

# Rimutaka Forest Park Charitable Trust Inc.



## President's Annual Report 2009

Presented on behalf of the Executive Committee

This report is presented to members on behalf of the Executive Committee to the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Rimutaka Forest Park Charitable Trust Inc. to be held in Wainuiomata, Lower Hutt on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2009.

2008 - 09 has once again been a significant year for the Trust and for its members.

We are all deeply saddened to learn of the death on 14 March of the founding President of the Trust, Mr. William (Bill) McCabe QSM. Bill was a founder of the Trust and was President until late 2008. He inspired many to promote forest conservation in the Rimutaka Forest Park and to effectively lead by practical example and by his quiet and respectful determination to get things done by persuasion and persistence. Bill brought into the Trust a long history of local knowledge of the forest park and well he understood the feelings of those who enjoyed walking and hunting and the deep personal satisfaction that comes simply from being close to enjoying beautiful natural forest surroundings. Bill had the strength of mind to improve the ecological integrity of forests in the park, notably through reducing animal pests and by upholding high standards of forest protection. These are bold yet practical steps that are now steadily leading to greater biological diversity and to improved forest structure and stature. It is a lasting tribute to Bill's passion and drive that a forest environment is steadily being created where brown kiwi and other native bird species can now live and breed, supported by a group of volunteer enthusiasts in this Trust that will carry on with this good work well into the future.

As a permanent record of Bill's efforts a small memorial seat will soon be built in the Catchpool Information Kiosk that will be dedicated to his name.

### Executive Committee

The Executive Committee met on seven occasions through the year and reviewed progress and made decisions on various topics including applications for funding, maintaining good cooperation with the Department of Conservation and the Greater Wellington Regional Council, the Kiwi Project, the Catchpool restoration programme, the Dawn Chorus programme, long-term planning, public relations and preserving public access from Sunny Grove into the forest park from Wainuiomata.

The Committee presently comprises:

President	Ian Armitage
Vice Presidents	vacant
Secretary	Melody McLaughlin
Treasurer	Greg Thompson
Committee members	Peter Cooper, Don Millward, Claire Thompson, Anania Randall, Scott Farrell.

## **Membership**

Membership stands at 99 at 30 June 2009, and we are very pleased to welcome 30 new members during the year. Others have joined since July. Thank you all for your support to the work of the Trust. The Committee is pleased to advise that the membership subscription fee will remain unchanged for the next year, \$15 for individuals and \$35 for clubs.

## **Programme Coordinator**

The role of Programme Coordinator held for part of the year by Melody McLaughlin has proved to be valuable for effectively leading, facilitating and coordinating the various Trust programmes and projects, in particular the very busy Kiwi Project. Recently the Trust has secured further funding from the BNZ 'Save the Kiwi' Trust that has enabled Melody to be reappointed to this valuable role. Her responsibilities are somewhat larger now because of the greater volume of programme activity.

## **Finances**

The financial position of the Trust is set in detail by Greg Thompson in the Financial Statements for the year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009. Once again, the financial position of the Trust is sound and the resources have been used effectively to achieve the various Trust projects. Our accumulated funds are sound and provide us with a comfortable level of reserve financial support.

The 'Sponsor a Trap' scheme that has worked well for several years continues to provide valuable support for trapping activities. Income from membership subscriptions has increased from 2008.

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of our sponsors during the year, BNZ Save the Kiwi Fund (\$20,000), Department of Conservation (\$18,000), Pub Charity (\$16,000), Wellington Community Trust (\$10,000), Hutt Mana Trust (\$7,300), Colin Watson-Wilson Trust (\$4,000), Hutt City Council (\$5,000), Ron Greenwood Environment Trust (\$2,000) together with several private donations. We are also grateful and wish to thank many companies, Trusts, and other agencies for the a varied range of services they have provided during the year, much of it in support of the Kiwi Project and the transfer of kiwi from Little Barrier Island in particular. All have helped to advance the goals of our Trust in conservation of ecosystems in the forest park.

We wish to thank our Honorary Auditor, Phil Rundle, for his continuing help in auditing of Trust accounts.

## **Kiwi Project**

A highlight of the Trust's activities this year and a major step forward in the long-term aim of establishing a self-sustaining population of kiwi in the Rimutaka Forest Park was the release in mid-April of 20 brown kiwi (11 females, nine males) into the Turere Valley. The birds were captured on and transferred from Hauturu/Little Barrier Island. The programme builds on considerable detailed organisational work and logistical planning over many months by members of the Kiwi team led by Melody McLaughlin. The success of the release operation is a credit to all who were involved in the meticulous planning and in the operational work of capturing kiwi on Little Barrier Island and subsequently releasing them into the forest park. It is notable that this was the first kiwi translocation arranged by a voluntary community group with the Department of Conservation providing much appreciated technical support to help us along. We can all take considerable pride in this major team achievement and I wish to thank you all for your generous efforts in this regard. There are currently 31 brown kiwi in the forest park, 27 are breeding adults and the others not yet old enough to mate.

We are very pleased to report that at this time three pairs of the Little Barrier Island birds are known to be breeding. Together with the older population there are presently six male birds incubating on nests. Eight chicks were raised last breeding season of which seven survived. Four

are still in the Bushy Park kiwi crèche and will be transferred to the forest park in the near future. These chicks are progeny from three captive bred pairs released in 2006.

In this breeding season we will again be implementing BNZ Operation Nest Egg, removing eggs from burrows, incubating and hatching chicks in captivity and later returning young kiwi to the forest park. We will also shortly commence the practice of leaving some eggs in nests and allowing them to hatch naturally. This is another step towards our long-term aim of establishing a self-sustaining brown kiwi population that can exist with minimal human intervention, other than pest control. Allowing some eggs to hatch in the forest park will help demonstrate whether the extensive trapping network is really effective. Monitoring is of course critically important in order to measure chick mortality and we hope, of course, that losses from stoats will not exceed about 40% of all chicks that hatch.

A recently introduced development is remote monitoring of kiwi and this approach has been working well for about six months. Volunteers have visited the Turere Valley and nearby sites at weekly intervals since the release of kiwi in April to regularly define the locations of all birds.

The recent death of kiwi 'Fern' to a dog attack was disappointing and highlights a continuing need for vigilance in protecting kiwi from all predators. Dogs are recognised as being a major threat in North Auckland to the extent that greater losses of kiwi are caused by dogs than from stoats and ferrets. The Trust has again provided kiwi aversion training for dogs during the year (two courses) and has continued with public relations efforts to encourage dog owners to put their dogs through such training. Along with promoting an acceptance amongst the general public of the importance of walking dogs on leads on main tracks in the forest park the kiwi avoidance training is but another step in the process of protecting the small kiwi population from predation.

Four Trust volunteers attended the Kiwi Hui in Turangi this year. The meeting led to an improved understanding of dog-related issues, including studies on the effectiveness of kiwi aversion training for dogs, also research on the role of genetic markers for kiwi and about population modelling.

### **Dawn Chorus Project**

The Dawn Chorus Project lead by Simon Wear focuses on the control of small animal pests and continued with the support of a small number of volunteers. It is now in its 9<sup>th</sup> year. Most trap lines were mapped during the year and trap positions were accurately defined using a GPS. Some of our original members are no longer available to help with trapping so accurate map definition of trap positions will serve to document the physical basis for trap management and will assist us in planning future pest control using traps and the collection of data. Target pests for the Dawn Chorus continue to be possums, stoats and rats but other pests are caught too. An effort will be made in the coming year to target ferrets and rabbits in the Catchpool and Orongorongo Valleys.

More traps have been deployed along the Catchpool streamline and over Middle Ridge, mainly targeting possums and stoats. The Animal Health Board had two volunteer days in the field and helped us with the physical deployment of stoat traps and setting out additional possum traps. This additional effort is an important part of the Dawn Chorus Project. We wish to thank the Animal Health Board for their dedicated support in this regard.

The Trust has only a limited number of volunteers for servicing traps so we are really keen to recruit more volunteers. The Dawn Chorus Project suits, in particular, those people who enjoy some regular physical outdoor activity that is not overly challenging. It is most valuable part of the work of the Trust and we welcome any offers of interest to contribute to on-going trapping efforts. On behalf of the Committee I wish to thank all volunteers for the dedicated and effective efforts made in 2008-09 in support of the Dawn Chorus project.

The Trust is watching with keen interest the outcome of trials currently underway in the park of self-setting stoat traps and 'easy-to-set' possum kill traps. Both of these new and novel trap designs have the potential to change the way we currently trap stoats, rats and possums.

Discussions were initiated during the year with Landcare Research Ltd about research on new approaches for the control of animal pests, especially possums and stoats. Although research progress is encouraging it appears that it could be some time before new operational methods become available. Dialogue with Landcare Research Ltd will continue periodically.

In August a survey commenced to collect data on birds in the Catchpool Valley and along part of the Five Mile track to better understand our knowledge about birds in parts of the forest park. The approach being followed is the standard five-minute count method, now widely used in New Zealand forests, that will over time enable long term trends in the incidence and the conspicuousness of birds to be better defined and will also enable comparisons to be made with other localities. Our aim is to extend the bird survey into the Turere Valley later. Again, we welcome volunteer interest in conducting regular monthly bird surveys.

### **Catchpool Restoration Project**

We are pleased to report that the Trust was successful recently in being awarded a grant of \$40,000 from the Community Conservation Fund to support revegetation of parts of the gorse covered lower slopes of the Catchpool Valley. The funds will be disbursed over two years, \$20,000 each for 2009 and 2010, for the purchase of a range of native treestocks, tools, contracting to cut lines in the scrub and for weed control. The Trust is pleased to be working closely with the Department of Conservation in implementing this new programme.

Led by Peter Cooper who completed the detailed arrangements, planting work commenced recently on land adjacent to the Catchpool carpark. Trees were being purchased from three local nurseries and planting will be carried out by various corporate volunteer groups.

Our landscape restoration plan is simple and involves a progressive programme of tree planting on slopes near the car park, above the camping ground and on other sites lower in the valley that have been disturbed through logging of pine forests. The aim is to work with nature, to preserve natural regrowth (and there is plenty in the damper sites) and to supplement it in gorse/bracken sites where native trees are absent. The short term aim is to markedly improve the amenity value of the lower slopes, make them more visually appealing to visitors and to widen plant biodiversity and provide more shelter for birds. Trapping and poisoning of predators will complement tree planting and to that extent it complements the Dawn Chorus trapping work. We don't have ambitions to reforest the mid and upper slopes as this is unrealistic and is beyond our resources. Nature will need to take its course here.

### **Public Relations**

Publicity about the Trust to the wider community has been promoted through various mechanisms during the year. Our website, [www.rimutakatrust.org.nz](http://www.rimutakatrust.org.nz) continues to be popular with visitors both in New Zealand and overseas and is the major point of access for information about the Trust. We wish to thank Peter Cooper for his skill and enthusiasm in maintaining and developing the website.

An informative brochure was drafted recently by Peter Cooper with inputs from others and will be printed and distributed to widen the 'reach' of our public relations. A 'Sponsor-a-Kiwi' brochure has also been drafted by Kelly Briggs and will be printed soon. Numerous press releases were issued during the year on various topics, but mostly concerning the Kiwi Project, often followed up with interviews with the news media. Talks to school groups by Trust members further advanced our public relations and in July our informative newsletter, 'The Rag', was printed and distributed.

We wish to thank Claire Thompson very much for her efforts in public relations during 2008 and 2009. Claire has now retired from this role and it has been taken up by Kerry Swadling.

### **Long-term Planning**

In response to an invitation from the Department of Conservation for comments on the future development of the Catchpool and Orongorongo Valleys the Trust provided a range of observations and suggestions concerning access and recreation, tracks, the use of huts, the Catchpool Centre, forestry issues and pest control. Periodic discussions with departmental staff on these topics have been most useful and are likely to continue.

### **Maintaining Public Access to the Forest Park from Sunny Grove, Wainuiomata**

In response to an invitation from the Hutt City Council in June concerning access across land in Sunny Grove to the forest park the Trust argued strongly in support for maintaining public use of this popular access route. We submitted that the important Sunny Grove gateway route should be permanently protected to provide easy, convenient and safe access to the forest park as it has done for several decades, in particular, to the Turere Stream catchment. We are pleased to note the Hutt City Council has decided to maintain public access to the park through Sunny Grove.

### **Christmas Barbeque**

The Christmas barbeque was held once again at the Catchpool Centre in December in bright sunny conditions. It was a fun event for Mum's, Dad's and children including races and a hunt the kiwi competition. Our sincere thanks go to the organisers for this event, an important part of the Trust's social calendar!

### **Appreciation**

On behalf of the Trust Committee I wish to thank all who have helped the Trust to operate successfully as a voluntary community organisation during the year. The trappers, the kiwi project team, the Catchpool restoration team and others who have contributed to public relations, fund raising and the numerous small issues that always come up, a big thank you to you all.

I would also like to acknowledge the generous and friendly support of the staff of the Department of Conservation for helping with the implementation of each of the projects being promoted by the Trust; we are most grateful for your support. May I also acknowledge the warm-hearted and friendly cooperation offered during the year by the staff of the Greater Wellington Regional Council.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the Executive Committee for their significant contribution to the effective running of the Trust during the year.

Ian Armitage  
President

8 September 2009