

Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society

Annual Report

9th July 2009

Tena koutou tena koutou tena koutou katoa.

A warm welcome to all society members, members of the public and special guests

80% of native plants in New Zealand grow no where else on earth, and home to an impressive portion of them is Mt Pirongia. Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society has championed this amazing and majestic maunga in the last year by focusing on three main areas:

Restoration

Community Awareness

Contribution

Restoration

Our passion is to have Mt Pirongia bursting with birdlife again. To do this, we set up pulsed control of mammalian pests using a bait station grid and plenty of keen volunteers. Beginning in 2006 with 250 ha, our Mangakaraa project has now grown to 470 ha. Ultimately we want to have 1,000 ha under control and have the thrill of hearing the call of the kokako again.

This year's achievements with pest control have been outstanding. An amazing 30 volunteers help with the bait station filling on two Saturday mornings in August and October. Post operational monitoring showed a reduction in rat populations from 52% to an index of 1.6% (basically only 1 rat in evidence). Reports of increased numbers of tomtits in our operational area have been encouraging for us as an early sign of positive impact, and we are delighted that consultation and funding is in place for the new Mangamauku extension of 120ha.

Credit for this wonderful progress has to go to Steve McClunie and Ken Allen who do such a fantastic job organising the bait station fills. Thanks also to Tonia Eckhoff, June Bright, Dale McClunie and Pirongia Forest Park Lodge for the refreshment side of things. Our volunteers deserve special praise. We have been over the moon with the positive response we have received for this project, and have never been short of willing helpers. In short, all of you rock, and you give us the impetus to carry through with our long term vision. Thank you.

To meet the on-going costs of the Mangakaraa project, we launched a 'Sponsor a Hectare Scheme' in 2007. This has been successful for us both in attracting needed funds (we now have over 100 hectares sponsored) and generating even more goodwill for our group. We are presently developing a display board to be placed at the Visitor Kiosk at the end of Grey Rd to publically acknowledge our sponsors.

Vegetation is an integral part of our restoration work and we are indebted to Selwyn and Dianne June, and Nicky Samuel for their dedication and expertise. Thank you as well

for taking on our Northern Rata replanting proposal, to ensure this iconic tree continues to grace the slopes of Mt Pirongia.

An exciting development for our group is the chance to protect native bats in association with Meridian Energy. A survey was undertaken in April and the presence of bats within our Mangakaraa project confirmed. We will be meeting with Meridian Energy and the Department of Conservation in the near future to discuss further details. I would like to thank Kessels Associates for offering expert assistance if required and Annette Vickers for helping with the survey work.

Community Awareness

Community awareness is another key role of our group and one of the main ways we do this is through the Mt Pirongia Art Awards. This was the fourth consecutive year we held the Awards, in conjunction with Te Awamutu SCREAM festival and funding from Creative New Zealand. We use this event as a way to promote our society's activities, while providing an opportunity for the exhibition of the rich artistic talent from our area. Categories included two-dimensional art and creative possum fur and fibre. We had a fabulous range of entries for the Awards, with artists contributing from as far away as Auckland and Invercargill. The response from the children was overwhelming, with 50 entries received from them including some outstanding woven entries from Te Pahu School. The staging of this event takes a huge effort and I would like to thank especially Tui Allen, our voluntary webmaster, who painstakingly photographs and loads the entries on to our website, and Sally Uerata who puts in the hours doing desk duty at the Pirongia exhibition.

We are also involved with guided walks on Mt Pirongia, through the North King Country Summer Nature Programme, dealing with environmental care and medicinal uses of native plants, and the Stream to Summit Promotion with DoC and Sport Waikato. Other opportunities to share our passion for the mountain and the care of its ecosystems are Pirongia Craft Day and presentations to schools and clubs such as Lions and BPW. Linda Daly, Nicky Samuel, June Bright and Tonia Eckhoff have all been star players. Thank you.

Contribution

Our society has an environmental activity centre project which we have worked on progressing this year by identifying possible permanent sites within Pirongia Village and liaising with Waipa District Council and community groups. Our vision is to establish a centre using a heritage building treasured by the local community, which will provide environmental education and resources for locals, visitors, businesses and tourists. It has taken a huge effort to get Council to agree that Section 550 can be made available for this purpose, and we are immensely grateful to all those who have worked with us especially Sabina Owen, Ros Empson and Gavin Dalziel. Vic Hopkirk has also been a wonderful asset to our group, volunteering his time and expertise in the upkeep of the building.

Our connection with non-toxic pest control methods has continued with the method being tabled in Parliament, a trial being conducted and preliminary outcomes looking promising, and a community car pool scheme for Pirongia was also initiated.

We hosted two French university students over about 12 weeks stimulating a rich exchange of experiences, especially as France does not have equivalent pest control issues. Through this arrangement we were able to develop a computer based training resource for native bird identification, and we provided DoC with assistance for their long term vegetation monitoring programme on Mt Pirongia.

Our expertise has been in demand with Pirongia School's native planting project and Hamilton Environment Centre's workshop on organising community events.

Other organisations we have an active involvement with are Pirongia Tourism Association, Pirongia Historic Visitor Centre and the Sustainable Business Network. June Bright and John Wilson, your involvement here is much appreciated.

Funding

All of these achievements would not be possible without funding. I would like to express our appreciation to the following organisations that have provided grants in the last 12 months:

Waipa District Council	\$500	Administrative expenses
Department of Conservation	\$3,421	Mangakaraa Project
Pub Charity	\$8,900	Envirocentre costs and Mangamauku Extension
Lion Foundation	\$670	Newsletter
Southern Trust	\$2,000	Information panel
Environment Waikato	\$4,000	Mangamauku Extension
Waipa District Creative Communities	\$900	Mt Pirongia Art Awards
North King Country Summer Nature Prog	\$200	Mangakaraa Project
NZ Post		100 free envelopes
Total:	\$21,500	

Donations

Pirongia Darts Club	\$5,000
A & P Cowan	\$2,000
Te Kuiti Tramping Club	\$200
Total:	\$7,200

In conclusion, it's been great for me to head a group that is achieving so much, but I treasure even more working with this committee of such tremendous, generous souls set on serving the source of all our wellbeing – the environment. Our total voluntary hours for the year amount to an impressive 1,168. Sadly we have lost two fine committee members, Jan Hania and Kevin Christie who contributed so much enthusiasm and expertise. Leading lights on the committee have been Steve as Vice-Chair and head of the Mangakaraa Subcommittee, Dianne as secretary, Linda as treasurer and June as Volunteer Co-ordinator. You all have done a fantastic job dealing with the extra work needed to keep the group functioning well and you have both my appreciation and admiration. Lastly, I thank all of you for supporting me so well in the past year.