

Landowners deserve credit for plant conservation award

The New Zealand Plant Conservation Network has recognised the Marlborough District Council's Significant Natural Areas project with an award acknowledging conservation gains achieved in partnership with landowners, in lowland and coastal areas.

Much of the credit for this award goes to the many landowners who have worked with Council in the identification and protection of Significant Natural Areas. The programme would not have been successful without their cooperation and proactive approach, both in allowing SNA ecologists to visit their properties then often following up by protecting significant sites. A number of landowners have allowed Council to collect seed from the region's few remaining totara trees. Others are helping to assess the extent of various pests and weeds, so that Council can identify ways landowners can be best supported in their efforts to protect remaining native biodiversity.

So congratulations and thanks to those of you who have worked with Council so far. We look forward to together making further biodiversity gains, in the future.

Six hundred significant sites

Nearly 300 Marlborough landowners have now participated in the Significant Natural areas project, bringing the total of sites identified to about 600. In 2007, ecologists Geoff Walls and Philip Simpson surveyed about 20 properties, mostly in the Sounds plus a couple in south Marlborough.

While most of the SNA sites are in reasonable condition, others are extremely vulnerable due to small size, impacts of land-use such as spraying, accessibility to stock or pest and/or weed infestations. Almost all would benefit from some animal pest control. A number of landowners are working through the Council's Landowner Assistance Programme to protect sites while others are protecting them independently.

Eco-sourced totara for sale



Bridget Kenny and Shane Rohloff of Pernod Ricard plant totara trees at the companies Seddon vineyard

Thousands of totara grown from local seed-trees are ready for planting back into the Marlborough landscape. Last spring landowners with indigenous restoration or planting projects underway were offered seedlings from the first release of locally sourced totara.

The second release begins this autumn, for planting through to late spring. The seedlings were grown from seed collected at Manaroa, Kaituna, Koromiko, Ronga, Flaxbourne and Woodside. Seedlings originating from the area closest to the planting site should be selected.

The totara seed collection and propagation project was carried out by forest and restoration consultant, Paul Millen, for the Marlborough District Council. He says the best time to plant totara is usually early spring, when soils are moist and the worst of the frosts are over. In coastal areas early autumn plantings can give roots time to establish before the cold of winter sets in. Wetland margins and the flood zone behind are best planted in summer, when water levels are at their lowest.

The seedlings are available in root trainers from Morgans Road Nursery which grew out the seed, at \$2.25 per tree. With last spring/summer so dry, there are still some orders from last season waiting to be picked up, says nursery owner, Grant Robertson.

Totara seed will be collected again this season as well as limited amounts of seed from key Marlborough species including kahikatea, kowhai and lancewood. **Anyone interested in eco-sourced Marlborough natives for existing or planned plantings, should talk through requirements with Grant at 578 1412 morgansroadnursery.co.nz.**

Government sets national biodiversity protection priorities

Last year Government released its "Statement of National Priorities" to help guide local government efforts to promote biodiversity protection on private land; very relevant to the Significant Natural Areas project.

There are no surprises in the statement which aligns closely with priorities followed in Marlborough, over the last few years.

The four Government priorities are:-

1. Land environments with less than 20% remaining in indigenous cover (most of lowland New Zealand including the Wairau and Awatere plains and Cape Campbell/Ward areas)
2. Wetland and sand dune ecosystems.
3. "Originally rare" ecosystems which includes 53 naturally uncommon ecosystem types (e.g. braided rivers, coastal turf areas, geothermal areas etc)
4. Habitats of threatened indigenous species of plant and animal, (in Marlborough including birds such as weka, kereru and rifleman and plants such as pingao, *Muehlenbeckia astonii* and native broom species.)

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Conservation projects underway

Fencing of forests, the protection and restoring of wetlands, and pest and weed control are all underway on private properties in Marlborough. We catch up with some people making progress towards conserving some significant natural areas, with help from the Marlborough District Council and the QEII National Trust.

QEII protects Marlborough Ridge wetland

The day John and Robyn Cuddon received a letter confirming that the QEII National Trust would covenant their Marlborough Ridge wetland, four royal spoonbills flew in to visit the restored site.

There've been some back-breaking days since willows were cleared from the overgrown wetland in 2003, says Robyn. At times, she thought the thousands of native seedlings planted would lose the battle against weeds. However, hours of targeted spraying followed up with hand-pulling and now mechanical weed-eating, paid off.

Water has now returned to the wetland, including run-off diverted from a subdivision developed by the Cuddons on the hills behind. With the water have come birds including grey teal, mallard, NZ shoveler, NZ scaup (black teal), paradise shelduck, Australian coot, pukeko, welcome swallow and Australasian harrier.

A next step will be to find out what predators are an issue and then if necessary, carry out control, including stoats and ferrets. John and Robyn hope to encourage fellow

Ridge residents to enjoy the wetland and perhaps consider not replacing pet cats!

Robyn admits to a major shift in thinking during the years she's committed to the wetland, from wanting to create a tidy parkland to appreciating the beauty of a less disciplined natural wetland landscape.

In an ecological assessment for the Marlborough District Council, ecologist Geoff Walls described the Cuddon wetland as "an oasis in a highly modified landscape. Already being ecologically restored, it has the potential to become a high-quality showpiece."



The Cuddons' wetland at Marlborough Ridge



Leona & Liam Plaisier check a possum trap set up beside the new gecko enclosure

forested land. This has included permanently protecting the majority of the property with a QEII covenant.

Ellen, Brian and their children Leona and Liam have reduced animal pest numbers through a long term

Plaisiers recreate healthy ecosystem

Since settling in the outer Pelorus Sounds close to 15 years ago, the Plaisier family have steadily improved conservation values on their 42 hectares of

trapping programme, recently boosted by assistance from the Marlborough District Council's Landowner Assistance Programme. They are working towards recreating a healthy ecosystem of native plants and animals that would have been present before humans arrived in the Sounds.

Another recent project which Council helped with was building some enclosures so native skink and gecko species can be safely reintroduced. Weka numbers are well up and the kohekohe forest is making a comeback now that possum, rat and stoat numbers are very low.

The Plaisiers have established low impact tourist accommodation on the property and share their knowledge and enthusiasm with many visitors.

www.tuinaturereserve.co.nz

Old mans beard tackled at Peggioh

Susan King and Barry Hope of Peggioh (inland from Ward), are making a concerted effort to control old mans beard.

Old mans beard is a real threat to a number of Significant Natural Areas, particularly in south Marlborough where it can easily invade and take over smaller sites with lots of "edge" area providing plenty of light.

Susan and Barry have been farming the 1300ha Peggioh, in the Medway ecological district, for nearly four years. In that time they have made quite a few changes to the way the property is managed, including inviting SNA ecologist Geoff Walls to survey the property and advise them on its many and varied ecological values.

Three areas have been covenanted and fenced through the QEII National Trust. With financial assistance from the Marlborough District Council and central government's Biodiversity Fund, Susan has been focusing on controlling old mans beard in some of these areas. It is proving to be hard work but progress is being made with the help of a part-time contractor using the cut and paint method (cut the vines at ground level and paint stumps with suitable chemical).

An information sheet on old mans beard control is available from the Council.



Phil Alley at work removing old mans beard on Peggioh

Project aims to draw tui to town

Rural landowners have so far been the focus of the Marlborough Significant Natural Areas programme. However, the attention will soon extend to town.

Areas of indigenous cover are few and far between on the Wairau Plain including urban areas of Blenheim, Renwick and Spring Creek, all in the Blenheim ecological district.

A recent report from Eric Spurr of Landcare Research looked into the lack of native birds on the Wairau Plain. The focus was on tui; a well-known species which would have once been common there. Now they are seen only occasionally, when drawn from forested areas of the Northbank where they live and breed, to feed on nectar producing plants such as flax, kowhai and eucalyptus species.

The report stated the obvious – that for native birds like tui to re-occupy the Wairau Plain, increasing areas of habitat suitable for feeding and breeding would be essential.



Enticing native birds across the Wairau Plain from the Northbank by providing a series of “stepping stones” of natural habitat shouldn’t be too hard if a whole range of landowners and managers (including the Marlborough District Council), get behind the idea.

The Council plans to set up a database to record bird sightings on the plains and to map sites to get an overview of existing and new planting projects. Already, a number of organisations, groups and individuals are working on natural area restoration projects on the Wairau Plain. The Council intends to support these efforts by providing information about suitable planting choice and design for native restoration projects.

Watch out for the launch of the “Tui to Town” project in autumn.

Copies of the Landcare Research report are available on request.

Lizard refuges revisited

Lizards (geckos and skinks) are a very important part of the NZ fauna being the only major group of vertebrate animals besides birds, and occupying almost all



Marlborough green gecko

ecosystems from mountains to the coast. They play an important role in ecosystems, for instance pollinating plants and dispersing seeds. New Zealand’s lizard species (about 80 in total), have unique evolutionary traits and are vulnerable to predators such as cats, rats and stoats. Thirteen species have been recorded in Marlborough, with six considered threatened.

Marlborough District Council staff member Mike Bell is checking out lizard populations in South Marlborough, to get a handle on native fauna inhabiting Significant Natural Areas. Initial surveys last summer looked at which lizard, insect and bird species were present in a handful of SNA identified sites around the Ward/Cape Campbell area. Methods for catching/observing these animals were trialled, including “weta refuges” for insects (a block of untreated wood with a cavity and a sliding inspection panel) and “pitfall traps” for lizards (paint tins set into the ground, baited and checked regularly).

A variety of insects and three species of lizard (spotted and common skink and Marlborough mini gecko), were found in a range of sites.

This year, as well as revisiting some of last year’s sites, Mike will check out lizard populations on three properties in the Ure, the Medway and Haldon Hills. A new type of refuge will be added to the repertoire - triple layers of Onduline sheet placed on the ground in strategic locations.

The information gathered should be useful in planning what sort of protection might be needed to maintain existing populations at healthy numbers. Habitat protection and predator control are two likely strategies.

For more information on New Zealand lizards see the New Zealand Herpetological Society website

www.reptiles.org.nz , Also check out

www.landcareresearch.co.nz/research.wildlifeecology/herpetology and [www.doc.govt.nz/Conservation/nativeanimals/reptiles & frogs](http://www.doc.govt.nz/Conservation/nativeanimals/reptiles&frogs).

Fish surveys in Sounds

Good numbers of native fish were found, during recent Significant Natural Areas surveys of some Marlborough Sounds streams.

Night-time spot-lighting and day-time electric fishing techniques were used to survey fish species present in the main Kenepuru Head stream as well as waterways in Elie and Hopai Bays.

Good numbers of native fish species were found including redfin bully, common bully, bluegill bully, giant bully, banded kokapu, dwarf galaxis, koaro, inanga, shrimps, and shortfin and longfin eels.

All these streams were in relatively good condition with stony bottoms. Shade from riparian vegetation was keeping them cool and providing insect and bird habitat which in turn provided food for native fish, all of which are carnivorous.

As most native freshwater fish are small and nocturnal they are not generally very well known. Thanks to the Godsiff, Hopkinson and Gerard families for their help with these surveys.



Electric fishing at Mike and Kristen Gerards property in the Sounds

Native regeneration earns carbon credits

Marlborough farmers Geoff and Liz Adams are farming carbon along with sheep, cattle and grapes on their farm on the northbank of the Wairau River. In September last year, the family sold credits on 560ha of regenerating native bush through the Crown Research Institute, Landcare Research. Registration and assessment was done under Landcare Research's Emissions-Biodiversity Exchange for the 21st century (EBEX21, an offsetting scheme for sellers) and sold through its business foot-printing and emissions reduction programme, CarboNZero.

Payments are about \$36/ha/year, based on accumulation of three carbon units/hectare/year, at about \$22/unit with costs of roughly \$10/unit then deducted.

Ideally, a carbon-farming site will have been in pasture in 1990, the baseline year to be eligible for Kyoto Protocol offset sites, says Landcare Research ecologist, Larry Burrows. There should be an indigenous seed source nearby. Mature forest doesn't qualify as it's no longer accumulating carbon. Having a Significant Natural Areas survey report for their property could add value to the Adams' credits, with biodiversity increasingly seen as a co-benefit.

Plan of action for climate change

Government's Plan of Action for climate change includes three ways forest owners can sell Kyoto Protocol compliant New Zealand Units (NZUs) of carbon sequestered.

Post-1989 exotic and native forests are eligible to trade Government guaranteed NZUs under the Emissions Trading Scheme, which will work across all sectors of the economy with inclusion of pre-1990 indigenous forest being considered. The Permanent Forest Sink Initiative (PFSI) also enables owners of post-1989 exotic and indigenous forest to claim NZUs. Active management – such as propagating and planting locally sourced seedlings, pest and weed control or fencing – will be required with limited harvesting allowed.

There is also the option tendering for a Government grant to establish native or exotic forest or encourage regeneration, under the Afforestation Grant Scheme.

Trades in carbon credits will continue on the grey market, but not on forest which will already be accounted for on New Zealand's Kyoto register, says Larry.

To find out more about some carbon trading options, visit www.maf.govt.nz/climatechange



Northbank farmer Geoff Adams, is collecting carbon credits on land reverting to scrub.

Packages for protection

Funding options available to help Marlborough landowners protect ecologically significant sites include;

- The Marlborough District Council's Landowner Assistance Programme, for conservation projects costing \$10,000 or less
- For projects costing more than \$10,000, the Council will generally apply to the Ministry for the Environment and Department of Conservation's Biodiversity Fund for support. Contact Nicky Eade, 520 7400 nicky.eade@marlborough.govt.nz
- The QEII National Trust assists with protection costs including surveying and fencing covenant areas. Contact Anna Polson, field officer, 574 1194
- The NZ Landcare Trust provides grants to land user groups with projects integrating the conservation of native species with sustainable production. Contact Barbara Stuart, 03 545 0443.
- Various covenanting options are offered by DoC. Contact Jack Hayward, DoC Nelson 03 546 9335.
- Other potential funding sources include the Nature Heritage Fund, the Ministry for the Environment's Sustainable Management Fund, The Department of Internal Affairs Pacific Development and Conservation Trust, New Zealand Community Trust, BOC Where There's Water Community Environmental Grants, the World Wide Nature Habitat Protection Fund and Lottery Environment and Heritage Grants.

Recommended Reading

The Marlborough District Council and Department of Conservation have published a number of publications relevant to people protecting the ecology of Marlborough, all available on request;

- The South Marlborough Significant Natural Areas Project Summary
- The Wairau Ecological Region Protected Natural Areas Report (DoC)
- The South Marlborough Planting Guide
- Marlborough's Freshwater Flora & Fauna – a field guide
- Brochures on wetlands, old man's beard control
- Threatened Plants of South Marlborough; a field guide. (DoC)

If you would like your property surveyed for ecologically significant sites or to enquire about protection options, contact Nicky Eade at the MDC 520 7400 nicky.eade@marlborough.govt.nz

