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THE FACTS & ISSUES

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In the last two years MEG has installed 2,634 bait stations and cut 159km of track restoring native habitat with over 3000ha of ethical possum control!



MOEHAU - ROBINS UP & POSSUMS DOWN!

In May 31 more Toutouwai (North Island Robin) were translocated from Pureora in the central north island to Stony Bay in a joint operation by Moehau Environment Group (MEG), DOC Hauraki and iwi. This is the second phase of the project to re-establish these birds on Moehau which prior to their reintroduction to the area 2 years ago had been regionally extinct for around 100 years. This top up was planned at the start of the project to broaden the genetic base increasing the long term viability of the Toutouwai population on Moehau.

So far at least 16 of the birds from the original reintroduction have bred on Te Moehau & re-establishing the Toutouwai population is looking good. Volunteers from MEG and Maungatautari assisted with the capture at Pureora and constructed boxes specially designed to provide a comfortable and safe journey.

Within seconds of release the birds were adding their song to the chorus in the Moehau forest. It has taken many years of predator control with particular focus on rats to make this habitat safe for these former locals to return.

Strong partnership and cooperation between community groups, DOC & iwi have made this possible, let's hope that more of the birds that have been lost to our local forests can return one day soon – maybe kokako!



Arbour Day planting at Coromandel Preschool

Coromandel Preschool did a big job planting natives to mark Arbour Day. 35 native plants sourced from the Honda Tree Fund through Waikato regional Council were planted on a grass bank in the car park behind the Pepper Tree. The children, teachers and helpers got stuck in digging holes, tipping in potting mix and patting and stomping the plants into place. In less than one hour the grassy bank went from barren to beautiful with leaves dancing in the breeze!

Congratulations to the kids and volunteers at the Coromandel Area School (CAS) Kiwi Project. So far they have caught 49 stoats, 6 weasels & countless rats in the hills above Coromandel Town. The next phase is ramping up awareness about dog control around the town to re-establish this 1000ha as viable kiwi habitat.

A massive thank you goes to Yuri Forbes who is taking a well earned break from the MEG committee having been on it for many years. Over the last 2 years as MEG's possum projects coordinator Yuri has helped to drive the installation of a truly coast to coast possum buffer zone to the south of Moehau. In one block at Port Charles possum population density was reduced from 23.1% Residual Trap Catch (RTC) before a recent operation to 1.1% RTC (more possum stats at back). Nuff said!

Cheers - Jonty Rutherford,

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MEG volunteers & DOC at the Stony Bay Robin release in May.

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It's a rare privilege to experience history in the making, more so if you are 'mingled' with it as well.

It wasn't till I was off the coast in a fishing boat, gazing back to Waikawau Bay and Mt. Moehau a couple of months ago that it occurred to me. In nearly thirty years of living in the district, the landscape had totally changed; thanks to decentralization, rogeronomics, and the loss of rural farm subsidies.

What was a yellow/green marbled landscape of gross erosion, slips, steep hill sheep pastures, and pine plantations, is now a softening landscape of regenerating scrub and native forests, wildling pines and ...pine plantations. There is very little evidence of hill country farming anywhere.

This is the eastern seaboard we're talking about - an area of about 7,500-10,000ha; the western side of the peninsula has slightly better soils and is still farmed extensively, although there are huge areas retired into regenerating forests there too.

It has its own piece of history right there, with the 1970's bringing about 1/3rd of the area into bankrupted farming ventures sold off cheaply to "hippie" outfits and lifestylers, 1/3rd retired, and the rest held by traditional farming families, with their backs up against the wall, trying to make a living.

Needless to say the soils are poor (if there is any) and constantly on the move (we can get 300mm of rain in a night), so on top of all the subsidy loss there are environmental issues to deal with as well. Slips and flooded rivers are common fare. The northern Coromandel is an isolated area with slow roads, which disappear occasionally, leaving the area even more isolated and often without power after storms. Regional and district councils are not particularly present except in ever increasing rates which hits the farming community hard and leaves them fuelling yet another set of resentments. The 'lifestyler' blocks and "hippie outfits" are hit just as hard. If this paints a somewhat gloomy picture, let me assure you it isn't all doom and gloom.

Since the mid '1980's' Department of Conservation has been one of the major landholders, being guardians of the 'spine' of this northern area - more than 12,000ha in all down to a line from Kennedy Bay to Coromandel Township. They don't pay rates however, which fuels more resentment from the libertarians and the traditionalists, but they are doing a superb job of restoring this unique area of flora and fauna.

Since the late '80's' so too have small groups of dedicated volunteers who have adopted areas of high biodiversity and worked hard at restoring some of these values. Add to this the laissez faire attitudes of some of the lifestyle block owners and the occasional farmer trialling radically different farming techniques and suddenly the historical perspective of the area takes on a whole new dimension.

And what has this all to do with indigenous forestry, you might ask?

Well just this:- since the late 1970's the faunal and floral biomass of our area has increased to somewhere around the state it was 150 years ago after the removal of most of the major native timber species, but before it was burned to shards of pottery on bare ridges and eroded in-filled gullies. In other words it is healing. Possums and goats are in low numbers or non-existent; there are no deer and in some areas there are very few rodents. What this means is a hundred fold increase in the flora biomass with a lush seedling under storey and the return of many of our principal native timber trees.

Add to this the increase in the "fruit and seed dispersers" like Kereru and Tui and Kaka and suddenly the landscape is a much richer place to view. We're talking areas now of 50,000ha, not pocket handkerchief stuff. These types of areas begin to be self sustaining as long as the gains made are not lost. A very difficult ask in the face of a small but vociferous right wing element who see any form of conservation of this type as a 'waste of taxpayers' money' or worse "creation of further waste lands", or "deliberately taking out productive lands".

As I said at the beginning of this article it truly is a privilege to be a part of this change but I do wonder how these wondrous changes can be consolidated and transformed for the future. It is an odd thing to think that economic downturns have raised the "values" of these retired areas so unintentionally.

Now would be a good time to build positive intent into the future well being of both this environment and the people who live, work, play in and appreciate this part of New Zealand.

Given all the brouhaha about climate change, carbon sequestration and the need for new market economies, and how hard done by are so many sectors of our community, the promotion of an indigenous forestry for the future isn't such a stupid idea; especially if it is managed well.

If we flash back once again to 150 years ago we will see one of the reasons so many of our timber trees disappeared: - we have some of the best timber trees in the world and they were widely sought after. You will find Kauri and Rimu sideboards in Germany, France, and England and any number of other European countries. Ships were built out of it; windows, doors and houses were made out of it. Tall buildings were built out of it.

But it was a short term gain and a lack of long term vision once again. Our timber trees were, and are, finite resources taking hundreds of years to mature. As an economic resource it soon dried up leaving a scarred landscape and a frantic scabble to look for alternative incomes. Today there is a very real chance to make good on all this "unintentional value-added land" and create an investment for the future which will reap far greater dividends at every conceivable level for everyone and everything involved.

Carefully managed selective logging is but one potential market, albeit a "boutique" market to begin with, but with high returns. Then there is the potential for medicines, oils, resins and other uses-even fruits. Add to this the potential for carbon sequestration markets and downstream timber production manufacturing and the 'depressed economy' of the northern Coromandel has a chance to reverse a creeping trend for isolated rural areas.

It will take energy and an ability to sacrifice some short term gain for longer term investment. Call it 'interest' in the bank. The potential capital value increases very quickly with active management. Not forgetting also, increased water quality, less flooding impacts and silt loading; and all the downstream effects of this, especially on our local tourism and fishing industries.

There are no losers in this process.

The old adage: "you can't see the wood

for the trees" needs to now read

"you **can** see the wood **and** the trees".

It just needs the vision to "see" it!

EARLY DAYS at WAIKAWAU BAY WETLAND. a letter from Barry Brickell

About the mid 1960s, as a potter in my thirties at my property at Driving Creek, I was beginning to feel hemmed in with neighbours around me. Smoke from my kilns became a problem as did my need for massive freedom from ordinary society but I was not a hippie. So I approached land agent Ray Denize for his advice as to where I could purchase a large block of land at a very cheap price, on which to establish my potteries, build a magnificent tourist railway and restore the native forests after the colonial "smash and grab" period had destroyed it. I ended up buying the 1000 acre block next to Rex Denize's farm. It extends from the road across the swamp beside the estuary right up to the ridgeline, the lowest saddle on the peninsula. In my youthful enthusiasm, I would build a coast-to-coast railway as a crashingly successful tourist enterprise, a local equivalent to the Tranz-Alpine rail trip now so popular in the South Island. What a pipe-dream it turned out to be as well as my other ambitions. But for the six or so years that I owned this block of land, I managed to achieve a boundary adjustment to my west with Rex, resulting in my ownership of the large flax-dominated swampland that I wanted to preserve. Against prevailing wisdom of the time I felt this wetland to be an important addition to the conservation estate.

The hillier part was covered in scrub, much of it dominated by prickly exotic "monkey-nut". The original forest-generated rich top soil had been washed off following repeated "burn-offs" so all I had was barren clay on which to try to establish native trees. As it happened, the Government Native Forest Nursery in Rotorua was selling off thousands of potted-up native trees, so I filled my Kombi van and with the help of some volunteers, we planted hundreds of them over the hills around the campsite that I had established on the northern ridge above the estuary. Unfortunately the survival rate was low due to poor soil, drought conditions and lack of maintenance.

But on the advice of a professional forester, I also planted eucalypts and Tasmanian Blackwood's on the seaward ridge. These have survived better and hopefully building up needed top soil as well as reducing storm-induced erosion.

As for native fauna, I did try to introduce weka through co-operation with the then Wildlife Department. I built a special fenced-in pen, complete with appropriate feeders, but all this endeavour came to naught after the weka were released, due to predation by very prevalent mustelids.

In 1973, I put the land on the market, as I had purchased the 22 hectare block of land close to Coromandel town where the present potteries and railway is located. It turned out to be a wise decision as can be seen today. To my great relief, the new owners turned out to be conservation-minded and so have, to my understanding, kept the swampland intact. I do hope that it will become part of a wetland conservation project for the future. Incidentally, shortly after I bought the Waikawau property, I engaged Gerald Bridle to form a lake and low earth dam with his bulldozer under funding from the then Acclimatisation society to encourage water bird life.

It is years since I have visited the property to see if any of my hard-won efforts have survived. Please let me know if I would be welcome back to help with any ideas for the future.

Sincerely, Barry Brickell

Dear Barry,

You will be pleased to know the current owners of your old block are working with MEG to continue your vision. The wetland is part of MEG's 65ha Waikawau Bay Estuary and Wetland Project. This encompasses comprehensive predator control and baseline survey research investigating all flora and fauna, funded by WWF and EW. This data will be used in the preparation of restoration plan for the area through the saltwater to fresh water transition. I'm sure the current owners would welcome a visit and input from you as would MEG. Ed

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERS BRAVE WINTER FOR MEG



International volunteers help install kiwi info board at Big Bay in July.

In July MEG hosted 3 awesome volunteers, 2 women from the USA and 1 guy from Scotland. All have shown real guts to come here in the middle of winter to play their part in helping restore our native habitats and help our native critters and plants.

Jessica Bentley a 40 year old corporate lawyer from San Diego said "I'm at a point in life where I have time for extended travel. I'm looking to contribute to the communities I visit, expand my skill set, and think about possible new career directions. My previous volunteer experiences has been education oriented, and while I've always cared about environmental conservation, I haven't yet had any hands-on experience in conservation work. This program is an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution while learning a lot about conservation methods and experiencing New Zealand's flora and fauna up close."

After a year teaching English in Korea Margaret Yeager, a 26 year old from Maryland USA has spent the month with MEG before heading to Mount Bruce to work at the kiwi breeding programme there. She is an Animal Behaviour postgraduate passionate about wildlife conservation and re-population. "The MEG program sounded like an exciting opportunity to help in one of the most biologically unique countries in the world."

John McCallum from Scotland is the youngest of the group at 19 and this is very different to anything he has ever done before. He said "I am passionate about working with animals and the environment and really want to do my part in making a difference about pollution and endangered species."

All three said that the experiences they have had helped them to set future directions and after a long career in corporate financial law Jessica is considering studying environmental law when she returns to the States. Being unplugged from the electronic world has been a challenge for the group leaving them feeling a little isolated but also liberated. The stunning views, birds and people have been highlights.

As well as trapping rats and weed control at Port Charles they have worked on bird surveys and building trap boxes at Waikawau Bay.

Well done to all of them and a big thank you from all of us at MEG for all your hard work and good humour.

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FISH LADDERS WORKSHOP MONDAY 19TH SEPTEMBER, WAITETE BAY (reserve day Sept 20th)

Bruno David is a freshwater biologist from EW who has been trialling a simple fish ladder system made from old mussel ropes. They have seen a 60% increase in key species upstream from their fish ladder the since trail began. If you have perched or hanging culverts in your creek book on 021410040 or email jonty@meg.org.nz

FREE KIWI AVOIDANCE DOG TRAINING LABOUR WEEKEND - NORTHERN COROMANDEL

Please Call 021 410040 for times locations and to book your dog.

THE MEG SUMMER PROGRAMME for Dec 2011 & Jan - Feb 2012 will be launched over Labour Weekend. Be entertained and informed over the summer by MEG's nature based events and adventures. This summer's programme offers some exciting new activities.

MEMBERSHIP & DONATIONS PLEASE

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

Please send subs to Lillian Gamble, 186 Lillis Lane, Coromandel Town or pay direct into BNZ account 020304 0342229 02. If you choose this option please email payment details to info@meg.org.nz

For new memberships please download the form at www.meg.org.nz/pdf/2707_Meg_Brochure_Member.pdf

Donations will, of course, be willingly accepted at any time in person, into MEG's bank account (see above) or at: <https://secure.donate.co.nz/fundraiser.aspx/megorgnz> !

Thank you.

POSSUM TRAP HALF PRICE MEGA DEAL

The Trapinator possum trap has been developed by CMI Springs, the people who make the DOC 200 stoat traps you see around the district. Kelvin at Waiaro Sanctuary, one of the most experienced trappers in the district, had a test run with the Trapinator and was happy enough with the results to order 50 of them over the past year. They are durable and really simple and easy to set even for people who are a bit nervous of traps. MEG are getting them wholesale and selling them at cost for just \$33 each which is about half the normal retail price. Just text or phone 021 410 040 or email info@meg.org.nz if you would like to buy some Trapinators. **Mr Possum says "I won't be back".**

Residual Trap Catch (RTC) Possum Control Results - Cyanide Operations to August 2011

RTC Monitoring Results	Paeroa Block	Waikawau	West Frontline	East Frontline (Sec 1)	East Frontline (Sec 2) coastal
Post-monitor	5.8% (Nov. 2010)	0% (Aug. 2010)	2.6% (July 2011)	1.1% (April 2011)	14% (April 2011)

A BIG THANK YOU TO...

- BNZ Save the Kiwi for ongoing support of MEG's Kiwi Project.
- Fortress Fasteners for hardware to build trap boxes and save kiwi.
- Lois & Warren Agnew from Gotcha Traps new corporate members & sponsors for supplying tracking papers.
- Steve Norris at Steelcraft Coromandel Town for engineering support.
- Print House, for sponsoring the Megaphone. Printed using Forest Stewardship Council certified paper. To find mindful print solutions see: www.phprint.co.nz or call Brett Phillips on 0800 225 125.

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