and a number of the rare plant pimelea tomentosa present.

Since the introduction of toxin pulses the average annual tracking tunnel index has dropped from 37% (2005) to 21% (2006) at Windy Hill and 38 to 34% at Benthorn Farm. The aim is to lower these further by extending the pulse periods from three to five/six weeks allowing more time for

the less dominant rats to take bait. While these indexes are not as low as we would like they are favourably comparative with those current at Glenfern Sanctuary in Port Fitzroy - a toxin based programme. Improvements can also be made by refining our trap covers. Trials have shown increased catch with an improved design made of wood. The Trust has decided to continue with the use of cholecalciferol for one more year to allow time for further assessment of efficacy and length of timing of pulses.

The field team has recently been provided with handheld radios for contact with each other. This has improved efficiencies out in the field and safety provisions significantly. Thank you to Barrier Energy Systems for the donation of one of our four radios.

We also much appreciate the volunteer field work of Des Casey and the support of Dean Medland with monitoring.

Monitoring Programme

In the managed project areas monitoring is done monthly for rat, weta, and lizard presence, and twice a year for birds, seedlings, and freshwater species. Dean Medland manages these same species at the same time as a Control Project on unmanaged DoC and private land. Results after the first six months of monitoring show no weta or lizard presence in the control area but both present in four out of the ten 'motels' in the managed area. Most noticeable is the abundance of invertebrates - spiders, cockroaches, paua slugs - that have taken up residence in the 'motels' in the managed area. The control project has funding for one year. Thank you to landowner Monique van Ditzhuyzen and the Biodiversity Advice Fund for supporting this project.

Our North Island robins...

The birds have started off the season well with 15 young banded to date and currently two more nests with 3 eggs in each. Unfortunately we have lost an adult female and male from separate pairs in the same area, possibly due to morepork predation or old age. The remaining birds have shuffled territories, remade pairs, and carried on breeding! January is the time when history indicates the most risk of egg and young predation from rats so our toxin pulse is timed to maximise their protection. We are well on the way to our goal of 20 fledged young for this season.

Funding

We have had a most successful year raising \$106,000 towards the costs of our projects. More than \$80,000 of this is returned to our community via wages being a considerable social and economic benefit. THANK YOU to Lotteries Environment, Biodiversity Advice and Condition Funds, and the Auckland City Council Heritage Fund. Thank you also to our landowners who make an annual contribution to the restoration of their properties and to WINZ for the continued subsidies.

Pest Management Audit

As part of our pateke recovery programme at Benthorn Farm the GBIs DoC undertook an audit of our pest management in October. The audit team was impressed with our level of organisation, the scope of the projects, and commented on the high level of motivation and proficiency of our

team. Their recent report contains a number of recommendations for improving cat trapping and assessing monitoring systems - these will be looked into next year.

GPS Mapping

With just 4 tracks to go, all our trapping routes have been mapped on our GPS - so far tracks total 64 kilometres. When this is completed the tracks will be downloaded onto a topographical map and this can be used by landowners to find their way about. It has also been a very useful way of auditing our track spacing to check for gaps and to mark places of significance like robin nests and rare plants.

Networking

Keeping up with best practice and research for restoration projects like ours is really important. Over the year I have attended the Sanctuaries of NZ workshop, a community focussed bird translocation workshop, and spent three days in the Department of Conservation mainland island at Te Urewera looking at their project, which is also trapping based with pulses of toxin. The bird life there - tomtits, bellbirds, robins, and kokako was outstanding. Much is still unknown about the dynamics of pest populations in forest habitats and sharing knowledge is essential. I have also recently been appointed to the Auckland Conservation Board where I will continue to advocate for the value of the ecology of Great Barrier.

New Landowners

We welcome the Wells family and Rachel Vlasich into the project area. Once pest management is established their two properties will add a further 20 hectares to our conserved area.

Thank you to the following current Trust & Project Sponsors:

Biodiversity Condition Fund

WWF Habitat Protection Fund

ARC.Environmental Initiatives Fund

Auckland City Council Heritage Fund

Lotteries Environment

Subritzky Sealink Ltd

Barrier Energy Systems

Wilson & Macindoe Ltd

WINZ & DoC

Great Barrier Airlines

Great Barrier Landowners :

Little Windy Hill Co Ltd

Helga and Peter Speck Benthorn Farm

Macnee

Wilkinson

Sommerville & Nicolson

Blaiklock

Henderson

Tschirky

Wells

Rachel Vlasich

On behalf of Trustees John Ogden, Liz Westbrooke and Mike Lee we wish you relaxing holidays.

Kind regards

Judy Gilbert

Trust Manager