

Rimutaka Forest Park Charitable Trust Inc.



Annual Report 2015

Presented by the President on behalf of the Executive Committee

This Annual Report is presented to the 27th Annual General Meeting of the Rimutaka Forest Park Charitable Trust Inc. to be held in Petone, Lower Hutt on 20th October 2015.

Highlights of the Year

This has been a memorable year for the Trust. My Report will consider the year in some detail, but the highlights from my perspective have been:

1. Successful completion of the first Community Conservation Partnerships Fund (CCPF) project – Joining the Dots (JtD). The Trust hired Melody McLaughlin as the part-time Project Coordinator, established a small steering group, and she achieved all the targets we had contracted to do – increased the protected Kiwi habitat area from 2,800 ha to 7,000 ha; purchased & installed an extra 197 traps; organised the volunteer workforce to service those; improved the Kiwi monitoring methods; enhanced collaboration with like-minded groups in the region, and devised a community stewardship scheme. An amazing effort.
2. Developed a bid for further CCPF funding. The Steering Group prepared a bid for the next round of CCPF funding – JtD2. This was successful, albeit at a lower level than first requested.
3. As the result of several years of Ian Armitage's research work, careful lobbying, and with a background of writing the last Management Plan for the Park, a letter was sent to the Director General of Conservation seeking a new direction in conservation funding. We recommended that the remaining plantation forest in the park be harvested soon, with the proceeds to be paid into a specially created charitable trust which would invest in NZ Government stock (Kiwi Bonds). The income from that investment would go directly to conservation works in the Park. We have not heard back from the Department about that request.
4. A Health & Safety policy and set of procedures was initiated by Peter Harvey, with support from Melody. This goes towards meeting our duty of care to those who work under the Trust's auspices and it also fulfils DOC's requirements for volunteers.
5. A very successful Film Night at the Lighthouse Petone was organised by Peter Harvey. A full house eventuated, with about \$1200 raised for the Trust. A number of organisations also helped sponsor that evening as well.
6. The Committee held a strategic planning day at which we confirmed some of the work that had been started in previous years but not finalised. We agreed our Vision: "*A thriving healthy forest ecosystem, rich in indigenous species, which can be enjoyed by the wider community*", and set out a Plan for the next 30 years. We are now in the process of putting some specific annual targets in place to achieve that Vision.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee met regularly during the year and acted in a governance role for the various activities undertaken by groups within the Trust. These included the management of the CCPF project (JtD), funding-raising, pest control trapping, the Kiwi Translocation Project, the Catchpool Restoration Project, and the Dawn Chorus Project.

The 2014/15 Committee:

President	Geoff Cameron
Vice President	Rosemary Thompson
Secretary	Grant Watt
Treasurer	John Cranefield.
Committee members	Ian Armitage, Janet Lawson, Melody McLaughlin, Penny Evans, and Peter Harvey.

The Committee members offer a wide range of skills to the task of running this Trust. They provided valuable support to me as the new President and ensured a relatively seamless transition from Ian to me. I am very grateful for such support. All members are available for re-election.

Membership

Membership stands at 95 (79 ordinary members, 7 associate members, 9 Family members), up slightly from last year. We have 2 Life members.

Grant has performed a sterling job as Committee Secretary and ensured the administration of the Trust runs smoothly. He has also continued searching for a cost-effective membership database to help manage the many tasks our volunteers and committee members undertake. We are pleased to welcome new members who have joined during the year and we thank all members for their support to the ongoing work of the society.

A Motion to this AGM follows consideration of the role of volunteers within the Trust. We obviously have a good number (125) of volunteers who carry out a range of tasks for the Trust. Not all are members. The RFPT provides the background organisation and administrative support for this volunteer work. It provides Hi-Vis jackets and a small safety pack. It purchases the equipment used during the course of most of the voluntary work. In Law and as a duty of care, the Trust has obligations to Volunteers with respect to their health and safety when they are undertaking work organised by the Trust in the Park.

The Committee believes that we need to have all Trappers, Trackers, Handlers, and others as members of the organisation from a legal point of view, particularly with respect to our Rules, SOPs, H&S provision and legal liability. We also acknowledge that people may not wish to formally join an organisation.

The successful passing of this motion will mean that all volunteers, on being accepted and inducted into a programme organised by the Trust automatically become a Volunteer Member. No annual subscription would be payable by a Volunteer Member, they would have speaking rights at meetings but may not vote on formal motions and cannot be elected to the Committee. However, they do agree to be bound by the Rules and Policies of the Society and may say that they are a member of the RFPT. I do hope that you will consider this motion and vote for it.

Finances

John Cranefield has set out the Financial Statements for the year ended 30th June 2015. Our financial position continues to be sound and has remained about the same as last year. Grant funding has been at a higher level than previously, reflecting the CCPF. As in past years our funds have been used effectively to implement various conservation-related activities. Donations, 'Sponsor a Kiwi', 'Sponsor a Trap' and 'Sponsor an Egg' schemes continue to provide valuable financial support for kiwi translocation activities. The Trust accounts are complex, but the skill and dedication of John to this work are appreciated by all the Committee, and by me in particular. Our thanks to John.

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of grant sponsorship during the year, namely, from the Department of Conservation, New Zealand Lottery Grants Board, Hutt Mana Charitable Trust, Wellington Community Trust, Pharazyn Trust, WWF New Zealand, Hutt City Council (Kiwi Project), and Hutt City Council (through the Wainuiomata Community Board). We have also received two generous

donations – one from the UPS Foundation and the other from the US Embassy after their staff enjoyed a breakout day assisting with restoration work. The UPS fund will be put towards enhancing the Trust's image; the US Embassy fund is being put towards a large sign board which will show and interpret the birds that have been seen or heard within the Park

We are also grateful for and wish to thank several companies, Trusts, other agencies and individuals for a range of services and support they have provided. All have helped to advance the society's goals of achieving improved conservation of Rimutaka forest ecosystems and wider public enjoyment of the forest park.

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

Pest Control Trapping

Pest control trapping is a continuous and critically important task that focuses on the control of small animal pests, primarily stoats, possums and rats, and has been enthusiastically carried out by a volunteer team of trappers throughout the year. Our sincere thanks go to all trappers who put such a lot of effort into the effective servicing of the traps. Last summer saw very high numbers of first rats, then stoats being caught as the populations exploded after the mast seeding year. A number of trappers increased their workloads as they could see what was happening and the threat it created.

Planning, coordination and operational arrangements have been led by Penny Evans. Best practice activities for stoat trapping continue to be met. Penny keeps very good records of animal kills by trap and trap line, and this data is used to detect pest hotspots. From this year we will use this data to increase trap density in these areas in an effort to further increase our protection of endangered species.

Trap repair and testing continues to be led by Mike White who ensures that traps are maintained to a very high standard. As the traps age, this becomes an increasingly difficult task. Grant Watt leads a group that checks the operation of all traps in the network. We hope that the gradual introduction of new, A24 self re-setting traps will reduce the workload of these teams, but there is still a definite place for the older traps and they do still need to be checked.

The JtD project meant that nearly 200 extra traps, mostly self re-setting A24's, were purchased and installed. This was a major logistical exercise for Melody in terms of finding additional trappers, as well as neighbours and other stakeholders agreeing to traps being located on their boundary or within their property.

I would like to thank Penny, Mike and Grant for the dedication and effort they provide to the trapping programme. As reported last year, without a consistent volunteer-supported pest trapping effort there would be no brown kiwi translocation programme at all, and the population and the distribution of other birds and the health of the forests would not be what they are today.

Dawn Chorus Project

Closely related to the pest control trapping is the Dawn Chorus Project that continues to control all animal pests that are threatening forest ecosystems, including birds, in the vicinity of the Catchpool Valley. It has been led for two years now by Martin Tonks and his efforts build on the pest control efforts of others over many years. Thank you Martin for your efforts.

It was this work that led to the Committee identifying about 350 hectares of this valley as a potential "Eco hotspot" where pest control efforts could be intensified and the ecosystem response monitored. This is the essence of JtD2.

Kiwi Translocation Project

The Kiwi Translocation Project, introducing a North Island brown kiwi population into the Rimutaka Forest Park, continues to be a flagship programme of the Trust and has morphed into the JtD programme with about 7,000 ha now effectively available for kiwi. We now estimate that over 100 brown kiwi are established in the Park and on adjoining land. We were intensely disappointed to lose all our monitored chick to predation during the last summer, the result of high predator numbers after the beech/podocarp mast year. Despite this setback, we have continued the system of allowing kiwi chicks to hatch naturally in order to continue the establishment of a kiwi population that can prosper with minimal intervention, other than pest control and monitoring.

Melody McLaughlin has continued to coordinate the implementation of the kiwi programme and manage the JtD project on a part time basis. She has done this with incredible skill and panache. She has become the face of the Trust and is known nation-wide. I would like to thank Melody once again for her leadership in this important task.

The Wellington Community Trust funded the purchase of transmitters and a contract to monitor the wild hatch kiwi chicks, an essential component of the kiwi programme. Jo Sim has provided the continuity with this work.

Kiwi, by their biological makeup, are very susceptible to dogs and so there has been a concerted effort to have local and hunting dogs trained to avoid kiwi. We are grateful for the support from Wainuiomata Marae, and the hunters and dog walkers who have put their dogs through the kiwi avoidance training programme.

Catchpool Restoration Project

The Catchpool Restoration Programme has continued to make a meaningful difference to the revegetation of parts of the scrubby slopes of the lower Catchpool Valley that were once temporarily in commercial pine forest. They use a variety of plants held in a small, recently upgraded, holding nursery at the Catchpool HQ. 350 Northern Rata seedlings were provided by Project Crimson, along with a grant to replace some aging tools and equipment. Seed from other plants in the valley is collected and grown on in the nursery. Also, we have been offered some Yellow Mistletoe seeds as part of a regional effort to re-establish this species, along with Red Mistletoe, in the Park.

A large number of corporate volunteers use this as their community effort or for team building exercises and included ANZ, Kiwibank, Westpac, BNZ, ACC and the US Embassy community. More than 350 students from schools as diverse as Wainuiomata High School, Berhampore Primary, Scots College, Wai Ora Montessori School and Chilton St James took part in various planting, releasing, trapping, monitoring and pest plant removal activities, whilst also being engaged in educational workshops that had a 'hands-on' conservation nature. It is really pleasing to know that the community is just starting to realise the range of benefits that an indigenous forest ecosystem, with modest volunteer management effort, can provide.

This programme continues to steadily improve the amenity value of the lower slopes near the Catchpool Valley car park and camping ground, to widen plant biodiversity and to provide a richer habitat for birds. Once again I would like to thank Peter Cooper for the considerable personal effort he has put into planning, the leadership and coordination of this important programme.

Fund Raising

The Fund Raising sub-committee has considered and arranged several initiatives for raising funds for the Trust. These have been successful in supporting our goals, in particular the flagship Kiwi

Translocation Project. Much of the credit for this essential aspect of our work goes to Rosemary Thompson for her enthusiastic leadership.

Following on from the successful Community Conservation Partnerships Fund bid last year, in which more than \$70,000 was granted mostly for the extension of the trapping network, the Trust successfully applied to the CCPF again this year and was granted a further \$75,000 for the next 18 months to maintain the current pest control activity and to develop and implement an ecosystem monitoring programme.

Public Relations

Publicity about the Trust to the wider community has been promoted during the year. Our website, www.rimutakatrust.org.nz continues to be popular with visitors in New Zealand and overseas and is the major point of access for information about us. It led to our grant from UPS. Our Facebook page has more than 300 followers. I wish to thank Peter Cooper and Kelly Anso for their respective roles in managing the society's website and Facebook page during the year.

Press releases were issued on the Kiwi Project. Talks to schools, Rotary and corporate volunteer groups by Society members (mostly Melody) further advanced our public relations and three issues of our newsletter, "The Rag", were printed and otherwise (electronically) distributed to members, other volunteers and to a range of other readers.

Long term Planning and Cooperation with the Department of Conservation

Progress was made during the year on the development of strategic options on how we can best achieve our objectives into the future, and a 30 year plan is now being used as the basis for our next 5 years' work.

The Committee met with local staff from the Department of Conservation to initiate a dialogue on long-term planning for the future management of the southern part of forest park, including the Catchpool Valley. The meeting was productive but staff movements within the Department have precluded follow-up action. Department staff have been very helpful in finalising the details of the Deed of Grant that follows the bids for CCPF funding.

Appreciation

On behalf of the Committee I offer my sincere thanks to all who have helped the Trust operate successfully as a voluntary community organisation during the year. Members and non-member volunteers have contributed enormously to pest control trapping, kiwi establishment, Catchpool Valley restoration, fund raising, public relations and other activities. A big thank you to you all.

I would also like to acknowledge the friendly cooperation from the staff of the Department of Conservation, particularly Rob Stone, Matt Barnett and Angus Hulme-Moir, for helping with the implementation of Trust activities. We do appreciate your support and we look forward to cooperating again in the future. I also wish to acknowledge the cooperation and support offered during the year by the staff of the Greater Wellington Regional Council, particularly as our trapping network approached the boundary, but also for the technical assistance.

Last, but by no means least, I wish to thank the members of the Executive Committee for the thought and considerable effort they have contributed towards the effective running of the Trust during the past year. An organisation such as this Trust does not run itself, and the membership at large should be very proud of the efforts your Committee put in on a voluntary basis

Geoff Cameron
President

16 October 2015