WINDY HILL ROSALIE BAY CATCHMENT TRUST

Windy Hill Sanctuary Newsletter #47 December 2024

Kia ora and Seasons greetings

We have had a cracker of a year!!

- Our fantastic field team - Jordan Scarlett, Paul Lee, Kerryn Johnson, Corey Hardstaff, and Liam Clark have delivered big time despatching 1,967 rats and 21 feral cats, cleared and newly marked 29.5kms of tracks, and attacked a range of weeds. The annual Monitoring programme has been completed for rats, invertebrates, lizards, weta, and birds. Keri Lyon left the team in October having done a great job on track remarking over the year. 52 feral pigs were culled by Dean Medland.
- Our volunteer landowners continued to manage rats and report catches.
- We had an awesome lichen and moss bio-blitz in October with Otago University's Allison Knight and Maia Mistral-Armour – the art of these beautiful species decorate this newsletter. Over 300 specimens were taken for further analysis.
- Sealink increased their Sanctuary sponsorship to cover all our freight for the year – amazing support, thank you.

Technology continues to play an increasing role in the Sanctuary operations - this newsletter from Assistant Trust Manager Lou Mack and I is focused on the technology that has evolved within the Sanctuary over time. The first step was the introduction of GPS in the mid-2000s. Prior to this great piece of equipment our entire tracking system had been built using knowledge of the contours of the land and a measured string to establish correct distances between tracks and stations. The first attempts at marking our tracks and monitoring stations on a map using GPS data resulted in 'spaghetti 'art as the team learnt to master the finer points of establishing locations on a map.

We were saved by the remarkable intervention of Kelvin Floyd who has, since early 2007, annually crafted comprehensive maps from our GPS data detailing all our equipment, monitoring stations, weeds, plants of interest, and seabird burrows. These are added to annually as we expand the Sanctuary area and increase equipment and monitoring locations. Overview maps of Sanctuary, its landowners, the five Pest Managed Areas, and the scale of our monitoring programme have proved to be great tools for showcasing our project and supporting funding applications.

The introduction of the first ever iPhone in 2007, closely followed by the first Android device has snowballed technology as we know it. Ever since, smartphones have evolved exponentially and the potential for their use in conservation, mapping, data collection, navigation, comms, plant and species identification, cameras and remote monitoring has changed the face of conservation as we know it.

The journey began with the field team getting set up with robust smart phones for field use and using locus for navigation and entering points of interest or dangers. It has continued in 2024 with the introduction of Field Maps to the team – kindly made possible by the generosity of Tu Mai Taonga. This app is currently being used by several groups on the island with the hope that all the community trapping and pest control groups will be included next year. This will be an amazing island wide shared database of trapping networks and trapping data.
Field maps contains huge amounts of information about Windy Hills trap networks: tracks, locations of traps and bait stations, hazards, points of interest and can collect all our data, moving the team away from pen and paper for data collection.

The team has also started using the council owned Ruru for recording weed infestations and weed control undertaken on the sanctuary. Ruru is a version of field maps but specifically for weeds in this instance.

This year a lot of time has been spent on upskilling the team in their use and ground truthing the information in the app for the Sanctuary. Lots of hiccups and snags along the way but we have had a huge amount of support from Auckland Council and Scott Sambell and the team at Ethos Environmental. They have gone above and beyond in helping get the team up and running this year, ironing out glitches and running training sessions for the field team. We are immensely grateful for their support to the Sanctuary.

More Highlights

- Lou Mack now has a good handle on Field Operations and led the series of team meetings over the year completing the first stage of the Sanctuary Management succession plan. Lou reports monthly to Auckland Council on pest catches, monitoring, training, events, and meetings.
- Our Sanctuary annual average rat tracking tunnel index came in at 8.3%. In the unmanaged control site, it was 49%. Great result for the hard working field team.
- The 21 HA Sanctuary expansion into the Wesney and Morrison property has the tracks almost completed and the field equipment on site ready to be operational early in the new year.
- Two Cooks petrel burrows and a new black petrel burrow were located on the Windy Hill cliffs when Jo Sim and her dog carried out the annual seabird survey.
- The Landcare Research Kaka Dispersal project is in its second year here with nine nests located in the Windy Hill pest managed area. Fledglings will be fitted with transmitters and banded over the summer which will allow their dispersal to be tracked.
- After a workshop with Nik Erikson from Auckland Council the field team is up to speed on weeds.
- Planning is underway for the 4th Hochstetter Frog survey in Te Paparahi in April 2025. This will be followed by a community lizard workshop led by herpetologist Sarah Herbert. We have been working closely with Ngati Rehua Ngati Wai ki Aotea in planning this survey.

- This year funding was approved from the QEII National Trust with continued funding from Foundation North and Auckland Council. Thank you. A funding application is pending with DoC Community Conservation Fund – this fund is focussed on threatened species of which we have 7 in the Sanctuary – black petrel, chevron skink, pateke, paua slugs, and plants Pimelea Tomentosa, Ramarama, and the recently discovered Scandia Rosafolia.
  Negotiations are underway with Auckland Council for a 2025 Funding Agreement.

Allison and Maia at work on moss and lichen specimens

We sign off for the year looking forward to a holiday break and returning in the New Year with vigour and enthusiasm.
This community based Sanctuary made up of 53 landowners partnered with the Windy Hill Rosalie Bay Catchment Trust is really hitting its straps made possible by the generous support it receives. Thank you.

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SEALINK

As I look out my window, the hills in my view are covered in manuka in blossom – a very kiwi white Xmas .

Kindest regards
Judy Gilbert, Lou Mack
On behalf Trustees John Ogden and Deb Badraun