



When we consider the state of our natural environment it is easy to become disheartened by what we read and see around us - good news stories seem increasingly hard to come by. What a welcome change then, for attendees on our Landcare Easter Walk, who came face to face with what could be achieved by making a commitment to more sustainable farming practices.

A welcome Easter surprise

Graham Clark was our guide as we walked over his farm in Waimatuku/Hamiltons Gap which has been in his family since 1963. A working dairy farm milking some 400 cows, the land has been farmed for over 140 years. The original bush and scrub was mostly removed in the distant past

and the landscape totally modified by agriculture. Rather than leave the land in its present predicament however, Graham made it farm policy to retire remaining wetland and bush areas in order to improve the environment. In the last ten years, many thousands of trees have been plant-

ed and over 10km of fences erected to protect streams, wetland and bush. The results speak for themselves, with cabbage trees and flax towering over us where once were swampy bogs waiting to trap any careless cow.

All this doesn't come for free however - count-

less hours by Graham and his sharemilkers, Kevin and Ann Starnes were spent fencing, planting and dealing to weeds and pests in order to get to this stage - not to mention the financial implications of their endeavours. Many on the walk noted that they drive past the farm on a

daily basis, totally oblivious to the fine work that is going on here. All participants were pleased that our Landcare walk gave them an opportunity to witness the good work that is going on under our noses and thank those involved - hey, it's not all bad news after all...

Above: The policy on Graham's working dairy farm is to retire wetland and bush areas.

Sustainable dairying water accord

Graham Clark got in early fencing off his farm streams but a new all-encompassing dairying accord, due to be signed soon, should ensure that 100% of all streams on all dairy farms are fenced by 2017.

This new accord will also include a riparian planting component rather than just fencing off the waterways. Taranaki Regional Council were quick to see the benefits of streamside planting and their Riparian Management Program has resulted in the supply (at cost price) of 2.6million plants to farmers.

Wouldn't it be great if Auckland Council could take a leaf out of Taranaki's book and provide a similar, huge incentive for other landowners to carry out such valuable work?

With much less land in dairying, the situation in Auckland would be much simpler and cheaper to remedy - surely as the premier city in New Zealand, it is something we can afford?



Wai Care* shows the way

A few months ago Awhitu Landcare held a field day for those interested in learning more about water quality. It was a wet, wet day but the Wai Care programme leaders held everyone's attention as they demonstrated different tools, and the process used to collect data. Many thanks to landowner David Millar, whose healthy stream yielded some very good results. *See Wai Care website for more details.

Left: Andrew Jenks of Wai Care demonstrating water testing methods

Winter plantings begin

Queen's Birthday weekend will be the start of our 2013 planting season. Everyone is welcome, come and help make a difference to our environment - a spade, a smile and a drop of sweat is all it takes!

LOCATION	DATE
Waimatuku / Hamilton's Gap Dune Planting and Beach Clean-Up	Sunday 2nd June 10.00am
Awhitu Central, Kemp Road Wetland Planting	Sunday 7th July 10.00am
Awhitu Social Club Manukau Heads Road	Sunday 28th July 10.00 am
Pollok Wharf Reserve Planting and Tidy Up	Saturday 17th August 10.00am

'Completely fatal' disease spreading

Funding to counteract the deadly Kauri dieback disease, fast killing the tree which New Zealanders voted their favourite in the 2013 Plant Conservation survey, will end next year. What would New Zealand be without our Kauri? It doesn't bear thinking about. Plant Conservation Council member Jesse Bythell echoed many sentiments when she said the Kauri tree has mana and is a taonga which captures the New Zealand spirit.

Right: Sign of disease



Plant Nursery Opening and AGM

In June we will be combining these two important events - details announced soon. From our new plant nursery at Matakawau we will be continuing to carry out all our usual pest control activities with the long term goal of establishing a mainland, predator free 'island' on Awhitu Peninsula, at minimal cost. Most importantly, the shadehouse facility will enable the propagation of thousands of eco-sourced plants for revegetation projects.

Out, out damn Pests....

Every year a whopping 26,000,000 native NZ forest birds perish to mammalian predators. That is the conservative conclusion of a rigorously scientific calculation by John Innes of Landcare Research. This is the enormity of what we are fighting. Its rat explosion time again. Nocturnal and shy, so rarely seen, they are nevertheless active from dusk till dawn regardless of the weather. If every one of us puts a rat trap on their property, native bird and insect life around the region will reap huge benefits. So, why wouldn't you?