

SNA Project Numbers

- **300**—the number of properties in Marlborough assessed for the presence of significant natural areas since 2001
- **708**—the total number of sites that have been identified covering about 45,000 hectares of land
- **85**—the number of protection projects, covering 1865 hectares of land in total, that have been carried out since 2003 – about 12% of the sites identified and 4% of the area identified
- **35**—is how many of the 85 protection projects covenanted through the QEII National Trust
- **2 million dollars**—the total budget for all these projects since 2003. Council's share is about \$500,000, landowners about \$450,000, QEII about \$75,000 and the Central Government Biodiversity Fund \$800,000.

\$\$ Funding to help Landowners Protect SNA and Wetland Sites \$\$

Council funding is available to help landowners to protect identified SNA or wetland sites. We can help with advice about site management and funding of fencing, weed control and native plantings. Together, we have completed over 80 projects since 2003, but there are plenty more sites that would benefit from active protection to safeguard them for the long term. Contact Nicky Eade at the Council for more information.



Chris Bowron
prepares his newly
fenced wetland for
native planting

The Council's recent survey to identify significant wetlands in Marlborough has resulted in more than 1000 new sites being potentially eligible for funding support through the SNA programme. Chris Bowron didn't waste any time moving to fence his wetland on the flats of his Avon Valley property. Chris had previously covenanted areas on another farm property and is no stranger to the SNA programme, being one of the farming representatives on the working group. It was his turn for some assistance with advice on planting the wetland and a 50% contribution towards the cost of the 500 plants and fencing materials. The spring planting included common hardy and frost tolerant species like kanuka, kowhai, pittosporum species, mingimingi (*Coprosma propinqua*), flax and cabbage trees, along with some rare pink brooms which have a natural range restricted to the Waihopai and Awatere Valleys in Marlborough. Chris is looking forward to watching the wetland area recover and flourish over the next few years now that the grazing pressure has been removed and the new plantings can get established.

SNA Phone Survey And Site Re-visits

It is over ten years since the first SNA surveys were carried out in the Kekerengu (east coast) and Medway ecological district in south Marlborough. While some landowners have been involved in protection work on some of their SNA sites, or helping out by allowing access for native seed collection, Council had not had contact with others. In order to check the ongoing effectiveness of the voluntary partnership approach to the protection of significant natural areas Council decided to carry out a phone questionnaire with landowners in these areas.

Phone Survey - Paul Millen carried out the phone survey on behalf of the Council and this gave us a good feel for on-going levels of awareness and viewpoints about the programme amongst landowners.

In summary 26 landowners were identified to contact and of these 23 full responses were obtained. The general attitude of the landowners contacted can be summarised as 48% positive, 40% neutral and 12% negative. The overall level of knowledge and awareness about the SNA project of the 23 landowners that completed the survey can be summarised as 11 (48%) high knowledge, 7 (30%) medium knowledge and 5 (22%) low knowledge. An overview of all responses is provided in the table below.

Landowners responses	number and % high/yes	Number and % medium/maybe	Number and % low/no
Awareness of MDC SNA programme and voluntary approach?	13 (57%)	8 (35%)	2 (8%)
Voluntary approach to continue?	18 (78%)	5 (22%)	0
Aware of SNA report?	12 (52%)	3 (13%)	8 (35%)
Awareness and knowledge of SNA sites?	14 (61%)	6 (26%)	3 (13%)
Importance and value of SNA sites?	15 (65%)	7 (30%)	1 (5%)
Desire to generally protect SNA sites and values-day to day farm management?	All 23 landowners 9 (40%) - fencing 14 (60%) - other		
Actual specific protection of SNA sites through MDC programme?	9 (40%)	7 (30%)	7 (30%)
Interest in MDC support?	9 (40%)	6 (25%)	8 (35%)
Community of interest in relation to SNA sites?	3 (13%)	9 (39%)	11 (48%)

Site Re-visits - Council also re-visited a selection of 25 sites over 12 properties and 11 different ecosystem types. Ecologist Geoff Walls found that all the sites still existed and all were still considered significant.



Geoff Walls

The sites were assessed in relation to both their condition and trend. Site condition varied from good (8%) good/fair (48%) and fair (44%). The trend of the sites varied with the majority being relatively stable (56%), some deteriorating (32%) and a few improving slightly (12%). However many of the “stable” sites were only in fair condition and had serious infestations of old mans beard (OMB) present which was being kept in some sort of equilibrium with stock grazing pressure. This situation creates an ecological dilemma as stock keep this weed under control and prevent it from completely dominating a site. To improve the condition of these sites serious attention to the control of OMB at a landscape scale would be required, followed by fencing of the sites to prevent stock access and allow regeneration and recovery.

Overall the results of both the phone survey and re-visits has been positive. Council plans to continue these re-visits in the 2015/16 summer covering the Flaxbourne, Grassmere and Wither Hills Ecological Districts to continue to build a picture of how SNA sites are faring in these highly modified lowland parts of the region. We look forward to continuing a positive partnership approach to managing SNA sites.

Tui to Town Project - Extended Area Eligible for Funding

The Tui to Town project is a subset of the significant natural areas project which promotes the protection of natural areas of ecological value. The SNA surveys have confirmed that very little natural habitat remains on the lowland parts of South Marlborough and the Tui to Town project is designed to promote habitat restoration in this area.

From 2008 the programme was targeted to the areas around Blenheim and Renwick but in early 2015 was extended to include the wider lowland south Marlborough area, including the Wairau Valley area and out to Seddon and Ward and surrounds (see the map below).

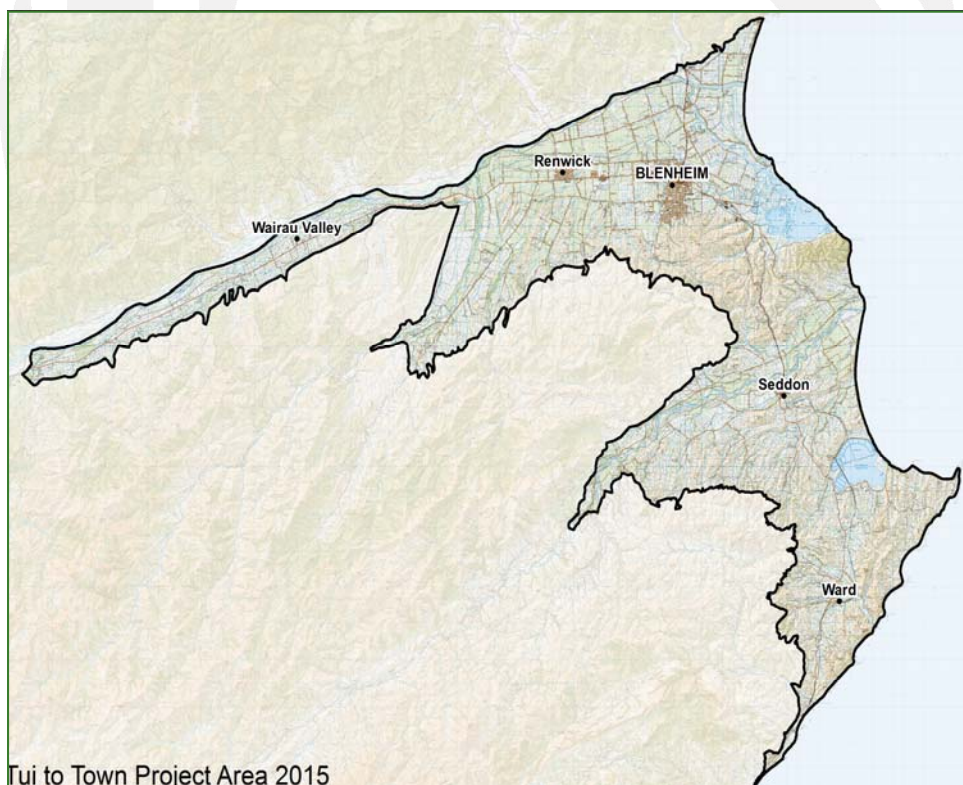
The programme essentially remains the same with the public encouraged to report native bird sightings to build a picture of species present and habitat use, and funding available for native plantings which are a minimum of 1000 square metres.

Since 2008 many hundreds of local people have participated in different ways, by reporting sightings and planting native trees in their gardens, schools and rural properties and now that the project area has been extended many more will be able to participate.

The Tui to Town brochure and website page have been updated to reflect the new wider project boundaries and can be found on the Councils website.

Sightings - Over 700 sightings of Tui in and around town have been reported since 2008. Australian Eucalyptus species have been most popular with TuIs (35% of sightings), kowhai the next most popular (23%) and after that sightings were scattered amongst a range of species, flax, banksia, camellia, fruit trees and so on.

Plantings—Over 40 new plantings of 1000 square metres or larger have been funded through the Tui to Town project, creating approximately 4 hectares of new habitat.



Tui to Town Project Area 2015

How can you help?

- Report native bird sightings within the project area – phone, email or use website (see details below).
- Plant suitable native trees to provide food and habitat areas for Tui and other native species – up to \$1000.00 of funding is available to help with larger plantings of 1000 square metres or more in area (this is one tenth of a hectare or an area of about 35 x 30 metres).

Sightings - online www.marlborough.govt.nz/Environment/Tui-to-Town/Report-Tui-Sighting-Form.aspx by email to tui@marlborough.govt.nz or phone the Council on 5207400.

Planting enquiries - contact Nicky Eade email nicky.eade@marlborough.govt.nz phone 520 7400

Seed Collection in a “Mast Year”

Heard of “mast” years? That’s when there is a high level of native plant flowering and fruiting, particularly beech species, which is great. However, the unfortunate flow on in New Zealand is that the pest animals also boom in these conditions, generally resulting in very high numbers of rats and sometimes mice, through spring and early summer, followed by high numbers of stoats in mid to late summer. The mast conditions over the last couple of summers have allowed us to make

some good collections of beech species and also some rimu (which only flowers infrequently). Over the 2015 summer we have also been focused on collecting more seed material in south Marlborough so that there are some locally sourced native plants available for new Tui to Town plantings that might eventuate over the next few years. Thanks to those landowners who have allowed access for seed collectors.

Seed nets set up under a large fruiting rimu tree near Okaramio



Weka

The Marlborough Sounds are a stronghold for weka in New Zealand and the large population continues to do well. Ralph Powlesland, experienced ornithologist and proud owner of a large and high value SNA site near Manaroa is carrying out ongoing research into weka in the Sounds, adding to the store of local knowledge about these impressive and resilient birds. Weka are very adaptable, inhabiting a range of habitat types (a mix of native and plantation forest, shrub land, pasture, with plenty of densely vegetated areas to retreat into when threatened by predators), and eating a variety of fruit and invertebrates, also eggs, lizards, small mammals and birds and carrion. Research shows that they do better in high-rainfall areas and seasons, when food (particularly soil inhabiting invertebrates like cicada nymphs), is more readily available. Populations tend to decrease markedly in droughts and this is borne out by observations



in the Sounds. Happily, unlike most other native birds, weka are large enough and aggressive enough to defend themselves from smaller predators, including rats and stoats, and have even been recorded preying on those species! Their two worst enemies are ferrets and dogs and there are no ferrets in the Sounds, making it a relatively safe environment for weka. In favourable conditions, weka are able to breed at any time of year, however most nesting occurs during May to December with 2-3 broods per pair being reared. Such high productivity allows the population to replace any losses, such as from drought, predators, old age and vehicle fatalities.

Funding Opportunities—Details and Contacts

Financial assistance of between 50% and 66% of the cost of protecting significant natural areas is potentially available to landowners through the Council’s Biodiversity Landowner Assistance Programme.

- Depending on the specific SNA site and its management objectives, protection work may include fencing to exclude farm stock, weed control, restoration planting to boost the habitat and occasionally, animal control. This is agreed between the landowner and MDC, with the input of an ecologist where needed.
- The MDC landowner assistance programme provides a 50% share of project costs. Where the landowner decides to covenant the site through the QEII National Trust, QEII will generally also contribute an equal share of any fencing costs, bringing costs down to 33% each.
- A simple “Landowner Agreement” document is prepared setting out the works to be completed. Contractors are generally used but landowners can contribute labour as part of their contribution (i.e. fencing work) - protection of SNA sites generally adds value to the property and often improves the adjoining grazing management options as well. Having a good quality natural area on the property, be it a vineyard, farm or forest, can add shade, diversity and interest.

Since 2003 about 85 protection projects have been completed and several others are in progress.

Check out the website for details (www.marlborough.govt.nz/Environment/Biodiversity/Significant-Natural-Areas-Project/Landowner-Assistance-Programme.aspx) or contact Nicky Eade at the Council if you would like more information on what assistance is available nicky.eade@marlborough.govt.nz phone 520 7400.



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