



Will Auckland Council continue to support pest control?

Possum control on the 22,000 hectare Awhitu Peninsula has been an activity which has been supported for a number of years by local landowners and Council.

As the Peninsula has a relatively narrow foot at its base, it provides the perfect opportunity for establishing a 'mainland island' (without the millions of dollars of cost required to build a predator fence!).

Awhitu Landcare has established a simple pest barrier line of bait stations across the foot of the Peninsula which is regularly monitored, and this is producing excellent results.

We have recently established a similar barrier across the northern third of the Peninsula, where valuable pockets of native forest still exist.

With the move to the amalgamated Auckland Council, identification of the small subsidy paid by landowners towards the cost of possum control has disappeared from rates bills.

Is this a precursor to removing the cost of possum control from Council funding?

Our Franklin Local Board, in consultation with the community, has identified that 'protecting and enhancing our natural environment' is a number one priority.

We have met with Local Board members and Council Biosecurity officers to discuss this matter, and they assure us that support of the pest control programme is imperative, and they will be doing everything they can to ensure this programme is included in the Council Long Term Plan (10 year period).

Landcare members will continue to work to make the Awhitu Peninsula pest free, invigorating natural habitats and allowing the native flora and fauna to thrive again.

It won't happen overnight, but it will happen. With ongoing assistance. Please?

Wild, but wonderful

We publicised our 2012 Labour Day walk as an opportunity to see some spectacular views, but on the day we were lucky to see 100 metres in front of us! As readers will recall, it was a bit of a washout as far as the weather was concerned – so we were keen to see how many would turn up for our Waipipi coastal farmland walk.

Despite the biting wind and rain, over 30 people assembled at the end of Kelland Road ready to set off on our 4km journey. Local weather expert Brian Hamilton joined the walk and informed us that we had a window of two hours before the really heavy downpour arrived – some thought that window was in need of a clean!

Ngati te Ata Kaumatua George Flavell led us to the Urupa site which has been recently been marked with stones. A karakia was said and George gave us more information about the Pa sites in the area and the past history of the locale and its people.

Landowner Murray McNaughten showed us the many aspects of environmental protection and regeneration that he has carried out on his property over the years. A wetland is regenerating after being fenced – reducing the silting up of a drain that had to be reg-

ularly cleaned out - and now no care-less cows need to be dragged out. A sandblow that was repaired in years past by the Landcare team was looking good – the marram gradually being replaced by other plants that will provide long term stability. Around 100 acres have been retired from farming – protecting precious ecosystems for the future. Many thanks to Murray for this opportunity to look at his valuable 'futureproofing' of a working, productive farm (and to test our stamina!).

Out on the coast, the wind was so fierce that a waterfall was being blown upwards, back over the land. A unique sight for those brave enough to venture close enough to the cliffs to witness it.

Back in the carpark, despite being wet and bedraggled, no-one seemed in a hurry to leave. It was obvious that everyone had a great time and a sense of achievement provided the warmth we all needed. No, we didn't see Mt Taranaki – but we will remember that walk for a good many years. So, in the future, if you think Landcare will cancel a walk due to poor weather, think again....

Below: Landowner Murray McNaughten (in red) explains how he has futureproofed his farm



Headline news goes unpublished

As lovers of nature, none of us within Landcare enjoy having to kill. A failure to control introduced predators, however, means our native species are doomed. Consider this. Remember the public anguish about the loss of birdlife following the Rena disaster? It was palpable. It is estimated that 1500 birds died due to this incident, and it is referred to as 'NZ's largest environmental disaster'. Actually, it is nothing of the sort. Research by John Innes of Landcare Research reveals that over 26 million native forest birds perish every year due to mammalian predators.

Unbelievable though it may seem, this is actually a conservative estimate reached by rigorous scientific methodology. And that figure does not include the loss of mature birds, introduced birds, or those native birds nesting in parks, farms and

gardens. Conservatively, therefore, introduced predators kill over 17,000 times more birds

every year than the Rena was responsible for. We have no choice but to fight back.

Community plantings look good

Last summer's wet conditions were very kind to our community plantings, with good survival rates and strong growth. It is hard to believe that we only planted the new lookout over Cochrane's Gap a couple of years ago - how fine it looks now for visitors to the area.

Below: Below Cochrane's Gap Lookout - then and now.



West Coast Sand Stabilisation Programme - 2012

The Landcare marram planting team were back in action during the winter planting season, with three projects to complete while sand moisture levels were ideal. The use of marram grass for repairing sand "blows" on farmland is still controversial, as it has become a plant pest in some coastal situations. Dr Doug Hicks has supported Landcare in the use of marram in back dune/pasture land situations on the Awhitu west coast, as it is the fastest-growing, most effective plant for controlling sand erosion.

Underplanted with pasture species, marram can be an effective nursery; it can also support the re-establishment of native plant communities. "Protecting indigenous vegetation associated with sand dunes" ranks No.2 in the DOC national priority statement (although funding to do this difficult work is very difficult to obtain...)

Marram plantings completed dur-

ing 2008, 9, and 10 have thrived; but spring 2012 is proving challenging for all three of this year's projects - two protecting pasture land, one strengthening a huge dune restoration project. The combination of low rainfall and constant strong winds from every direction typically sees large volumes of sand "on the move", burying fresh plantings and invading pasture land - so the survival of 2012 plantings hangs in the balance as we head into summer.

