



**MARLBOROUGH
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Summary Report on the
Results of the
Significant Natural
Areas Project 2015 – 2016**

Report No: 16-004

July 2016



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MDC Report No: 16-004

E310-006-001 & E310-012-003/Record No: 16156513

ISSN 1179-819X (Online)
ISBN 978-1-927159-69-9 (Online)

July 2016

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Executive Summary

Introduction and Background

Through the Resource Management Act 1991 and its subsequent amendments, the Council has a role in maintaining and protecting indigenous biodiversity and significant natural areas in the Marlborough region. Since 2001 the Council has implemented the “Significant Natural Areas” (SNA) project, which has involved extensive field based ecological survey work and a subsequent protection and monitoring programme.

This report provides a summary of results of the Significant Natural Areas project (SNA) over the one year period from July 2015 to June 2016. It follows from seven previous summary reports, one of which covered the early years of the project from 2001 to June 2008, one covering the two year period from 2008 to 2010 and the others covering the annual periods from 2010 to 2015.

This report summarises the results of:-

- ecological survey work carried out
- the related environmental protection work carried out through the SNA project Landowner Assistance Programme from July 2015 to June 2016
- the related monitoring programmes; and ;
- several other projects associated with the Significant Natural Areas project including:-
 - o publicity and education activities,
 - o the native seed collection project; and
 - o the Tūi to Town project from its establishment in 2008 until June 2016

(NB: all financial amounts in this report are presented GST inclusive)

Ecological Survey Work

Since 2001, extensive field based ecological surveys have been carried out on private land through large parts of the Marlborough region. The majority of the work was carried out from 2001 to 2009 and since that time only the occasional survey is carried out, generally through landowner requests.

In the 2015-2016 two further surveys were carried out on private land in the Marlborough Sounds. One of these properties had a QEII covenant covering the site already and the other site was also in the process of being covenanted through the QEII Trust. This brings the total number of sites identified to 708.

Protection Programme

A pilot landowner assistance programme to implement protection of areas identified as significant natural areas was established in 2003 and extended into a full programme in 2005. Since this time a total of 88 projects have been completed.

In the 2015 - 2016 annual period two new projects were completed. In addition twelve other on-going weed control projects were completed and the Council also provided significant support to an ongoing community weed control initiative in the Waima/Ure valley, bringing the total number of projects to fifteen for the year.

Total Funding Contributions for Biodiversity Protection Projects on Private Land 2015 – 2016

Marlborough District Council Funding	\$63,452.00
QEII National Trust	
Landowners	\$15,743.00
Total	\$79,195.00

Monitoring

Monitoring of the sites that have been the subject of protection work was initiated in 2006 and has been repeated on a bi-ennial basis since that time. In the 2015/16 monitoring round a total of 26 sites were visited on 19 properties. The results show that 74% of sites are improving in condition, 20% are in stable condition and only 6% are deteriorating in some way.

A new programme to re-visit a selection of un-managed SNA sites was initiated in the 2014/2015 year and continued in the 2015/16 year. This targeted four ecological district areas (Kekerengu, Medway, Grassmere and Wither Hills) and included a telephone survey with participating landowners and field visits to a selection of 44 sites in total.

Results show that only 11% of these un-managed sites are improving in condition, while 53% are in stable condition and 36% deteriorating in some way. Weed impacts were the most common cause of site deterioration, with feral animals and farm stock also having an impact in some cases. The phone survey carried out in conjunction with this programme showed that landowners have mixed levels of awareness and interest in the SNA sites and programme.

Associated Projects

- Publicity – information about the project has been disseminated at a number of public events over the year including the Marlborough A and P show and Garden Marlborough.
- Seed collection carried out between February and May 2016 with a focus on collecting for the new extended Tūi to Town areas in south Marlborough.
- Tūi to Town project – The programme area was extended in early 2015 to include the Wairau Valley area and the Seddon/Ward/Flaxbourne area and there has been publicity about this to encourage further plantings in lowland south Marlborough in the future. Four new plantings were funded in the 2015-2016 year including one in the Wairau Plain area, two in the Seddon area and one in the Wairau Valley.

Discussion and Conclusions

While much has been achieved through the project, it appears that momentum to protect sites has decreased over the last several years with only ten new protection projects being completed over the last 3 years of the project.

Monitoring of a selection of the many unmanaged sites show that many of these sites are only in fair condition and while about 50% are stable a reasonable proportion are deteriorating in condition.

The phone survey carried out in conjunction with this programme showed that landowners have mixed levels of awareness and interest in the SNA sites and programme. There is more work to do in promoting the programme and the assistance that is available to landowners.

A planned external review of the SNA programme may help to set the future direction and work programmes associated with the SNA project. Also, the current review of the resource management framework in Marlborough through the proposed Marlborough Environment Plan may provide some further direction once the public submission process has been completed (submissions close on 1 September 2016).



Members of the Significant Natural Areas working group which has been instrumental in helping to guide and manage the project since 2001

From left to right, Geoff Walls (contract ecologist), Alan Johnson (MDC), Jo Gould (DoC), Paul Millen (consultant), Mike Aviss (DoC), Nicky Eade (MDC), Tom Stein (QEll rep), Ross Beech (farmer rep), Roy Grose (DoC), Jan Clayton-Greene (DoC), Simon Moore (DoC)

Absent: Chris Bowron and Kristen Gerard (farmer representatives), Federated Farmers representative

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1. Introduction

The Significant Natural Area project was established in 2001 to enable the Marlborough District Council to meet its obligations under section 6 (c) of the Resource Management Act which requires that, in relation to managing the use, development and protection of natural and physical resources, the protection of areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna, shall be recognised and provided for as a matter of national importance.

The Council of the time decided to meet these obligations through a proactive but non-regulatory programme to identify significant natural areas and offer landowners support to protect and enhance these areas. Integral to this approach was a commitment to hold the property specific information confidentially rather than scheduling it for regulatory purposes.

A working group was established to assist the Council to manage the programme. The group included Councillors and staff, Department of Conservation staff, three landowner representatives and the local QEII representative. This group met several times a year in the initial stages of the project and continues to meet approximately annually. It has played an important role in guiding the direction of the project over the years.



A small remnant wetland area in the Grassmere Ecological district

A small team was employed to assist with landowner consultation and carry out the ecological survey work. Paul Millen carried out the majority of the direct consultation with landowners while ecologists Geoff Walls and Philip Simpson carried out the ecological field work and reporting and also provided expert advice as required. Once the later protection programme was established Paul Millen also assisted with managing restoration and protection programmes and has carried out the seed collection work since 2006. Some external assistance was also used to help with publicity and the publication of the two summary reports (2005 and 2009) and planting and restoration guides (2004 and 2011).

Information collected through the significant natural areas surveys is held in a database and is only reported publicly in a general sense. The two main ways the information is used are firstly, to provide a regional overview of significant natural areas and biodiversity on private land in the Marlborough region, and secondly, to provide a basis for developing protection programmes with landowners interested in proactively managing and protecting these areas.

The Marlborough District Council continues to support the non-regulatory approach to provide for the protection of significant natural areas. The Significant Natural Areas programme is well established but continues to evolve over time.

At the time of writing the proposed Marlborough Environment Plan has been publicly notified and is open for submissions. This proposed Plan promote the ongoing use of the voluntary partnership approach adopted through the Significant Natural Areas project and also sets out indigenous vegetation clearance rules which are designed to provide a reasonable level of protection to all areas of indigenous vegetation through general rules.

Part A: Ecological Survey Work – Summary of Results – July 2015 to June 2016

2. Field Based Ecological Surveys – Background and Overview

Between 2001 and 2009, extensive field based ecological surveys were been carried out on private land throughout large parts of the Marlborough District. This work has been approached as a partnership with landowners, who have participated voluntarily. Through the results of the ecological survey work, it has been possible to analyse the extent and type of ecosystems remaining and the severity and types of pressures these remaining areas are subject to.

Ecological Districts have been used as the survey units. The Marlborough District Council carried out the majority of the survey work overall (Kekerengu, Medway and Waihopai ecological districts in south Marlborough and Para, Fishtail, Pelorus, d'Urville, Sounds and Cook Strait ecological districts in north Marlborough -see yellow shaded areas on map). However, the Department of Conservation also carried out a substantial part of the survey work between the years 2002 – 2004, as part of the Protected Natural Areas (PNA) survey of the Wairau Ecological Region which included five ecological districts in south Marlborough - Grassmere, Flaxbourne, Wither Hills, Blenheim and Hillersden (see green shaded areas on map). Some ecological districts at the south of the region were not surveyed (Tapuaenuku, Bounds, Dillon, Sedgemere, Balaclava Travers and Red Hills), being mostly Department of Conservation land or pastoral leasehold land.

The ecological survey work has resulted in a large amount of information being collected. This provides both a regional scale overview of the extent and state of biodiversity resources on private land, and a more detailed property scale assessment which is useful for implementing practical protection measures such as fencing and pest control. While the emphasis has been on terrestrial vegetation and habitat values, wetlands, and some waterways, have also been assessed.

The work was largely completed in the nine year period from 2001 to 2009 (inclusive). Further occasional field surveys have been carried out at the request of landowners since that period.

In the 2015-2016 two further surveys were carried out on private land in the Marlborough Sounds. One of these properties had a QEII covenant covering the site already and the other site was also in the process of being covenanted through the QEII Trust. This brings the total number of sites identified to 708.



Map 1: Ecological Districts and Marlborough District Council/DOC survey areas

2.1. Wetland Survey 2010 – 2013

From 2010 – 2013 Council has carried out a further project to identify regionally significant wetlands in Marlborough. These have been scheduled in the proposed Marlborough Environment Plan which is currently notified and submissions are being sought. Wetlands are identified on the Plan zoning maps and landowners now have another opportunity to consider this. This project involved desktop identification followed by notification to all affected landowners and follow up field visits on request. There was some overlap with wetland areas already identified through the earlier Significant Natural Areas surveys.

While the final number of identified wetlands is not yet completely confirmed, well over 1000 are likely to be scheduled. The intention is that these wetlands will in effect be classified as significant natural areas and will therefore qualify for the same assistance with protection works through the Landowner Assistance Programme. A number of wetland owners have expressed an interest in wetland restoration and approached the Council for assistance in the 2014-2015 year and three wetland projects were completed in that year.

2.2. Results

The tables below show the summary of ecological results from the Significant Natural Area surveys on private land for both south and north Marlborough in the 12 year period from July 2001 to June 2016. These do not include the additional wetland sites that have been identified more recently through the 2010-13 survey described above.

Tables 1 and 2 show the total participation rates and overall results from 2001 to June 2016 in south and north Marlborough respectively. Using ecological district units, the tables show; the number of properties surveyed, the number of properties where permission to survey was sought but declined, the number of sites identified, the combined area and percentage of total land area of all of the identified significant natural area sites, and in north Marlborough, the percentage of Department of Conservation land.

As of June 2016 a total of 286 landowners participated in the ecological survey in both south and north Marlborough (75% of those approached). A total of 94 landowners declined to participate (25% of those approached). A total of 708 significant natural areas have been identified, with a combined area of 45,575 hectares.

Table 1: South Marlborough Ecological Survey Participation and Results (July 01 – June 16)

Ecological Districts	No. Properties Surveyed	No. Properties Declined	No. of Sites	Combined Area (ha)	% of Total Land Area
Kekerengu	20	3	57	1,446	4.6%
Medway	14	3	79	4,961	15.5%
Waihopai	19	14	61	5,418	5%
Blenheim	15	1	13	292	1%
Wither Hills	22	7	24	5,132	16.7%
Grassmere	10	4	11	155	1%
Flaxbourne	26	14	62	2,027	7%
Hillersden	29	4	30	3,666	7.5%
Totals	154 (75%)	50 (25%)	336	23,092	7.2% av

Table 2: North Marlborough – Ecological Survey – Participation and Results (July 01 – June 16)

Ecological Districts	No. Properties Surveyed	No. Properties Declined	No. of Sites	Combined Area (ha)	SNA sites as a % of Total Private Land Area in ED	SNA sites as a % of Total Area of ED (DoC and Private)	% of DoC Land
d’Urville	21	9	47	3,650	16.5%	12.0%	27%
Cook Strait	3	0	7	755	17.1%	13.2%	24%
Sounds	64	16	186	11,790	16.0%	9.5%	39%
Pelorus	19	10	45	1,472	3.8%	1.4%	63%
Para	18	7	55	2,975	8.7%	6.2%	24%
Fishtail	6	2	33	1,350	9.0%	3.0%	55%
Totals	131 (75%)	44 (25%)	373	21,924	(Av=12%)	(Av=7.4%)	(Av=38.5%)

2.3. Discussion

The field based ecological surveys have produced a lot of information about the distribution and type of native habitat remaining on private land in both south and north Marlborough.

South Marlborough

This part of the region is characterised by a history of extensive native vegetation clearance and consequently very depleted ecological functioning in some respects. While there are some extensive areas of beech forest, kanuka forest, shrublands and tussock grasslands, these all occur in the extensive areas of hill country. Of the eight ecological districts that were surveyed in the south Marlborough area there is very little Department of Conservation land, apart from in the Waihopai ecological district, and in general, the percentage of total land area of significant natural sites is very low - less than 10% in six of the eight ecological districts and less than 5% in the three of these lowland coastal ecological districts (Blenheim, Grassmere and Kekerengu).

This is clearly reflected when the ecological districts are compared to the Priority One area of the 2007 Statement of National Priorities for Protecting Rare and Threatened Biodiversity on Private Land which identifies land environments that have less than 20% remaining in indigenous cover. The 20% threshold is based on a well established species-area relationship which shows that the rate of biodiversity loss increases dramatically when the amount of available habitat drops below 20% of its original extent.



Some ecosystem types in south Marlborough are very depleted and the little that does remain is not always well managed or formally protected in anyway (for instance wetlands, podocarp forest and broadleaved forests). However, with a recent emphasis on protection of some of these areas some improvements are being made, with landowners introducing management such as fencing, weed control and restoration planting, that will ensure the long term sustainability of some of these sites.

North Marlborough

The north Marlborough part of the region has a different climate and history of land clearance to south Marlborough and also has a considerable amount of land in Department of Conservation management (ranging from 24% to 63% in different ecological districts). The percentage of total land area of significant natural sites is generally higher than in south Marlborough, ranging from about 4% to 17% across the ecological districts.

While some ecosystem types are quite depleted, for instance lowland alluvial and swamp forests and kohekohe forest, a significant amount of native forest habitat remains – both beech and podocarp dominated. Additionally, large areas of regenerating forests consisting of kanuka, manuka, tauhinu and broadleaved species are present where land has been left to regenerate following earlier clearance.



While fencing is important for some lowland sites within a pastoral farming landscape, feral animal pest control is the main challenge in north Marlborough, especially as there are still populations of a range of native fauna present (forest birds, sea birds, weka, giant land snails, freshwater native fish species).

Part B: Protection Work – Landowner Assistance Programme – Summary of Results 2015-2016

3. Landowner Assistance Programme – Background and Overview

The Landowner Assistance Programme has been operating since 2003 in conjunction with the field ecological survey work, and has targeted assistance to high value sites with identified pressures and threats that can be practically managed. It was initially established as a pilot programme with a focus on the south Marlborough area, but has since been fully established as a permanent programme and extended to include north Marlborough.

While the main focus of the programme has been on practical protection of individual high value significant natural area sites (including a mix of fencing, weed and animal pest control and restoration planting work), other broader methods to promote the protection of natural values in south Marlborough have also been incorporated. These have included:

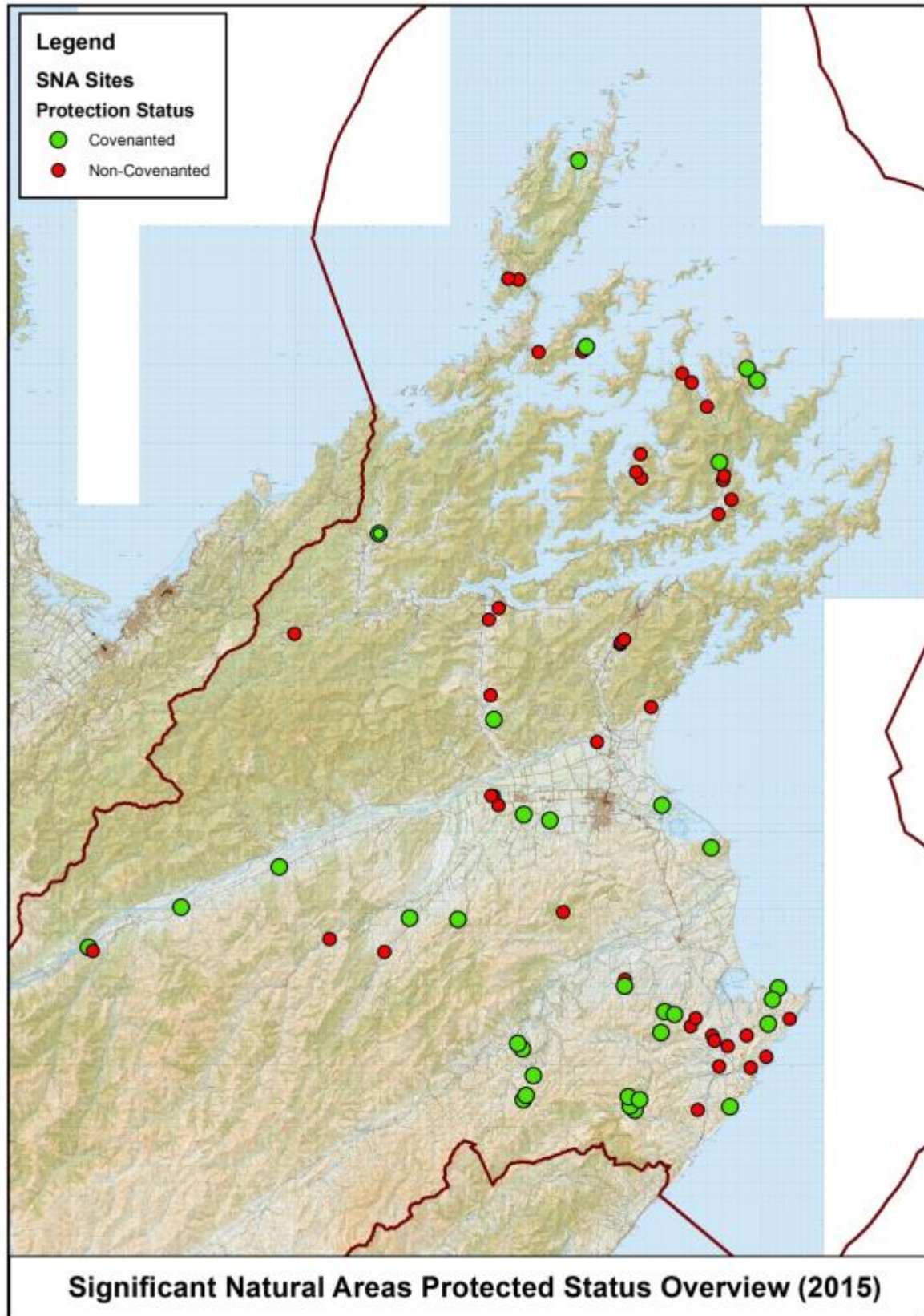
- the pilot use of farm scale plans to balance the production and conservation values within properties (especially where fencing is not practical);
- three feasibility studies looking at pest and weed control issues (old mans beard and goat control in south Marlborough and wilding pine control on d’Urville Island);
- the collection of native plant seed material to ensure an ongoing supply of locally sourced plants for re-vegetation and restoration efforts, associated publicity and promotion work (newsletters, a series of newspaper articles and publication of summary reports and native planting guides for both south and north Marlborough); and
- the Tūi to Town restoration project with an original focus on the Wairau Plain area but which has been extended to include the Wairau Valley and lowland areas around Seddon and Ward in 2015.

A strong conservation effort on private land is needed if functioning ecosystems are to be maintained, especially in the lowland areas of south Marlborough which have been identified nationally as threatened environments with less than 20% of natural cover remaining. To be effective this would need to include continued protection of the last remaining remnants as well as active restoration planting to create new habitats and increase the overall area in natural cover (which is currently less than 1% on the Wairau and Awatere Plain areas). So far only about 12% of the 708 identified sites over the whole of Marlborough have received any restoration or protection (33 in north Marlborough and 55 in south Marlborough). Many surveyed sites are likely to be deteriorating in condition over time due to a range of threats and pressures.

While the protection and restoration efforts since 2003 have been heartening, continued effort is required. Over the past couple of years (2014/15 and 2015/16), the demand for assistance to protect sites is decreasing and efforts to encourage further work need to be considered.



A significant natural area site in south Marlborough which has been fenced some restoration planting established to complement existing vegetation which is thriving in the absence of stock pressure



Map 2: The location of the majority of the 85 sites that have been protected through the programme. The sites shown in green have been covenanted.

3.1. Protection Projects 2015-2016

In the 12 month period from July 2015 to June 2016 year the Council contributed to fifteen projects in total. Only two of these were new projects, and twelve were follow up weed control projects (including two minor contributions to QEII managed maintenance projects). The new protection projects included the fencing of two small forest remnants on a property in the outer Marlborough Sounds.

In addition the Council contributed significant funding to a community led weed control programme in the Waima/Ure valley. This programme has been underway since 2009 and is overseen by a community group (the Waima Valley Ecological Restoration Society). The Council committed two years of funding support to allow the group to seek further major funding to continue its work (for instance Lotteries Fund, Community Conservation Fund).



Peggioh landowner Susan King and Council Biosecurity Coordinator Jono Underwood look over part of the Waima/Ure catchment

The total number of projects carried out since 2003 is 88.

All of the twelve follow up projects involved weed control in sites already protected in some way. The main weeds include willow re-growth, old mans beard and wilding pines.

An additional four small restoration planting projects within the Blenheim, Hillersden and Grassmere Ecological Districts were funded through the Tūi to Town Project.

An additional "expenditure" in the 2015/16 financial year was the repayment of \$10,000 to the Department of Conservation. This was for a funding instalment of \$10,000 received in 2014 for a project which did not proceed due to a change of plans by the landowner.

3.2. Protection Projects Summary – July 2015 – June 2016

Table 3: Summary of new protection projects July 2015 – June 2016 (GST inclusive)

Ecosystem Type	Size (ha)	North/South Marlborough ED	Type of Work	Total Funding	MDC	Biofund	Landowner and QEII/other
Forest (Me)	1	N Sounds ED	Fencing	\$4686.50	\$2343.25		\$2343.25
Forest (Me)	1	N Sounds ED	Fencing	\$4686.50	\$2343.25		\$2343.25
Waima OMB project		S Medway ED	OMB control	\$30,000 plus funding from other sources	\$30,000.00		Various in kind
Department of Conservation			Repay	\$10,000.00	10,000.00		

Ecosystem Type	Size (ha)	North/South Marlborough ED	Type of Work	Total Funding	MDC	Biofund	Landowner and QEII/other
Tūi to Town x 4	0.4 ha	S Blenheim, Hillersden, Grassmere ED's	planting	\$4062.00	\$4062.00		Un known
Total				\$53,435.00	\$48,748.50		\$4,686.50

Table 4: Summary of ongoing protection projects July 2015-June 2016

Ecosystem Type	Size (ha)	North/South Marlborough ED	Type of Work	Total Funding	MDC	Biofund	Landowner and QEII/other
Wetland (De)	4	S Blenheim ED	Weed control	2439.00	1219.00		1219.00
Wetland-(De)	8	S Blenheim ED	Weed control	2439.00	1219.00		1219.00
Wetland (Wi)	40	S Blenheim ED	Weed control	3176.00	1588.00		1588.00
Wetland (Li)	3	S Flaxbourne	Weed control	1150.00	1150.00		
Hill slopes (Ne)	14	S Para ED	Weed Control	920.00	920.00		
Gully (St)	5	S Kekerengu ED	Weed control	1094.00	1094.00		
Gully (Av)	11	S Flaxbourne ED	Weed Control	483.00	483.00		
Hill slopes (Me)	20	N Sounds ED	Weed control	3888.00	1944.00		1944.00
Coastal Gully (Re)	2	N Sounds ED	Weed control	482.00	241.00		241.00
Hill Slopes (SB) QEII	40	S Flaxbourne ED	Weed control	5750.00	2875.00		2875.00
QEII x 2 projects				\$3,942.00	\$1971.00		1971.00
Total				\$25,763.00	\$14,704.00		11,057.0

Total spending on the fifteen protection projects was \$79,195, although this does not include additional unknown contributions to the community led Waima/Ure Valley old mans beard control programme. The Marlborough District Council share was \$63,452 (this includes Tui to Town spending of \$4062 and the repayment of \$10,000 to the Department of Conservation's Biodiversity Fund), and landowner share \$15,743.

Total combined spending on protection projects on private land for the 2015-2016 financial year, when all of these protection projects are taken into account, is set out below showing the contribution of the various funding sources.

Total Funding Contributions for Biodiversity Protection Projects on Private Land 2014-2015

Marlborough District Council Funding	\$63,452.00
QEII National Trust	
Landowners	\$15,743.00
Total	\$79,195.00

Summary of Total Funding Contributions for Biodiversity Protection Projects on Private Land 2003 – 2016

Marlborough District Council Funding	\$694,290.00
Central Government Biodiversity Fund	\$810,010.00
QEII National Trust	\$78,318.00
Landowners	\$556,830.00
Total	\$2,139,448.00

A summary of all Significant Natural Area project expenditure is included in Appendix 1

3.3. Relationships

The Council promotes covenanting and has developed a strong relationship with the Department of Conservation and the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust (QEII), both of which provide a mechanism for landowners to independently covenant protected areas on their properties. A total of 40 of the 88 projects protected through the programme so far have been covenanted. Two of these are Protected Private Land (PPL) covenants administered by the Department of Conservation and the other 35 are QEII covenants. The QEII National Trust takes responsibility for on-going monitoring of their covenanted sites, reducing the monitoring required to be carried out by the Council.

The Council has also been working collaboratively with the Marlborough Sounds Restoration Trust in recent years and has contributed to several wilding pine control projects on private properties, led by the Trust.

The Waima Valley Ecological Restoration Society is a community based initiative in South Marlborough with an emphasis on Old Mans Beard control in the Waima/Ure catchment area. The Council has assisted this group to develop a management strategy to structure the project work, and has also contributed financially to some small areas of control work with a more substantial contribution granted for the 2015/16 and 2016/17 years.

Other community based conservation groups currently operating in the Marlborough region include:-

- The Tūi Nature Reserve Trust
- Kaipupu Mainland Island Sanctuary
- Grovetown Lagoon Restoration Project
- The Endeavour Inlet Restoration Trust
- The Te Hoiere/Pelorus Long-Tailed Bat Project (Forest and Bird)
- The Para Swamp Restoration project (Fish and Game and Gamebird Habitat Trust)
- The Picton Dawn Chorus Group
- Totara for Totaranui Project

In addition a Trust is currently being established to deal with the issue of wilding tree spread in South Marlborough.

All of these groups are independent of the Council and obtain significant levels of funding from other sources, for instance Lotteries, Canterbury Community Fund, the Biodiversity Condition and Advice Fund (now Community Conservation Partnerships Fund), and landowners.

Part C: Monitoring Programme – Summary of Results 2015 – 2016

4. Background and Overview

Monitoring is an important part of measuring and tracking the outputs and outcomes of any project. There are three types of biodiversity monitoring that are relevant to the Significant Natural Areas project.

Firstly, at the broadest level, regional scale biodiversity monitoring is desirable so that an overall picture of biodiversity state and trends can be gained. At this stage this type of monitoring is not established in the Marlborough region but we are involved in a national Envirolink Tools project which is being carried out in conjunction with Landcare Research and the Department of Conservation. This project is developing some standardised biodiversity indicators and methodology to measure these indicators. Staff continue to maintain a watching brief over this project.

Secondly and more specifically, in relation to the Significant Natural Areas project, some ongoing monitoring of the state and condition of a selection of representative sites from the more than 600 sites identified that have not had any specific conservation management applied is required. This type of monitoring was started in the 2014-2015 in two ecological district areas and repeated in the 2015/16 year in a further two ecological districts and is discussed below. The budget for this work was \$30,000 but only \$12,238 was spent as a significant proportion of the work was carried out by Marlborough District Council staff.

Thirdly, systematic monitoring to assess the condition of the 88 sites protected through the Landowner Assistance Programme (about 12% of all sites identified), has been established and is carried out every two years. So far five monitoring rounds have been undertaken starting with a pilot in the summer of 2006/7 with 12 sites visited. The following four rounds have been carried out at two yearly intervals including 2010, 2012, 2014 and most recently in the summer of 2015/16. The QEII National Trust monitors the sites that have been covenanted through their organisation (currently 40 sites), and some sites are not monitored as they are managed by other organisations or are very minor in nature. . The budget for this work was \$30,000 but only \$8,639 was spent as a significant proportion of the work was carried out by Marlborough District Council staff.



4.1. 2015 - 2016 Monitoring of Managed SNA Sites

SNA Assistance Programme Monitoring – In the 2015/16 monitoring round a total of 26 sites were visited on 19 properties. A total of eight sites (on four properties) were not visited this time around, mainly due to resourcing limits. These sites should all be visited in the next monitoring round in 2017/18.

Table 5: Summary of Monitoring of Managed SNA sites 2006 - 2016

Year	Total Sites	Sites monitored	Sites excluded	Sites missed 2015/16	QEII sites
2006/7	25	12 (9 properties)	1		12
2009/10	52	24 (17 properties)	4		24
2011/12	74	19 (13 properties)	18	6	30
2013/14	80	25 (19 properties)	13	7	34
2015/16	88	26 (19 properties)		8	40

Contract ecologist Geoff Walls and Council staff member Nicky Eade carried out the monitoring over the 2015/16 summer season. Assessment methodology is qualitative and simple and includes photopoints and rapid ecological condition and trend assessment. Reports prepared for each site visited and provided to the landowners, include commentary, site maps and photographs established at defined photopoints to provide a visual record of changes over time. Any emerging issues (for instance weed invasion) are discussed with the landowner and management put in place to deal with these. The monitoring allows the Council to maintain links with landowners and remind them of their responsibilities in relation to these sites. Further quantitative monitoring could be added in time to allow a more rigorous analysis of change in site condition over time or to target particular points of interest within sites.

The Table below provides a summary of the condition and trend of the sites. While some sites are only in fair condition (31%), the majority are in good/fair or good condition (69%). Similarly while some sites are only stable or are deteriorating in condition, the majority are improving (76%).

Table 6: Summary of Monitoring results for managed SNA sites 2015/16

	Good	Good/Fair	Fair	Fair/Poor	Poor
Site Condition	4 (15%)	14 (54%)	8 (31%)		
	Improving	Improving/Stable	Stable	Stable /Deteriorating	Deteriorating
Site Trend	10 (37%)	10 (37%)	5 (20)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)

Some observations from the 2015/16 monitoring round:

- landowners continue to be co-operative and allow access for monitoring purposes and most landowners are either very, or moderately, interested in the sites and tracking their progress over time.
- However, a small number of landowners do not appear to be particularly interested in the sites on an ongoing basis and this is generally reflected in the condition of the site.
- most sites are improving in condition generally due to natural re-generation processes and in some cases establishment and growth of restoration plantings within sites.
- initial major weed control efforts are often succeeded by secondary weed issues that require ongoing control for a number of years, the monitoring programme picks up these situations and assistance can be provided to landowners to deal with these issues.



A fenced riparian area in the Marlborough Sounds showing vigorous recovery of understory species.

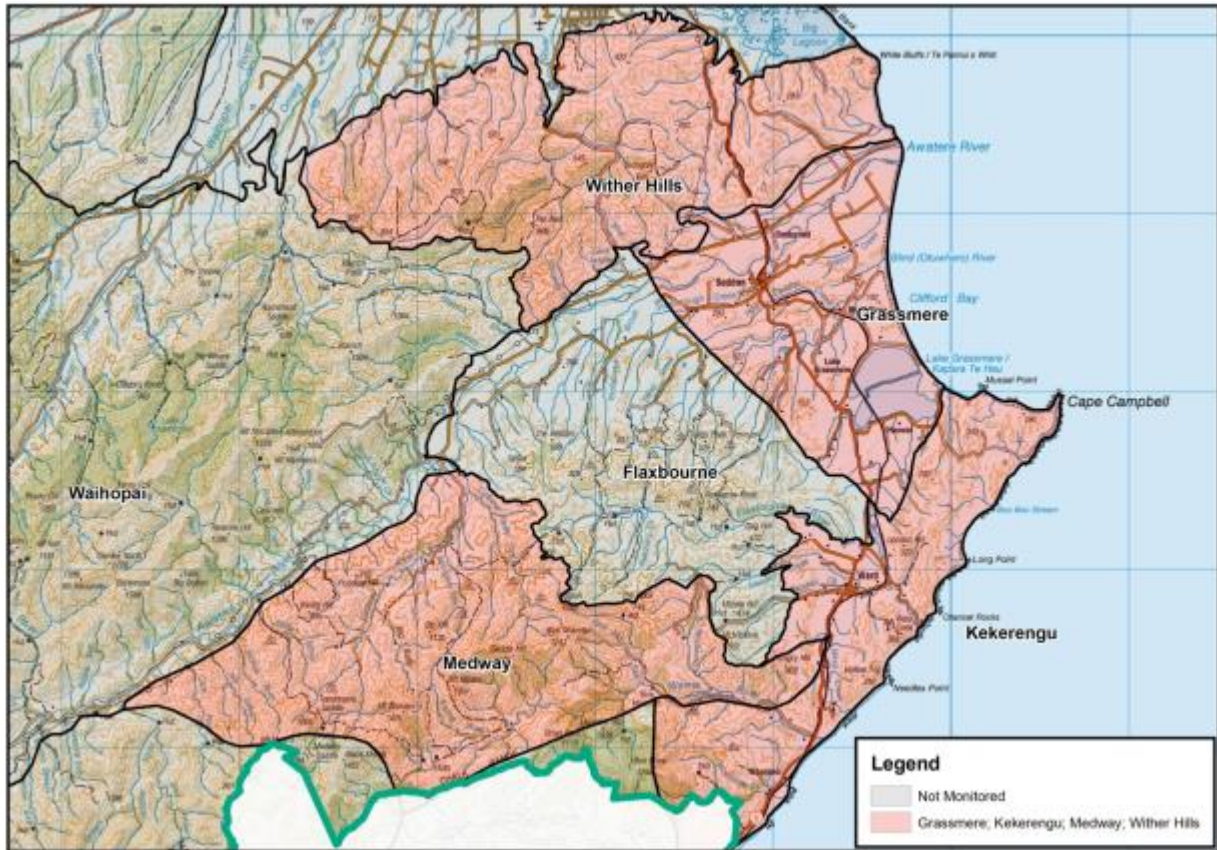


A fenced gully system in south Marlborough showing photopoint tag for future monitoring.

4.2. SNA Un-Managed Sites Monitoring/Re-Visits Pilot Programme

Monitoring to assess the state and condition of a selection of representative sites that have not had any specific conservation management applied was carried out for the first time over the 2014/15 and 2015/16 summer seasons. This included a telephone questionnaire with all landowners of properties with significant natural areas identified on them and site visits to a selection of sites to assess their ecological condition. A detailed report on this monitoring programme is available, (*Summary of Results of Landowner Questionnaire and Monitoring Re-visits of a Selection of Un-managed Significant Natural Area Sites in the Kekerengu, Medway, Wither Hills and Grassmere Ecological Districts 2015 -2016*. Marlborough District Council Report, July 2016).

Four ecological districts that were part of the earliest original significant natural area survey programme were selected for this follow up programme. These were the Kekerengu and Medway ecological districts which were originally surveyed by the Council and the Grassmere and Wither Hills ecological district that were originally surveyed by the Department of Conservation (see Map below).



Map 3: Overview map showing the Kekerengu, Medway, Grassmere and Wither Hills ecological districts.

Communication with landowners was necessary to obtain permission to access properties to carry out this monitoring. This was carried out via a phone questionnaire to collect information about landowners awareness, interest and thoughts about the SNA sites located on their properties. Access permission (to re-visit sites), was also sought from a selection of landowners.

- **Questionnaire/Survey** – A total of 49 landowners completed the telephone questionnaire, 25 in the first season (Kekerengu and Medway ecological districts) and 24 in the second season (Grassmere and Wither Hills ecological districts).
- Four landowners declined to carry out or complete the survey and one landowner who owns multiple properties was unable to be contacted.
- A series of questions were asked to evaluate the level of landowner awareness and interest about the significant natural areas on their properties and the assistance available to them through the Council programme. There was a clear difference in the levels of awareness and knowledge between the two groups, with the first group having higher levels across all of the areas discussed. This was obvious both in relation to general awareness about the SNA programme and the more specific levels of awareness around the sites themselves and the assistance available to assist with protection work. This is most likely due to the difference in approach between the Council run SNA surveys and the Department of Conservation run Protected Natural Area surveys.
- Overall, landowner attitudes and awareness are quite mixed. It is likely that involvement in the SNA programme has raised awareness of indigenous biodiversity and conservation issues in a general sense. A number of landowners had a positive attitude towards the

SNA programme and biodiversity issues, although a few (generally new landowners), had been unaware that they had sites of value on their properties. Of the less interested and aware participants the attitude can generally be described as indifferent or uninterested rather than directly negative.

- While the majority of properties were still in the same ownership (32 out of 56 properties), a number were in the hands of the next generation through family succession (6 properties) and 18 properties had changed hands and were in different ownership.
- The following tables show the telephone questionnaire results for each of the two seasons.

Table 7: Summary of responses to Significant Natural Areas phone survey Kekerengu and Medway Ecological Districts 2014/15

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 mgmt?	All 23 landowners 9 (39%) - fencing 14 (61%) - other		0
Awareness of MDC Assistance 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%)

Table 8: Summary of responses to Significant Natural Areas phone survey Grassmere and Wither Hills Ecological Districts 2014/15

Landowners responses	number and % high/yes	Number and % medium/maybe	Number and % low/no
Awareness of MDC SNA programme and voluntary approach?	8 (31%)	8 (31%)	10 (38%)
Voluntary approach to continue?	16 (64%)	9 (36%)	
Aware of SNA report?	7 (24%)	5 (16%)	13 (60%)
Awareness and knowledge of SNA sites?	9 (36%)	9 (36%)	7 (28%)
Importance and value of SNA sites?	10 (40%)	5 (20%)	10 (40%)
Desire to generally protect SNA sites and values- day to day farm mgmt?	10 (42%)	8 (33%)	6 (25%)
Awareness of MDC Assistance programme?	5 (20%)	3 (13%)	16 (67%)
Interest in MDC support?	7 (29%)	8 (33%)	9 (38%)
Community of interest in relation to SNA sites?	2 (8%)	7 (29%)	15 (63%)

- **Site monitoring re-visits** - A total of 44 sites were re-visited, 25 in the first year, and 19 in the second year. A mix of ecosystem types were included, the majority being areas of broadleaved forest (15 sites), with 10 other ecosystem types represented: Landowners received reports showing the results of the site monitoring.
- Overall results combining all four ecological districts show that the sites visited were generally in reasonable condition (44% good or good/fair and 54% fair) which reflects the inherent resilience of most of the sites, which have persisted within a productive landscape over many years prior to the SNA programme identifying the sites in the early 2000's.
- However, on a less positive note, very few sites were improving in condition (11% improving or improving/stable) and a reasonable proportion of sites are deteriorating (36% stable/deteriorating or deteriorating). The reasons for the deteriorating condition vary but the main one is weed invasion, with the impact of farm stock and feral animals relevant in some instances.
- The sites that are deteriorating in condition are spread across all ecosystem types. In some cases direct management intervention could be very effective. However the widespread presence of Old Mans Beard in many sites in the Medway area presents a real ecological dilemma, as in some cases stock are keeping the weed in check where they can access it. Any efforts at control would need to be well planned and applied over the whole locality to be effective.



Kanuka gully site in a dry summer season – Wither Hills Ecological District



Gully floor of the same site showing conglomerate rock canyon supporting a variety of ferns

- Other issues affecting some sites included active vegetation clearance using fire or herbicide (parts of 2 of the 25 sites), and all sites are likely to be infested with a suite of animal pests which have impacts on both the vegetation and any indigenous fauna present (birds, insects and lizards).
- Another issue that arose in discussion with several landowners was the intention to clear areas of indigenous vegetation and a lack of awareness about the relevant controls in the Marlborough resource management plans. The relevant information and advice was provided to these landowners both verbally and in writing when the monitoring reports were sent out to them.

Table 9: Combined summary of results of SNA site revisits to Kekerengu, Medway, Grassmere and Wither Hills ecological districts- 2015/6.

Site Condition	Good	Good/Fair	Fair	Fair/Poor	Poor
	4 (10%)	15 (34%)	24 (54%)	1 (2%)	0
Site Trend	Improving	Improving/Stable	Stable	Stable/Deteriorating	Deteriorating
	2 (4%)	3 (7%)	23 (53%)	9 (20%)	7 (16%)

- **Summary and discussion** – The process of carrying out the landowners questionnaires and the site re-visits has assisted in re-engaging with the landowners in these four ecological districts and could be continued in other ecological districts in subsequent years. Landowner awareness is mixed and further work could be done to promote the SNA programme and its objectives.

- While most of the sites that were re-visited through this programme are naturally resilient remnants within highly modified landscapes, a number are in deteriorating condition due to the impacts of weeds, feral animals and farm stock. This is to be expected without active management intervention.
- This monitoring methods used in this programme were qualitative only and designed to provide a fast way to assess the state and condition of sites. The establishment of photopoints provides some scope for ongoing monitoring but additional quantitative methods could be built into the programme if required in the future.



Part D: Associated Projects

5. Publicity and Information

5.1. Background

Publicity and promotion have been integral to the Significant Natural Areas Project because it relies heavily on voluntary participation and proactive protection activity from landowners. Initially the emphasis was on increasing awareness about the unique and diverse biodiversity of the region and the opportunity for landowners to participate in collecting information and looking at options for protection where necessary. This occurred through personal contact, individual property reports, annual newsletters and newspaper articles.

More recently publicity about the SNA project is integrated into other media releases and publicity, for instance links with entrants in the Marlborough Environment Awards, farming articles and so on.

Previous publications relating to the project have included:

- Annual project newsletters – 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015
- Guidelines for landowners to develop a management plan for the sustainable management of native vegetation – 2004
- Native Vegetation for South Marlborough – a Planting Guide – December 2004
- South Marlborough – Significant Natural Areas Project Summary Report – July 2005
- Marlborough District Council web page – Environment/Ecology and Biodiversity - 2005
- Tūi to Town brochure, web page and associated planting guides (Wairau Plains and South Marlborough low lying hill country) – June 2008
- North Marlborough – Significant Natural Areas Project Summary Report – June 2009
- North Marlborough – Native vegetation planting and restoration guide – June 2011



5.2. The 2015-2016 Year

In the 2015/16 year displays were presented at two public events including the Marlborough A and P Show and Garden Marlborough (both November 2015).

An annual newsletter was sent out to all participating SNA landowners in September 2015.

A general brochure about the SNA project was produced and is now available as a handout. See Appendix 2.

Work was started on guidelines for landowners to convert pine land cover back to native land cover in the Marlborough Sounds (to be completed by November 2016).

Information management and storage systems within the Council were improved over the 2015/16 year and all Department of Conservation PNA report information was scanned and filed into individual site files.



6. Seed Collection Project

6.1. Background

Through the Significant Natural Areas project it became apparent that boosting the supply of suitable locally sourced native plants would be necessary if there was to be an adequate volume of plant material available for restoration projects in Marlborough. The Tūi to Town natural habitat restoration project is helping to stimulate this activity on the Wairau Plain area by providing information and for larger projects, funding assistance.

The Significant Natural Areas project has provided an opportunity to identify remaining pockets of indigenous plants on private land that provide valuable seed sources to generate future material for restoration planting.

A pilot seed collection project was initiated in 2006 focusing on totara seed collection and this has continued since then and broadened to include a range of suitable species for restoration planting such as kowhai, kanuka, flax, cabbage tree, mahoe, kohuhu, ngaio, broadleaf and lancewood.

Over the last eight years since July 2008, the emphasis has been on collecting the podocarp species matai and kahikatea from sparsely distributed remnant populations to complement the original and ongoing focus on totara. Coordination with the Marlborough District Council's Reserves Section has also taken place to try to create efficiencies in the area of seed collection.



The programme is flexible and can be shifted to meet the needs of specific projects. The current emphasis in terms of location has been to collect seed close to Blenheim to ensure that the Tūi to Town and other lowland restoration projects have a supply of suitable plants, and also some collection in the Rai Valley area to enable an effective riparian restoration planting project in the area in the future.

A co-operative arrangement with local plant nurseries has been developed whereby Council collects and provides the seeds (courtesy of the access granted by private landowners to seed sources), and the nursery propagates, grows and sells the plants. This helps to ensure that appropriate locally sourced native plants are available in Marlborough nurseries to service the restoration of natural areas in the modified lowland environments.

6.2. The 2015-2016 seed collection season

In the 2015/16 seed collection season seed was collected from a number of sites in both north and south Marlborough. The main focus was on collecting seed from common restoration species in the Flaxbourne area to ensure a supply of locally sourced plants are available for future Tūi to town projects. The total cost of the seed collection project in the 201/15 financial year was \$7,390.

7. Tūi to Town Project 2008 – 2016

7.1. Background and Overview

The Tūi 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 Tūi 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. Native bird sightings (not limited to Tūi) are being regularly reported from these new areas and a number of enquiries about funding for larger plantings have been received.

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.

7.2. Information and Publicity

In the 2015-2016 year displays and presentations promoting the Tūi to Town project were presented at several public events including the Marlborough A and P Show, Garden Marlborough (November 2015).

The Tūi to Town brochure and website page have been updated to reflect the extended programme area. See brochure in Appendix 3.

Tūi to Town street flags continue to be flown in Blenheim and Renwick periodically.

A number of public plantings (for instance the Taylor River plantings carried out by the Marlborough District Council Reserves section and the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT) Horticulture course), are publicised as being linked to the Tūi to Town project.

7.3. Sightings

In the 2015 calendar year a total of 55 tui sightings were reported. This was the first year sightings were reported from the wider south Marlborough area and 13 of the 55 sightings were in the Seddon and surrounding areas. Other sightings reported from the Seddon township area included bellbird, fantail and grey warbler.

This brings the total number of Tūi sightings to over 750 over the seven year life of the project, providing useful information about Tūi movement and feeding patterns on the Wairau Plain and the beginnings of some information about Tūi presence in the Seddon and Awatere area.

The basic pattern that has emerged is that Tūi are resident in the forested areas to the north of the Wairau Plain and begin travelling to feed about May, continuing through until about December. They appear to be resident in and around large flowering eucalyptus trees for periods of time through winter (ie; they are present early in the morning and late in the evening for several weeks), but it is not yet clear if they nest in any locations on the Wairau Plain.

Tui were sighted in a variety of locations in and around the Seddon township, including the lower Awatere Valley and Cape Campbell areas. The birds are only occasional visitors and is uncertain at this stage where these birds travel from and reside.

Eucalyptus species are the most common for sightings (34%) with kowhai next (23%) as well as a variety of other species (banksia, camellia, various native species, fruit trees).



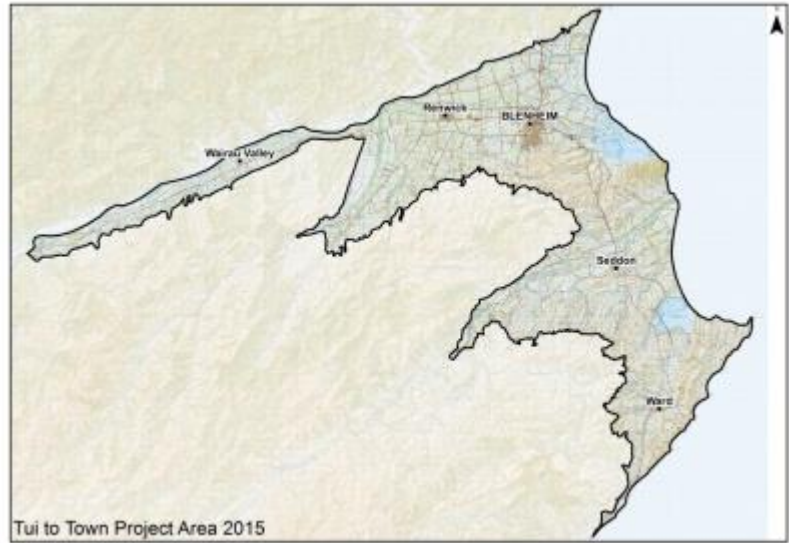
7.4. Plantings

Four new plantings were funded in the 2015-2016 financial year, bringing the total number of funded plantings to 48 since 2008, a total area of new habitat of about 4.8 hectares. These plantings compliment other restoration projects on private land being undertaken through the SNA project, projects on Council land, and other smaller scale plantings of native vegetation on private land, school grounds and so on.

The total Council contribution to the four Tūi to Town planting projects in 2015-16 year was \$4,062.

7.5. Extension of Tūi to Town Programme to Wairau Valley and Seddon/Ward Areas.

Map 4 shows the new extended Tūi to Town area which include the original Wairau Plain area along with the valley floors of the Wairau Valley and the lowland areas of the South Marlborough area where there is less than 10% of indigenous vegetation cover remaining . This is based on the Ministry for the Environment “Threatened Environments” layer and has been identified as one of four priorities for protection on private land in the 2007 central governments Protecting our Places document. The area represents land where very little indigenous habitat remains –between 1 – 5% of land area with sites generally very small, highly modified and scattered and isolated within the landscape. It includes all of the Blenheim and Grassmere Ecological districts and lowland parts of the Hillersden, Wither Hills, Medway and Kekerengu Ecological Districts.



Map 4: Town Extension Area

The extension of the Tūi to Town project into these new areas will help to create more awareness about native bird presence as well stimulate new native plantings. A good number of enquiries have been received from the new areas over the 2015-16 year but only three planting projects were actually completed in these areas (1 in the Wairau Valley and 2 in the Seddon area). One of the plantings was carried out by a community group on private land in the centre of Seddon and has received a good level of publicity.



Seddon Tui to Town planting November 2015



Seddon Tui to Town planting July 2016

8. General Discussion and Conclusions

The Significant Natural Areas programme has been in place in Marlborough since 2001. It is the main mechanism used by the Council to identify and promote protection of terrestrial indigenous biodiversity. It is entirely voluntary but sits alongside some rules preventing certain types and scale of indigenous vegetation clearance and wetland drainage and clearance. The sites are not scheduled in the resource management plans (apart from wetland sites identified in the 2010-13 surveys which are intended to be scheduled).

The project is very focussed on identifying and protecting habitat areas as a mechanism to protect larger suites of indigenous species (insects, reptiles and birds). Ecological assessments are relatively broad scale, relying on experienced ecologists and rapid qualitative methods. While it is a voluntary method of promoting protection, the information collected through the significant natural areas ecological surveys is used internally by the Council when assessing the effects of resource consents.



Tōtara and cabbage tree plantings doing well in a fenced SNA site in a dry south Marlborough location.

A wider review of the roles and responsibilities of local government in managing indigenous biodiversity in the New Zealand context is currently underway and it will be interesting to follow this discussion over the next year or two. It may provide some direction in relation to the SNA programme or other Marlborough District Council activities or programmes. The government has also re-started the process of developing a National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity.

A working group continues to assist the Council to manage the SNA project and meets at least annually. This group remains integral to the management and direction of the SNA project.

While much has been achieved through the project, it appears that momentum to protect sites has decreased over the last several years with only ten new protection projects being completed over the last 3 years of the project. Of the 700 or so sites identified through the SNA surveys about 88 have had protection work of some kind applied to them and a number (38) of these sites are also covenanted to provide permanent legal protection (primarily through the QEII Trust).

Monitoring to track the condition of these protected sites was carried out over the 2015/16 summer season and found that 74% of sites are improving in condition, 20% in stable condition and only 6% deteriorating in some way.

However, there are around 600 SNA sites yet to be protected and proactively managed so that their ecological values are sustained in the long term. A programme to contact landowners and carry out a telephone questionnaire in addition to re-visiting a selection of 44 un-managed sites carried out over the last two summer seasons showed that in contrast to the managed sites, only 11% of sites are improving in condition, while 53% are in stable condition and 36% deteriorating in some way. Weed impacts were the most common cause of site deterioration, with feral animals and farm stock also having an impact in some cases.

The phone survey carried out in conjunction with this programme showed that landowners have mixed levels of awareness and interest in the SNA sites and programme. There is more work to do in promoting the programme and the assistance that is available to landowners.

In addition to the monitoring of SNA sites (both managed and un-managed), mentioned above, Council may also need to establish a broader regional state of environment monitoring programme to align with national monitoring and reporting requirements. Work is underway nationally to assist Councils in developing these programmes.

The SNA working group has met recently to discuss the future direction of the SNA programme. The working group recognises that building and maintaining goodwill and awareness amongst landowners is at the heart of the SNA programme, and the work carried out in relation to the questionnaire and site re-visits has gone some way to re-establishing contact with most landowners in the four ecological districts involved. This engagement could be built on by extending it to other ecological districts and following up more regularly with individual landowners.



A fenced and planted riparian area in the Marlborough Sounds, pasture growth and weed plants can cause problems and require ongoing management.

Other initiatives could include more active engagement with landowners through sector groups, ie, Dairy NZ, Beef and Lamb, Federated Farmers, Marlborough Winegrowers and the Marlborough Forest Industry Association. Targeting protection of certain types of high priority sites, or within certain high priority localities, could also provide opportunities to raise the profile of the project and improve uptake of assistance available for protection of sites.

An external review of the SNA programme may help to set the future direction and work programmes associated with the SNA project. Also, the current review of the resource management framework in Marlborough through the proposed Marlborough Environment Plan may provide some further direction once the public submission process has been completed (submissions close on 1 September 2016). The submission process will also result in a final confirmation of wetland sites which will then be formally eligible for financial and technical assistance through the SNA Landowner Assistance Programme.

Information management in relation to the SNA programme is undergoing some changes. Improvements to the Councils internal information storage systems have been implemented. The electronic capture of all of the Department of Conservation 2004 Wairau Region protected Natural Areas Survey Programme is a step forward although there is still work to be done in creating property specific maps and reports for landowners with sites originally identified through the DOC survey programme. In addition new technologies and tools (for instance improved aerial photography for large parts of Marlborough), are creating opportunities to refine site mapping which may allow for a review of some site boundaries in the future.

The significant natural areas project is an important element of indigenous biodiversity management and protection in Marlborough, with a particular focus on privately owned land. It is complemented by the work of the QEII National Trust which works independently with private landowners to covenant and

protect areas. Treaty of Waitangi settlements across the top of the south island may also influence iwi involvement in biodiversity related issues over the next few years.

There has also been an increase in the number of larger scale community conservation and restoration projects in Marlborough in recent years and the significant natural area project continues to work closely with some of these, particularly where private land is involved.

In recent years complimentary work to identify ecologically significant marine sites in Marlborough has also taken place, and more work is planned, extending the scope of knowledge about ecology in the region.

In summary, the Significant Natural Areas Project continues to be the main way in which the Council works to protect land based indigenous biodiversity in the Marlborough region. While some gains continue to be made, the momentum of the project has slowed and the proposed review in relation to biodiversity outcomes and landowner engagement and awareness may provide some future direction, along with the current overarching Council review occurring through the Proposed Marlborough Environment Plan currently open for public submissions.

Associated Reports

Summary of Results of Landowner Questionnaire and Monitoring Re-visits of a Selection of Un-managed Significant Natural Area Sites in the Kekerengu, Medway, Wither Hills and Grassmere Ecological Districts 2015 -2016. Marlborough District Council Report, July 2016.



Appendix 1: Total Budget for Main Aspects of Significant Natural Areas Project – MDC Expenditure and Revenue – July 2014 – June 2015 (GST inclusive)

Table 10: Significant Natural Areas Project – Total budget July 2014 to June 2015

Project Name	Projected Budget	Actual Expenditure	Revenue
SNA survey and general	\$5,000	\$0	
SNA protection projects	\$80,000	\$59,390 (includes \$10,000 Biofund refund)	
Tūi to Town	\$10,000	\$4,062	
SNA associated projects (seed collection)	\$10,000	\$7,390	
SNA monitoring – managed sites	\$30,000	\$8,639	
SNA monitoring – Un-managed sites	\$30,000	\$12,238	
SNA miscellaneous (meetings and publications)	0	\$7,180	
Total	\$165,000	\$98,899	

Appendix 2: SNA Project Brochure

The Significant Natural Areas (SNA) project in Marlborough

Since 2001 the Marlborough District Council has worked to identify and protect significant natural areas on private land in the Marlborough region through a voluntary partnership approach with landowners.

These areas can include dry shrublands, forests, tussock grasslands and wetlands which once covered most of Marlborough. Often, people with native vegetation and wetlands on their properties know these places are special and want to protect them from animal pests and weeds for future generations to enjoy.

The significant natural areas programme helps firstly by identifying and describing these areas, producing property based ecological assessment reports for landowners and secondly by providing help to protect these areas.

Council ecologists have identified 700 significant natural areas in Marlborough and over 1400 additional wetlands, all eligible for funding.

The SNA Landowner Assistance Programme is voluntary and relies on proactive participation by Marlborough landowners. Since 2003 it has offered management advice along with funding for fencing, weed control and native plantings. Priority is given to high value sites with identified pressures and threats that can be practically managed. Already, over 80 sites have been protected in some way including about 1860ha of dry shrublands, tussock grasslands, forests and wetlands.

Protection fencing and restoration planting usually adds value to properties and can improve grazing management options. Protected and planted areas add shade, diversity and interest to farms, vineyards, and forests.

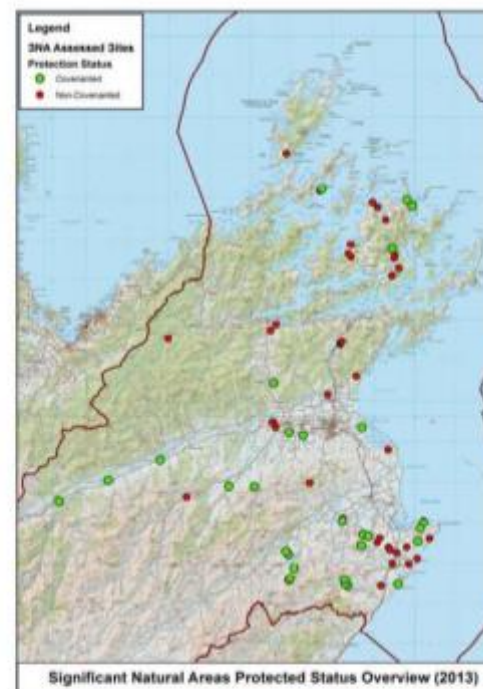
The Significant Natural Areas Landowner Assistance Programme:



- Meets 50% of the costs of protecting significant natural areas
- Allows landowners to contribute labour or cash
- Helps with fencing, weed control and planting to boost habitat, depending on site and management objectives
- Sometimes helps with animal pest control, with an ecologist's input when needed
- Accepts individual as well as group applications
- Is binding during the landowner's tenure. For long-term protection, covenanting with the QEII National Trust is encouraged
- Splits fencing costs three ways, if a landowner covenants with the QE II National Trust

Total spending on protection projects since 2003 is \$2 million. Council's share is about \$400,000, land-owners \$450,000, QEII \$75,000 and central Government \$800,000 through its Biodiversity Fund.

The map shows sites that landowners have protected through the SNA programme from 2003—2013.



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www.marlborough.govt.nz/environment/land/significant-natural-areas.aspx



South Marlborough

Along the coast from the Blenheim ecological district to Grassmere and Kekerengu, native vegetation clearance for farming combined with low rainfall has left one of the most depleted landscapes in New Zealand. There are next-to-no podocarp and broadleaved forests left.

Across the district less than 10% of native cover remains, falling to 1% on the Wairau and Awatere Plains. This is well below the 20% threshold of natural habitat below which the rate of biodiversity loss increases dramatically. The Tūi to Town project was set up to help fund new plantings in these very modified parts of south Marlborough but it is also important to try to protect areas that remain.

Of 85 protected Significant Natural Areas in Marlborough so far, 55 are in South Marlborough.

After learning that a wetland on his Avon Valley property was one of more than 1000 eligible for funding through the Biodiversity Landowner Assistance Programme, Chris Bowron didn't waste any time in fencing it off. No stranger to the



programme, he is a farming representative on the Significant Natural Areas working group. It was his turn for assistance with advice on planting and a

50% contribution towards the cost of 500 hardy, frost-tolerant species plus fencing materials. He is looking forward to watching the wetland recover and flourish, with grazing pressure removed.

North Marlborough

North of the Wairau River the climate is wetter and large areas of beech and podocarp forest remain, with extensive areas managed by the Department of Conservation. Regenerating kānuka, mānuka, tauhinu and broadleaved species are colonising land previously milled and farmed in some places.

Of 85 protected Significant Natural Areas in Marlborough, 30 are in North Marlborough with a focus on remnant areas on lowland flats. Along with fencing some sites, pest control is the main challenge especially as there are still large populations of native birds, freshwater native fish species and giant land snails present in places.

Mike and Kristen Gerard have been actively protecting regenerating native bush on their Sounds sheep and beef farm since the early 1980's.



The Marlborough District Council has helped protect 620ha through its Landowner Assistance Programme. Funding has helped with fencing creeks, wetlands and conservation areas to allow plantings and create corridors for birds and native freshwater fish. Participating in the SNA programme has also allowed the Gerard's to source funding for wilding pine poisoning work. Some of the special areas have Covenants with the Department of Conservation ensuring they will be looked after, once ownership changes.

Kristen is a farming representative on the Significant Natural Areas working group.

Protecting our Places - Significant Natural Areas in Marlborough



Appendix 3: Updated Tūi to Town Brochure

Suitable Tūi to Town Native Plant Species		
Smaller trees and shrubs (1-5 m)	Trees (tall 5-20 m)	
Flax species	<i>Phormium tenax</i> and <i>P. cookianum</i>	<i>Griselinia littoralis</i>
Coprosma species	<i>Coprosma propinqua</i> , <i>C. robusta</i> , <i>C. lucida</i> , <i>C. repens</i>	<i>Cordyline australis</i>
Koromiko	<i>Hebe salicifolia</i>	<i>Kunzea ericoides</i>
Coastal Shrub daisy	<i>Olearia solandri</i>	<i>Dacrycarpus dacrydioides</i>
Kōwhai species	<i>Sophora prostrata</i> and <i>S. microphylla</i>	<i>Plagianthus regius</i>
Lancewood species	<i>Pseudopanax crassifolius</i> and <i>P. ferox</i>	<i>Hoheria angustifolia</i>
Shrubby tororaro	<i>Muehlenbeckia astonii</i>	<i>Pittosporum tenuifolium</i> and <i>P. eugenioides</i>
Toetoe	<i>Cortaderia richardii</i>	<i>Podocarpus totara</i>

The native plant species listed have been selected because when planted together they:

- Provide food for native birds for most of the year (nectar and fruit).
- Are local species which naturally occur in lowland south Marlborough and are attractive, hardy and easy to grow.
- Are available from local nurseries. Ask for the locally sourced plants - plants grown in root trainers are the best value.

Other non native plant species can also be attractive to native birds and may complement plantings however these species are **not funded through this programme**.

Examples include Eucalyptus species (*leucoxylo*n, *globoides*, *sideroxylo*n, *melidora*), Callistemon species (Bottlebrush), Banksia species, Camellia species and fruit trees.

Plant establishment and maintenance tips - plant in early spring after the worst frosts. Eliminate all weeds by either mulching or spraying. Mark plants with bamboo stakes. Mulch around plants (straw, weed-mat, bark etc). Weed control around new plants will be needed for several years until they become established.



Tūi to Town

Natural habitat restoration for lowland South Marlborough





Photo: Damien Toman

Tūi to Town - Natural habitat restoration for South Marlborough

The Tūi to Town programme is being extended from the Wairau Plain west further up the Wairau Valley and south to the Seddon/Ward areas!! The programme encourages habitat restoration by helping with funding for new native plantings and recording sightings of native birds to build a picture of what species are present and what habitat they are utilising.



The Tūi to Town programme arose through the Council's Significant Natural Areas project which, since 2004, has been supporting private landowners to protect existing areas of native habitat. However some areas, particularly lowland South Marlborough, have very little natural vegetation cover remaining. The rich variety of native birds, insects and lizards that existed in the dryland forests before the land was cleared by fire is mostly lost. While the area is nearly all dedicated to productive land uses like farming and viticulture, there is potential for some habitat restoration.

The Tūi to Town programme was set up in 2008 to promote habitat restoration on the Wairau Plain. Since that time, about 35 new plantings (30,000 plants), funded through the programme, have provided small stepping stones of habitat and food and Tūi have started visiting some of these areas.

The extension of the Tūi to Town programme in 2015 to the Wairau Valley and the Seddon/Ward areas allows funding to also be available to create new areas of habitat through new native plantings over a larger area than the Wairau Plain (see map).

All of these areas are identified by the Ministry for the Environment as Threatened Land Environments with less than 10% remaining in native cover and are therefore a priority for protection and restoration.

Habitat for native birds and insects – creating stepping stones

Diverse native forest habitats support a variety of birds and insects. Some native birds like tūi, kereru (wood pigeons) and kaka, have specific feed and habitat requirements and generally need a sizable area of native forest and habitat area to live and breed in a locality. However, these species can travel long distances (up to 20 km), to feed, so they can be seen some distance away from native forests at certain times of the year (mostly winter and spring before they start breeding).

Others, like bellbird, fantail, grey warbler and silvereve, are less specialist feeders (relying mostly on insects), and can therefore live and breed in areas with less native forest and habitat and make more use of gardens and parks.

Creating stepping stones and corridors of native habitat will help support native bird species in lowland South Marlborough including the Wairau Valley. By reporting native bird sightings (not just tūi), it will be help to build a picture of what native bird species are present in lowland south Marlborough and what habitats and plants they are relying on.

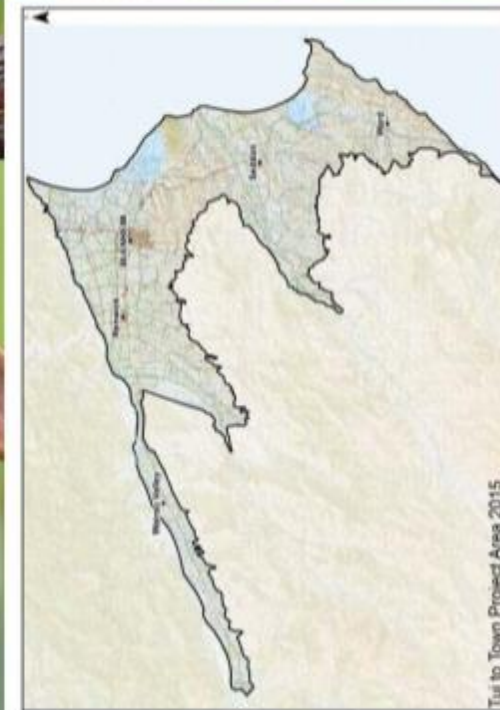
What you can do

Report sightings of native birds to the Council so that we can build a better picture of where and when various species are seen and what they are feeding on. Report by www.marlborough.govt.nz/Environment/Tui-to-Town/Report-Tui-Sighting-Form.aspx
Email: tui@marlborough.govt.nz Ph 5207400

Protect existing remnants of natural habitat like wetland areas or pockets of native vegetation on your property (Council may be able to help with this).

Create more natural habitat by planting suitable native species (see list over page), on your property, at your school or in your garden. Funding assistance is available for plantings of more than 1000 square metres on private property (\$1 per plant up to a maximum of \$1000).

Create community groups to tackle larger restoration projects on public land.



Tui to Town Project Area 2015

Information and help available from the Marlborough District Council

- See over page for simple planting suggestions.
- More detailed planting information is available in "Native Vegetation for South Marlborough - A Planting Guide".
- Financial assistance may be available for larger protection or restoration projects of more than 1000 square metres in area.

Contact Nicky Eade, Marlborough District Council
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