

**Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society
Annual Report
2016**

Tena kotou, tena kotou, tena kotou, katoa.

It is my pleasure to report on another highly successful year for Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society. Our work now covers Mt Pirongia and Northern Pureora Forest and our interests have expanded to protecting kokako and dactylanthus.

Last year, I signalled our hope of setting up kokako protection at Okahukura. We were rapt that we gained funding through the Department of Conservation in September. Working in partnership with DoC Te Kuiti and Pureora, Ngati Rereahu and Kessels Ecology, a 1,000 ha bait station grid was established by the summer and 650 bait stations filled by community volunteers. Through social and print media, we attracted 80 volunteers to the project, of which 63 had not volunteered for us before. Rats were reduced from 46.6% to 3.3%, but most importantly kokako pairs surveyed in June showed an increase from 22 in 2012 to 45 pairs. Best of all, the Pureora kokako population has been assessed as genetically robust, the first population in the country to achieve that milestone. As we gear up for our next season of control at Okahukura, we have been able to appoint a co-ordinator for the Okahukura project, Jeanie Allport who holds a wealth of biodiversity experience, and we look forward to working with her.

In relation to translocating kokako to our maunga, I need to stress that our Okahukura project has no guarantees that we would be able to source founder birds from that area and we await DoC's response to our kokako translocation strategy on where suitable birds might be available from. We were ecstatic to learn from DoC that progeny from Pirongia kokako removed in the 1990s are still surviving today. One of the Pirongia males was part of a successful captive breeding programme at Mt Bruce, and Kapiti Island and Tiritiri Matangi now have these blood lines. We were also able complete the DNA sampling of kokako on Hauturu/Little Barrier Island so that analysis of genetic diversity of that population can inform decisions on the suitability of those birds for translocation. At this time we do not have a firm date for the completion of that analytical work. An ethical clothing company, Chalky digits, has agreed to fund the development of a corporate sponsorship package for translocating kokako to Mt Pirongia which we are excited about as it should help us secure some funding for this hugely significant project.

Mt Pirongia pest control work goes from strength to strength behind the incredible dedication of Steve McClunie and Ken Allen and the consistent reduction in predators is seeing native bird numbers flourish. Last season we achieved a zero rat index, down from a pre-operational level of 78% which was our highest ever starting point. We are blown away by the number of riflemen, bellbirds and kereru being heard and seen. Robins continue to breed successfully but remain in low numbers.

Our envirocentre building is continuing to be upgraded, albeit slowly. A water tank has been installed and we are currently seeking funding for toilets and internal remodelling. The exterior is in the process of being painted thanks to Straight Paint

and Watty Paints and we acknowledge the huge input from Vic Hopkirk for achieving these improvements.

Following the fascinating presentation at our last AGM, a *Dactylanthus* group was set up to look after the plant colonies on Mt Pirongia and thanks go to Allison Sellars for co-ordinating this group.

Our projects absolutely depend on grants and donations, and I would like to acknowledge our gratitude for the support from the following funders over the past year:

Department of Conservation's Community Fund Grant of \$148,676 for the Okahukura Kokako Protection Project

WWF and the Tindall Foundation grant \$9,350 for Mt Pirongia pest control

Waikato Catchment Ecological Enhancement Trust funding of \$8,625.00 for Mt Pirongia pest control

Department of Conservation's Community Partnership Final instalment of \$8,625 for a Kokako Translocation Plan

Waikato Regional Council \$5,000 for Okahukura pest control costs and \$5,000 for Mt Pirongia pest control costs.

Waikato Environmental Protection Valder Grant \$5,000 for Okahukura pest control costs

Department of Conservation in-kind funding for website redevelopment

Chalky Digits grant of \$4,300 for a kokako corporate sponsorship package

Four Winds Foundation \$4,200 for envirocentre structural work and insurance

Pub Charity \$3,159.76 grant for envirocentre structural work

Department of Conservation's Biofunds: Final instalment of \$1,500 for pest control on the private land within our bait station grid

Waipa District Council: \$800 for administration costs

These total \$204,235.76 apart from the website funding.

We have continued our environmental education and advocacy through presentations and forums, and benefit from a diverse and committed support base. We currently have 120 members, 105 individual and corporate sponsors of hectares with 174 hectares sponsored in total. Our Mangakaraa podcast, available for free on the internet <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZO-Gxc1yfWk>, now has over 4,189 views while our facebook page has 304 likes. We are grateful for the steady stream of new volunteers wanting to be involved with our projects, and this year volunteer

hours came to 3824 involving about 85 people. Voluntary contributions cover bait station filling and providing refreshments afterwards, monitoring for rats, birds and bats, dactylanthus, planting and releasing work, and tasks related to our envirocentre building. Our volunteers are our living treasures without whom we would have no chance of restoring the living treasure which is our maunga, so I salute you all for the contributions you make and encourage you to keep supporting us in the areas that appeal to you. It is only by working together that we can achieve our vision.

Lastly, I want to thank all those on our committee who give unswerving commitment to our vision of bringing Mt Pirongia back to life. You are all an inspiration to me and set the standard for positive action in being kaitiaki for our country's unique natural heritage. I especially want to acknowledge Steve McClunie as vice-Chair and our guru for pest control, Dianne June as Secretary, Greg Hill as our newly appointed Safety Officer and Selwyn June for leading our monitoring work for robins, birds generally and bats. Alison Sellars is not on our committee but she has done a superb job as our publicity officer which is greatly appreciated. I also want to mention Gerry Kessels from Kessels Ecology who has made a massive contribution personally to our Okahukura project. Finally our Treasurer Ed Brodnax is stepping down from his role. He has kept our finances running sweetly in the background, allowing us to concentrate on the physical side of restoration and we are immensely grateful for his meticulous management. We wish him all the best for the future and we hope to still see him at our events.

This week the winter weather has been pretty glum and the choice of flying to beautiful destinations to escape the dreary conditions at home is tempting. But it made me mull over what this group's vision is all about: working to bring forth conditions on our home mountain that we would never want to escape from. I wrote this as the tuis enchanted me with their calls in my garden and I dreamed about how it would be if one day that might be kokako.

Kia kaha

Clare St Pierre
Chairperson
14 July 2016