

ARC's Eco Care programme provides information, resources, training and advice to community groups throughout Auckland to support their work for the environment. In this issue groups share their ideas on how to measure success as well as how to promote and communicate what they do.



Monitoring can produce unexpected results, such as finding an endangered Moko skink, as was discovered on Motuihe Island this year.

Counting matters

Monitoring might sound like the boring part of the job, but it can also attract volunteers who might prefer to do that than dig out weeds and stick in plants. "A lot of people don't want to do the head down, bum up planting and weeding all day," says Matt Baber who, as a volunteer for the Motuihe Island Restoration Trust, oversaw the development of a monitoring programme on the island.

Monitoring has often been left to the experts, but Matt and others working in this area use and promote methods aimed at volunteers. The island is using Formak protocol (see page 3). Forty monitoring stations have been established on a 200 x 200 metre grid, each of which is a "one-stop-shop" for the counting of birds, invertebrates, reptiles and plants. Once a month, from October to April, 16 or so volunteers divide into pairs and visit five stations and count what is there. The work often appeals to people who are keen to learn a new skill, or university students

wanting to get some field experience.

Motuihe Island has 179 hectares with approximately 18 hectares of remnant coastal forest. Many describe it as the next Tiritiri Matangi, only 20 years behind. But the Motuihe Trust has the benefit of learning from the pioneer restoration project.

"One thing they wished they had done at Tiri, in retrospect, was get a better understanding of what the ecological conditions were like before they planted a quarter of a million trees, and kept a more thorough record of the changes once they did," says Matt. Hence monitoring on Motuihe began immediately after the pests were eliminated and the restoration work began. "It's becoming more common to do this," says Matt. "People are just wanting to know more and have a better understanding of the fruits of their labour."

www.motuihe.org.nz

Cr Dianne Glenn, Chair of ARC's Environmental Management Committee says thanks: "So many people in groups contribute so much each year, working together for the local environment, whether it's in gumboots digging holes or in the evening organizing events and meetings." We wish you a well deserved rest these holidays and look forward to working with you in the New Year.

Monitoring: what's the point?

Without monitoring we are guided by hunches and anecdote, rather than by real evidence that we are doing what we have set out to do. It makes sense, therefore, to establish a monitoring framework at the same time that you set out your project plan; this will allow you to evaluate progress towards your group's objectives. Proof of progress will help you attract and keep volunteers, get funding and, at the very least, remind you on those cold muddy mornings why you are even bothering.

Monitoring also contributes to the general understanding of our environment and how it responds to our efforts. For instance, knowing what food resources are available at a site may provide valuable insights on what factors influence the success of any species translocations, informing on-going work and other similar projects.

If possible, share the knowledge. Judy Gilbert, of Windy Hill Trust on Great Barrier Island, which is monitoring freshwater species and sending the data to NIWA says: "If you can, connect your monitoring data to bigger databases, so the information doesn't just sit in a file."

We welcome feedback on this newsletter and are keen to hear any story ideas from your group. Contact the ARC's Eco Care Coordinator, Caren Shrubshall, on 09 366 2000.

From zero to lots

You might be sure your work is having an impact, but it helps to be able to prove it. "We had a scientific approach and were able to show these outcomes with these nice graphs, but they were quite simple ones," says Judy Gilbert, one of the landowners of the Windy Hill Rosalie Bay Catchment Trust on Great Barrier Island. "But people were really taken aback."

It was at a recent "Rat Attack" workshop that Judy reported the results of a monitoring programme in which the ecology of Windy Hill, a 240 hectare area on the island which has been managed for pests since 1999, was compared to a control area, that is, a block of land in the same area which hasn't had pest control.



Monitoring streams on Windy Hill

This involved comparing the numbers of rats, lizards, wetas, birds and seedlings over a year. Results showed that the rat population was around 15 percent (of known numbers) on Windy Hill, but it was around 86 percent -- sometimes 100 percent -- in the unmanaged area. Forty weta were found on Windy Hill, but only one in the control site, and 17 lizards were found on Windy Hill, but none in the control site. Windy Hill also had slightly more birds, and twice as many seedlings.

Tangible evidence can be very persuasive, especially when talking to the unconverted. "It isn't rocket science and nor does it have to be," she says. "But people could see the evidence. And it was local. This was their patch, this is what is going on under their noses. This is what is going on in their bush."

Keeping track of reality



Sandra Jack, project manager for Ark in the Park, with hihi.

Photos: Eric Wilson

Reintroducing a rare species into your area may boost group morale, but....

In late November, a hihi nest was found in the Waitakere Ranges, the first confirmed breeding of hihi (stitchbird) on the mainland, outside an enclosure, since 1885.

This was one of the 59 hihi released into the Cascade Kauri region earlier this year, thanks to the efforts of Ark in the Park, a pest control programme spearheaded by Waitakere Forest and Bird, in partnership with the ARC.

The group has been busily monitoring the birds since their release. They know that some have died, some have disappeared, but at least seven male hihi are ready for breeding. "Things are looking positive," says Ark's project manager, Sandra Jack.

Ark in the Park is one of the most ambitious and successful conservation efforts in the Auckland region, and getting a bird as rare as the hihi into the area was a considerable achievement. But while the reintroduction of a rare species inevitably boosts group morale, it also comes with an obligation to keep track of what happens next, not just in the following season after the release, but over several seasons.

Ongoing monitoring demands time and effort, and can also be costly. Ark in the

Park had to raise \$40,000 for the hihi translocation. This included the cost of screening the birds for disease, but also monitoring transmitters and equipment, and the cost of contracting someone to spend weeks in the bush observing the birds over the forthcoming breeding season. "I don't think we realised it would cost that much," says Sandra. "It just kept going up, so we've been very lucky to get the funding for it."

Hihi is an extremely vulnerable bird, partly because it appears to be particularly susceptible to disease, and partly because it nests in tree holes. "So there's only one way out, and that's usually where the rat is," says Sandra. However, this is exactly why the Hihi Recovery Group decided to release the bird into the Waitakere Ranges; to find out whether the species can survive in the presence of low numbers of predators.

Monitoring the results of any translocation is crucial. It not only alerts you to what is happening in your area and how effective your pest control is, but helps us understand our indigenous species.

"Even if it fails, as long as we know why it didn't work, that's all part of the learning," says Sandra.

www.forestandbird.org.nz/ark

Tools for keeping track

One of the most useful environmental monitoring resources is available online, at www.formak.co.nz, developed by ecology consultants, PA Handford & Associates Ltd, specifically for non-specialist volunteers and community groups.

Formak has two parts. The first is a thorough and detailed guide to monitoring, what you'll need and how to go about it, information on identifying a good monitoring site, as well as information on how best to actually monitor birds, reptiles, invertebrates and plants.

The other part is a website, a site to store all the relevant data for your group. The idea is that when individuals move on, the historical records don't go with them.

In February next year, this will expand to include a photo point module that will let you store photographs from your site.

The ARC runs Formak workshops twice a year. For more information contact the Heritage team via **09 366 2000** or info@arc.govt.nz



Awhitu Landcare Group, FORMAK-ing

Community Net has several how-to guides for community groups, including one on developing a marketing and communications plan, a good starting point in promoting your group or organisation to funders and volunteers: www.community.net.nz/how-toguides/marketing/publicationsresources

DOC - From Seeds to Success. Some excellent guidelines on monitoring - why and how - are available in "Seeds to Success". Go to www.doc.govt.nz and search for "success guidelines 40480".

Grabbing the limelight

Given that dozens of planting days occur around the Auckland region throughout winter, how do you get the media to pay you any attention?

There are never any guarantees, but it helps if you are willing to grab any opportunities that come your way.

On 29 June 2007, 1,000 trees were put into Logan Carr Reserve by local school children from five local schools. This planting day was the result of Botany Town Centre and its "1+1=Tree" campaign teaming up with Gecko NZ, a voluntary organisation aimed at getting communities involved in their environment. It was one planting day among many, yet it attracted considerable media attention, from radio stations, the local paper and TV One's *Breakfast* show.

How come? Partly this was because Botany Town Centre could afford to hire public relations help to draw attention to its campaign. Partly it was because Gecko was prepared to accommodate the company's desire for media coverage, even if this involved rescheduling the event, at the last minute, in order to fit in with *Breakfast's* wish to do a live cross before 9am.

"We were in partnership with this company, and they had their objectives and we had ours and some in which we could meet in the middle," says Gecko coordinator Chrissy Henley. "So in this instance we could tweak things a little and help them meet their media objectives. And it had a phenomenal spin off for us."

Chris Ferkins, Gecko trustee and Chair agrees: "It definitely put additional requirements on us, but also additional opportunities. The school kids were really chuffed to see themselves on TV and of course the exposure of the event gave the event itself more kudos and that increased the likelihood the event would be run again."

The "1+1=Tree" campaign run by Botany Town Centre as well as Lynmall, went on to win Australasian AMP Capital Award for Corporate Social Responsibility.

Gecko Trust: www.manawa.org.nz/new.php?group=17



Gecko NZ also teamed up with Lynmall to organise the planting day of its "1+1=Tree" campaign. This time the cameras came from TV2's "Studio Two" programme, and accompanied by popular children's presenter, Olaf. The children were so happy to see him, reports Gecko coordinator Chrissy Henley, they knocked him over. "When you get a TV personality turning up you have to manage that and still somehow get the planting done," she says. "You just have to accept that the focus won't be on the planting for a while, and go with that."

