

megaphone

THE FACTS & ISSUES

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"The earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed."
- Mahatma Gandhi

EDITORIAL

Thank goodness the cool clear days of spring are here! Despite the wettest winter on the Coromandel in living memory, over 1 metre of rainfall already this year, it has been a very pleasing time for MEG. Several highlights stood out in my first few months as the MEG coordinator.



Will Petee, International Student Volunteer from Nth Carolina at the WWF launch day at Waikawau.

As we went to press with the last Megaphone we received news of funding approval from the World Wildlife Fund, for work on the wetlands at Waikawau. The WWF grant has since been received as well as approval for two further grants for work on the habitat restoration project at Waikawau. (More inside)

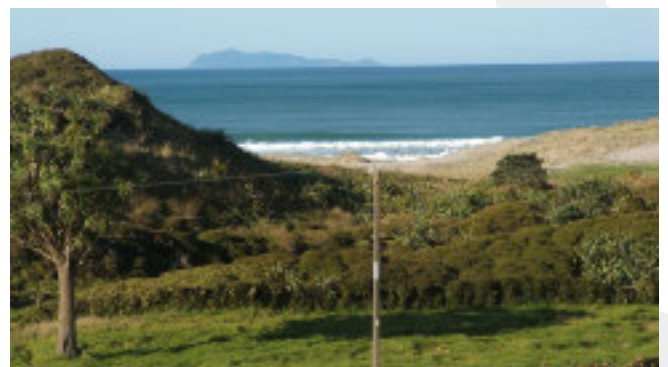
In August MEG stalwart Alan Currie and I hosted a group of students from the Coromandel Area School and MEG members on a trip to The Maungatautari Ecological Island. The following day we took the school students to the new sanctuary at Driving Creek to begin a study of the invertebrates there. It was great to see the enthusiasm of the students and the teachers forging what I hope will be ongoing links between the school and The Driving Creek Sanctuary. (More inside)

MEG's AGM will be at 10:30am on the 22nd of November which brings me to our other piece of big news... MEG has a new home at Waikawau, venue for this year's AGM. The building gives us an outstanding facility to accommodate volunteers, store equipment and host educational programmes.



The MEG Ecobase Waikawau – Environment Resource Centre and Hostel.

Groups from The Global Volunteer Network and International Student Volunteers organisations have already enjoyed the million dollar views, helping us start replacing invasive weeds with native plants in the grounds. An additional toilet and shower under construction will give us capacity to accommodate up to 16 guests. - *Membership has its privileges so book early!*



The million dollar view from MEG's new HQ.

It all adds up to a very positive spring for MEG and for the environment in the Northern Coromandel.

Cheers

Jonty Rutherford

MEG Coordinator

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MEG TRAPPER PROFILE - REUBEN TURTON

Reuben Turton has been the main rat trapper with the Port Charles Rat Attack for the past two years, working three to four days weekly.

He follows lines established throughout the 350ha project bush area, each line on a north south grid line, working some of the 2600 rat traps.

A normal day will see Reuben clearing, baiting, resetting, maintaining and recording catches of around 120 traps. If that is not enough he is often out with his Kiwi Aversion trained pig hunting dogs following his passion hunting for pigs on his days off.

One of the perks for Reuben in his job is the opportunity to look for fresh pig sign during the day and following up with a hunt later in the day. Reuben says he is the fittest he has ever been. His day starts with three cups of coffee and giving his dogs a run before leaving to work the lines. Gentle nudging has seen him recently add breakfast to his daily routine.

Working with the overseas volunteers on the project (and other MEG activities) gives him great amusement with their comments of "being in the jungle".



Reuben Turton - Makes a serious contribution to the success of the Port Charles project.

Reuben became involved with the Rat Attack after working locally on weed control and track cutting.

Being out in the bush, being fit and organising his own time makes a great add on to his job. Opportunity to work with volunteers and committee members is a bonus. It's all good so long it doesn't rain!!!!

2,600 TRAPS HAMMER RAT POPULATION



Port Charles is on track for the reintroduction of North Island Robin.

The Port Charles Rat Attack covers 350ha of private land with 2,600 rat traps and has one outstanding objective to reach, that being the reintroduction of locally extinct North Island Robins.

To achieve this target we have to maintain rodent tracking of less than 10%. Our goal has been and is to maintain tracking of 5% or less.

The rodent monitoring is carried out every three months, which sees 6 lines of 10 tracking tunnels activated with volunteers placing tracking papers (with ink pad in the middle) in each of the 60 tunnels. A small quantity of peanut butter is placed at each end of the tunnels. These are left out over night and removed the following day. Footprints are identified.

Before the project rodent indexing showed:

Rats 70% Mice 20% Weta 0% Skink 0%

September 2008 rodent indexing showed:

Rats 1.6% Mice 40% Weta 22% Skink 1.6%

We are on track... Visual indicators and social reporting all indicate significant increases in bird numbers, invertebrates and skinks. Seedlings of Tawa, Titoki and Kohekohe are evident in the bush where they were not before.

The 2,600 rat traps are checked on a routine basis, with the ideal turn around being a month. The wet winter months have been challenging to maintain this level of checking.

The boundary of the Rat Attack area has significant bush. This is maintained on a weekly schedule with traps and bait stations checked and reset. This weekly activity is vital in providing some degree of protection from reinvasion of rodents from the non controlled area.

Rats exist within the block but are maintained at low levels. The success of the project to date depends on the ongoing trapping, the commitment of the trappers, the energy of volunteers and the support of the locals.

We are looking to identify a number of bird nests this breeding season to look at the fledging rate. We welcome anyone who is able to assist with this task. Anyone interested in volunteering some time for this activity please contact Lettecia on 07 8666 626.

WAIKAWAU BAY WETLANDS GETS BIG SPRING BOOST.

After two years of intense animal pest control, especially for rodents, things are looking good. We have reduced rats to less than 15% and mice are steady at 40% on the latest monitoring. More importantly there has been a three-fold increase in fernbirds over the past twelve months and a higher incidence of banded rail sightings than ever before. We're hoping for even better results this season, weather and volunteer help permitting!

Over the past three months we have had two overseas volunteer groups; one from International Student Volunteers, and one from Global Volunteers Network and a school group from Coromandel Area School through, helping with a variety of tasks, including rodent monitoring and tree planting. This year we received a further 800 trees and plants from the Honda Tree Fund (administered by Environment Waikato) all of which have been planted. To date over one thousand plants have been planted around the edge of the estuary and wetlands.

We have also received a "triple whammy" of funding grants.

Applications were made to seek support for a full ecological study of the flora and fauna of the wetlands and the estuary. Both applications were successful and we received full funding!



Kathi Parr supervises a group from International Student Volunteer organisation as the mollusc count gets under way at Waikawau.

One is from the World Wildlife Habitat Protection Fund; the other from Environment Waikato's Environmental Initiatives Fund. Not only, but also.... a grant from the TCDC Coromandel/Colville Community Board will enable us to buy a high quality telescope for monitoring and surveying bird nesting sites deep within the wetlands. This will reduce impacts and lessen disturbance of nesting birds.

Studies will commence mid-October and will continue for about six months, with some monitoring continuing over the next two years.

We are always open to hosting volunteers and interested people, so don't hesitate to drop us a line if you would like to take part in any of our surveys, or if you think you might be able to contribute expertise.

Finally, a very rare visitor has blessed us with her presence over the past three months and shows no sign of leaving at this stage—Kotuku-White Heron has been in residence around the estuary and pastureland following stock and feeding on the wildlife of pugged paddocks and riverbanks.

This is the first sighting in this area for more than 50 years. The occasional Royal Spoon Bill, or Cattle Egret, has turned up over the past twenty years but never our Sacred Heron.

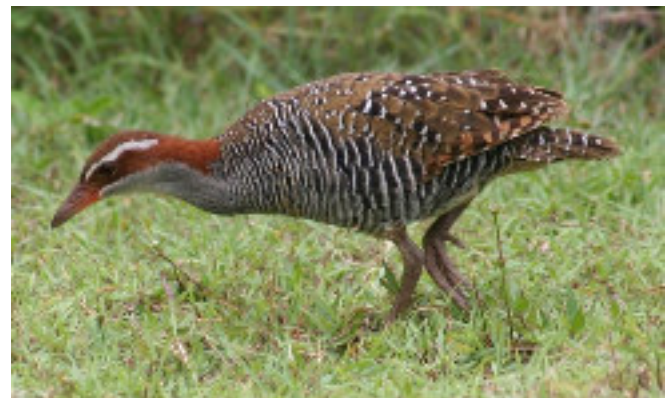


Kotuku at Waikawau

"There is something very special and deeply gratifying, about going down and slogging around in mud up to eyeballs, only to lift eyes and be blinded by the light of the purest white bird we are ever likely to see. This is a wonderful time, to be sure". - Wayne Todd, MEG's Waikawau Wetlands Project Leader.



RAIL SERVICE AT SANDY BAY!



Banded Rail (file pic).

MEG Committee Member Tina Morgan has a new semi permanent resident in her quarter acre at Sandy Bay in Port Charles. Tina says, "A banded rail often fossicks on my lawn, and as long as I make no sudden movements the bird seems quite relaxed out in the open. It's exciting to have such an uncommon bird visiting my front lawn."

Banded rail are usually very quiet and shy birds, which skulk in the undergrowth, using their stripey feathers as camouflage. They feed in mangrove creeks and salty swamps – there is such a swamp behind Tina's house at Sandy Bay. They are ground nesters, and produce 4 to 7 eggs.

The birds are quite often seen around Port Charles these days, another benefit of the predator control being done by MEG and DoC.

CORO SCHOOL VISITS MAUNGATAUTARI

On the 20th of August a group of students and teachers joined MEG (Moehau Environment Group) on a field trip to visit the Maungatautari reserve near Cambridge. This encompasses over 3000 Ha. The numbers of native invertebrates (insects) has increased 300% inside parts of the enclosure, providing food for the burgeoning birdlife.

The group was greeted by trustee Selwyn Mackinder and volunteer visitor guides Clare and Liz, who guided us through the network of tracks and provided a wealth of information. Selwyn laid out the ambitious and courageous vision of the Trustees to make Maungatautari into an internationally acclaimed conservation project.

Upon arrival Selwyn guided us to see a breeding pair of Takahe, two of only 260 remaining worldwide and the only two on the North Island. We then proceeded on well groomed tracks to explore the southern enclosure with its unique 20 metre high observation tower, giving access to observe the forest canopy up-close. The health of the bush was stunning! It was a pleasure to see the lush crowns of huge Rata, Rimu and Kahikatea.

Local etymologist Alan Currie accompanied the excursion and is working with the Coromandel Area School students on the establishment of a long term science project to study the invertebrates at the Driving Creek sanctuary.

Their study is inspired by similar work done at Maungatautari and is perfectly timed as the driving creek sanctuary enclosure was just confirmed 'pest free' on the 19th of August after intensive monitoring was completed. Alan Currie says: "we will be able to build a clear picture of the effect of pest eradication on the insect population at Driving Creek." Insect studies are an important and scientifically sound way of measuring objectively the health improvement of an ecosystem. Also insects are the base of a healthy food chain in the forest, proven to improve breeding and survival rates among Kiwi and other native birds and lizards.

Dorothy Meredith, class teacher at the Area School said: "The visit to Maungatautari was inspirational for our students and we are really looking forward to our ongoing association with the Driving Creek Sanctuary".



One Maungatautari's pair of Takahe

MEG WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

For more information please contact our membership coordinator Tina Morgan at (07) 866 6720 or email your membership enquiry to: t.morgan@colville.org.nz or just post the form below to us with your subscription.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions remain at \$10 per person, \$20 per family and \$50 for company membership.

However, the Committee has decided that in future, all subscriptions will fall due on January 1st each year. This will save a lot of work.

If a subscription has been paid during 2007, the next subscription will not be due until January 1st 2009.

Subscriptions not yet paid for 2007 will be accepted, and once paid, will fall due again on January 1st 2009.



MEG AGM – 22nd NOVEMBER

This year's AGM will be held on the 22nd of November, 10:30am at the MEG Ecobase on the main road at Waikawau.

COMING SOON... JANUARY 2009

MEG SUMMER PROGRAM

The team are well down the track with planning for this year's summer programme. We are adding events close to Coromandel Town and Whangapoua to make the program accessible to a wider audience. Details will be on www.meg.org.nz from Labour Weekend.



MEG thanks BNZ Save the Kiwi and Fortress Fasteners for their ongoing support.

JOIN MEG AND SUPPORT OUR PROJECTS

Membership application

Name: _____

Address: _____

Ph: _____

E: _____

I am interested in helping with MEG's projects: YES NO

Annual Membership fees:
Single: \$10.00 Family: \$20.00 Corporate: \$50.00

I would like to donate a further: \$ _____

Payable to: The Membership Coordinator
Moehau Environment Group, Sandy Bay RD 4, Coromandel.

For further information: Jonty Rutherford, MEG Coordinator,
CA Colville PDC, Coromandel. Ph: 021-410040
E: jonty@meg.org.nz W: www.meg.org.nz

WE THANK YOU!