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It is with much pleasure that I write this first newsletter from the Windy Hill- Rosalie Bay Catchment Trust. The Trust was formed in July last year to bring together the pest management projects at Little Windy Hill(commenced 1998) and Benthorn Farm(commenced 2000) in Rosalie Bay on Great Barrier Island and to act as the umbrella organisation for expanding these two projects into neighbouring properties. The Trust is incorporated with charitable status and takes on the role of employing the three field workers involved on the projects.

The Trustees are committed to ecologically restoring approximately 1000 hectares on south-eastern Great Barrier Island through both plant and animal pest management, and long term to create a sanctuary into which species lost to Barrier can be reintroduced. The longer term vision of a rodent free Great Barrier Island is actively promoted by the Trust with the knowledge that this would create the largest rodent free island in the world bringing huge social, economical, and environmental benefits to this Island.

Great Barrier is in many ways an environmentalist's dream – it is free of possums, mustelids, deer, hedgehogs, wallabies, and Norway rats, which makes the objective of restoring the Islands unique biodiversity much more achievable than in many other parts of New Zealand. It is the fact that it has some 1000 inhabitants which brings a special challenge to creating the vision of being rodent free – the Trust's job is to lay the foundation stone for this ambitious idea in the community.

So, how are we, Trustees Liz Westbrooke, Mike Lee, Geoff Lloyd, John Ogden, and myself going about this?
Currently we are.....

- ***managing pests over a 200 hectare area of ecologically significant land without the use of poisons***
- ***taking an integrated approach to pest management – all invasive animals and plants are being systematically removed***
- ***acting as a working role model and resource to others in the community and elsewhere in New Zealand***
- ***creating employment on an island with very limited opportunities for its youth and other unemployed***
- ***expanding our area of operation by working cooperatively with a collective of private property owners and DoC***
- ***working in partnership with WINZ, the Auckland Regional Council, the Auckland Museum, and the Department of Conservation***
- ***realising the vision of reintroducing rare or endangered species with the recent placement of a chevron skink into our sanctuary area***
- ***partnering the Auckland Regional Council with weed eradication and stoat monitoring***
 - ***monitoring our activities for signs of success, as well as researching traps and baits on behalf of other organisations***
 - ***exploring ways of becoming more self-supporting***

- ***opening the project areas up to site visits from the community, schools, and scientists***
- ***publishing our progress and successes in both local and national media***

It is a very exciting time to be involved at the active end of conservation, pest management. All over New Zealand the impact of pests, even in those supposedly protected areas, is being realised. It has now been clearly demonstrated in DoC's six Mainland Islands and a number of offshore islands, that the come-back for all native and endemic species following the removal of invasive mammals and plant pests is immense. DoC is a world leader in pest management and eradication programmes – it is clearing larger and larger islands as its expertise and confidence grows. Campbell Island at 11,500 hectares is the largest to date. Great Barrier is some 28,000 hectares.....not such a formidable difference. Let us hope that this year sees the eradication of rats from Little Barrier Island – with no rodent predators left the rats are feasting on the islands birds, invertebrates and reptiles.

Funding

It is heartening to have received so much support for this restoration project which operates on private land. The benefits environmentally are easily recognised but it has been a hurdle for some to feel easy with public money being spent on private land. The fact is, pests know no boundaries, good habitat is what they're after regardless of who owns it, and much of New Zealand's ecologically significant land, like ours, is held in private ownership. The private landowner has a responsibility to halt the decline of our waning biodiversity on its land, like ours, and in doing so support the conservation efforts on public land. Thankyou to our many sponsors listed.

On the Ground

The engine room of the projects lies with our team of field workers who walk over 25 kilometres servicing around 1100 rat traps and 60 cat traps, who regularly hunt pigs, goats, magpies and mynas, and remove weeds. All our workers are employed through WINZ Task Force Green or Job Plus work schemes and as workers pass through the project the island will accumulate a pool of people trained in pest management. Our challenge is to be able to retain a core of field managers who give the project its continuity and provide the training. We receive quality support from WINZ. To date the Little Windy Hill and Benthorn Farm Pest Management projects have jointly removed some 7000 rodents, 17 pigs, 56 cats, and 221 goats, magpies and mynas, plus a suite of invasive plants.

Research and Monitoring

There are very few places in NZ where the fluctuations of wild rodent populations have been charted long term. The Trust is gathering interesting data, through trapping, about rodent densities in a temperate climate. Alongside our data collection we are also monitoring our birds, invertebrates, and seedlings to note the progressions following the removal of most of the pests.

Later this year we will update you with our progress, trials and tribulations. Until then, happy trapping.

Judy Gilbert
Trust Manager
Founding Trustee