

ECO CARE NEWS



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Volunteers, Motuora Island

Conservation in New Zealand is dependent on the kindness and generosity of public spirited volunteers, prepared to invest time and energy for the love of the land. But community conservation isn't always easy. In this issue of Eco Care we talk to a number of groups in the Auckland region about the issues involved in getting a community project started, and what keeps them going.

Show me the money

“Success builds success,” says the Kaipatiki Project's funding volunteer, Helen Morton. “If you get funding and then successfully complete a project it makes it easier to get more funding. You can show that you have experience and that you can deliver.”

The Kaipatiki Project began over ten years ago, when one North Shore resident, Jenny Christianson, was so dismayed at the state of her local reserve she began clearing it of rubbish and weeds herself.

She then started firing off outraged letters to the council and the local rag. A resulting news article resulted in some of her neighbours and even a few local businesses offering their support for the restoration of the Witheford Reserve. One good act led to another, and these days, the Kaipatiki Project is an incorporated society which has its own environment centre, one full-time employee and two part-time employees. (A natural heritage coordinator, an education coordinator, and an administrator.)

While it still works with the community to restore Witheford Scenic Reserve, Kaipatiki has expanded its aims. Its current vision is **“Inspiring Communities to Live Sustainably”** and it does so

through biodiversity workshops, education bush tours, mangrove tours, courses on sustainable living, plant propagation, smart shopping, energy efficiency et al. Some of these workshops generate income: Helen says projects of any size should find ways of generating income.

Getting funding can be hard work, but it's a system, and you just need to find out how it works. Firstly, suggests Helen, gather the evidence of your achievements. You may be surprised to find how much evidence there to gather. It could be the numbers of plants planted, the number of community events held. It could be the number of volunteer hours given to your project, tangible evidence that the community is behind you.

Regular evaluation and monitoring is crucial, especially for larger, ongoing projects. “It really needs to be built into a project from the start,” says Helen. **“Most funding agencies will want to see right up front how you intend to monitor the project.”** Some agencies, especially government agencies, have complicated accountability mechanisms, and the corresponding forms can be bewildering. It helps if you have people on board familiar with modern business templates.

Helen says that once projects get to a certain size, it is quite likely they will need to employ staff. (In Kaipatiki's case, to run education programmes.) Getting the funding for salaries can be complicated, but isn't impossible. It usually means appealing for funding for the project (which will include labour costs) rather than for a salary. It helps if you can show you have management systems in place, and people on board with some experience with them.

Helen says figuring out how to get money has been a “learning curve”, and often a challenging one. But she is only encouraging, pointing to the numerous resources that are out there. (See box on page 2.)

She also suggests you get on as many pertinent e-mailing lists as you can. “And set up a calendar that shows the deadlines for everything that is coming up.” Speaking of which, readers now have two weeks to complete an application for the Environmental Initiatives Fund, which closes 5pm, Friday, 27 July.

For more information contact Courtney Miller at: courtney.miller@arc.govt.nz

Funding: where to get it

The ARC booklet, **Environmental Funding for Community Groups** lists all the known sources of environmental funding for projects in the Auckland region (www.arc.govt.nz/arc/environment/funding/).

The **Funding How-to Guide** (www.community.net.nz/how-toguides/Funding) is an excellent starting point for those seeking advice on grants, sponsorship and other types of funding.

Fundview (www.fis.org.nz) has detailed information about community funders throughout the country. Most public libraries and Citizen Advice Bureaus in Auckland will give you free access. While you're there (and at www.fis.org.nz), also check out Breakout, a data base that lists grants, award and scholarships available for individuals, many of which are related to the environment.

The **North Shore Community and Social Services** also offers a wide range of booklets/fact sheets, such as *Guide to Funding Applications, Sponsorship*. (Phone 09 486 4820)

Your local council offers funding, training and advice. Ask for the Community Adviser or Parks Officer.

Beat the Backlog!

All charitable organisations that wish to be eligible for "charitable purpose" based tax exemptions after 1 July 2008 will need to register with the Charities Commission as soon as possible (by June 2008 at latest) or they will lose their charitable tax exemption benefits.

This includes those who already have charitable status, who will need to register with the Charities Commission to keep their status. The tax exemption situation has changed due to amendments to the Income Tax Act 2004 and Estate and Gift Duties Act 1968. These amendments take effect from 1 July 2008.

If you are not already registered with the Commission and want the tax benefits for your group, consider applying as soon as possible. Only registered charities will be eligible for tax-exempt status based on charitable purpose after 1 July 2008.

The Commission is urging organisations to apply for registration as soon as possible, to avoid any uncertainty about ongoing tax exemptions.

Find out more about the benefits of registration and how to register at: www.charities.govt.nz or call the Charities Commission's free information line 0508 Charities (0508 242 748).

First, state your intent



Celebrating the deaths

For the past **three years** a group of around **50** landowners in south Auckland have been trying to rid **2,500 hectares** of one of our most destructive mammals.

They have also been remarkably successful; last year the Baldhill Landcare Group, or less formally, the Baldhill Possumbashers, celebrated the death of 5,000 possums with a cake.

Baldhill is in the Puni-Pukeoware area, on the border between Waikato and Pukekohe. It's a popular breeding ground for kereru, due to the considerable stands of taraire tree in the area. The trees produce fleshy purple berries between May and October, which coincides with the pigeon's nesting season, as they provide a rich protein source for the chicks.

Thanks to the Possumbashers (with the help of the ARC, Environment Waikato and Franklin District Council) the residual trap catch of possums has been reduced from 38 percent to six percent. In some areas – where funding has made more bait stations possible – it's as low as two percent.

If a conservation group wants to get anywhere fast, says Possumbasher Andrew Sinclair, it should develop a strategic plan. It's fundamental when lobbying for funding, but also forces you to clarify exactly what you want to do.

This might sound like stating the obvious – you're all on the same wavelength, right? "I've learnt this is business," says Andrew. "If you've got a group of people

at a meeting they will go in all sorts of different directions." It is remarkably easy, for instance, for the conversation to be diverted from wood pigeons to say, local recycling issues. Meetings that meander can kill community enthusiasm. "If you have a goal it gives you some sort of identity; this is what we are about. Then you're more likely to get something done."

The Baldhill Possumbashers have kept things simple. Its strategic plan is outlined simply and concisely, and takes up no more than a page. It states the group's vision, its specific objectives, and how it intends to achieve them. One of the key visions is to enhance the native wildlife, with a focus on kereru and bats. Its first objective is to increase the woodpigeon population five fold in the first five years. The first thing on the "how to" list is to "focus initial energy primarily on possum and rat control".

There are now 200 bait stations throughout the Baldhill area. The group is monitoring both the traps, and the bird populations. It's too early for any firm figures of their impact on the birds, but there is anecdotal evidence. "One guy said he saw a flock of 30 or so pigeons five or six months ago," says Andrew. "There is certainly a lot of activity. I just saw two fly across as we were talking."

Agree to agree



Volunteers in the Motuora Island Restoration Society's nursery

The numbers of restoration projects is growing, which is good news, but it also means that there are less planters to go around.

“There’s a lot of competition to get planters these days,” says Ray Lowe, chair of the Motuora Island Restoration Society.

As this was being written, the society were readying for the Gold Coin Trip. They called it this because the society had decided that they might lure the numbers in by offering them a free trip. (Well, almost free; volunteers would be charged \$1 for the return journey, a trip that would usually cost \$16.) The tactic evidently worked, as 140 seats available were quickly snapped up. “Well we’ve got 5,000 trees that need to go in the ground,” says Ray.

Motuora Island is a Recreation Reserve in the Hauraki Gulf, south of Kawau Island and north of Auckland. The reserve is jointly managed by the society and the Department of Conservation (DoC). The Motuora Restoration Society was established in 1995, although the project had begun five years earlier. It plants around 25,000 plants/year and over the past decade it has planted 300,000. “I think that’s quite an achievement,” says Ray.

An island project has its own idiosyncratic challenges. Most obviously, there is the weather. If it’s too inclement to take a boat load out, the whole planting day will be postponed. Foul weather on the mainland project generally only means less people turn up.

The society also has an idiosyncratic approach to restoration. It grows all its own plants, in its own nursery that it has built on the island, from seed sourced from the island or nearby islands. It has

a translocation plan that follows the food chain, reintroducing species from the bottom up, the idea being that nothing is introduced until there is a well-established food source for it. “So that what we introduce doesn’t eat itself out of existence.”

Hence, they have eschewed high profile birds for lower profile invertebrates. First off the boat, last year, were the Duvaucel’s geckos and shore skinks. (The island already has the most iconic bird of all, as Motuora is used by DoC as a kiwi crèche, although that is independent of the society’s work.)

This group has never wavered from its unique approach, and has a notably consistent membership. Meetings are held once a month, and they go on for hours, yet people continue to turn up. Ray, who has been the chair for the last eight years, attributes this to their consensual approach. “I personally think that’s why it works,” he says. “Too many projects can fall down because someone has a mission. This is not about us, its about the project. We all decide on everything that happens and make sure that everyone is okay with everything that happens.” If that takes time, and it usually does, then so be it.

“We’ve done all the mission statements and the 10 year plan. We’ve done all that. But I think what holds it together is that we don’t do anything unless we all agree and we will keep working through it until we do. We have conservative people and we have pushy people, but somehow we have a great stability.”

For the love of it...

The Centennial Park Bush Society has begun trapping rats and possums, but a lot more volunteers are needed before the group can do this at a meaningful level.

“We’ve got about 10 rat traps and six possum traps,” says the society’s chair, Richard Hursthouse. “We probably need about 20 possum traps and 200 rat traps to make a real difference.”

Any conservation projects lives and dies on getting enough volunteers willing to give their time and energy for a cause greater than themselves, so how do you get them, and how do you keep them coming back?

Having a charismatic bird to protect (or to reintroduce) is always a great motivator for any restoration group, tends to attract a lot of publicity and therefore more volunteers. But conservation is often about less captivating matters, such as rat-trapping, and weeding. “When you talk about weeds, most people’s eyes glaze over,” agrees Richard.

Centennial Park Bush Society is based in Campbells Bay, North Shore, and covers 70 hectares. Around 40 hectares of that is a golf course, and the rest is regenerating native bush. There is also plenty of ginger, monkey apple, pampas grass, privet and other exotic weeds, which the society has been gradually removing and replacing with native plants. This year the society plans to plant 1,300 natives. Last year they planted 1,700.

But not everyone wants to weed, and not everyone wants to plant. “It’s important to recognise that supporters come in all shapes and sizes,” says Richard, noting that Centennial Park’s supporters include those who prefer to donate money rather than time, neighbours who give them access to the park through their properties, the individual prepared to be treasurer and the individual willing to take meeting minutes.

He recommends that you find ways to make people feel appreciated; this may involve something as simple as providing a cup of tea and ensuring there is time to chat. And it’s imperative people are always kept in the loop. “It’s really important that people feel involved and that their views are being heard and that they know they are part of the decision-making process.”

Most importantly, if you want to keep people interested, avoid imposing schedules or obligations or asking for more than people are able to give. “This is volunteering,” he says. “You have to recognise that people have limits on how much time they can put in. And every smidgen of time is valuable.”

Recent arrival



left: Kawau Island / inset: Herbie the chihuahua learns to avoid kiwis

The Kawau Island Kiwi Care Trust is a new community group in the Auckland region.

The trust was initially Nick Randall's idea, and Nick has also been the project's driving force. Asked what he'd do differently if had the last 12 months again he says: "I wouldn't do it," and laughs.

The first year of any project is usually the most demanding, especially for the person who had the bright idea in the first place. "I probably hadn't really worked out how much it will fall back on one person. And the more it falls back on one person the more difficult it is to delegate. It's your baby. You've given birth to it and nurtured it to this point and it's a bit hard, if you're not careful, to then start to delegate and let other people get on with it. That's something I'm teaching myself to do."

Nick has taken heed of the advice of kiwi expert, Wendy Sporle (now the National Mentor for Advocacy, for the BNZ Save the Kiwi Trust). "She said, 'you'll burn out, and the whole thing will disappear, I've seen it all before.' So before you do anything see if you can get others on board. A committee – it doesn't have to be a formal committee – but people who are committed and can help you develop your idea."

As you may have guessed from the name, the group is concerned with protecting the population of kiwis on Kawau Island, estimated to be somewhere between 40 and 50. Nick frequently hears them calling, sometimes in chorus. In the past year he's seen about four baby kiwis trotting by the house. He knows he's lucky: Nick manages the Spencer property, which constitutes half the private land on the island.

"But once you've lived among the kiwi they do something to you," he says. "It's quite strange. You become very attached to them. And then when you hear about a couple getting bowled over by dogs..."

Man's best friend, notes Nick, is the kiwi's nemesis. Hence the group is now coordinating and organising kiwi aversion training for dogs on the island, supported by DoC.

Nick has put his own two dogs, a poodle and chihuahua through the programme. He says it's not just about teaching dogs to avoid kiwis, but enlightening dog owners to the fact that dogs find kiwis irresistibly appealing, and how vulnerable kiwis are to their attacks. (Even when the dog is as petite as a chihuahua.)

Word is beginning to get around and Nick says the group is beginning to gather momentum. He has many other ideas in mind, such as planting out the island with more natives. The island ecology has suffered due to its wallaby population (Nick is currently culling them from his property) and he hopes that ultimately the project will be planting somewhere between 20,000 and 40,000 trees each year. "That way you really make an impact."

As Nick discovered, your community group may be new but there are hundreds of projects that have gone before you. "Go and look for advice, there is a heap of it out there. Tonnes and tonnes of it." (See box).

Useful Websites

The ARC (www.arc.govt.nz) provides all sorts of resources for volunteer groups in the Auckland region, such as budget management, monitoring results, and strategic planning.

Volunteering Auckland (www.volunteeringauckland.org.nz) links volunteers with conservation projects in the Auckland area.

The New Zealand Trust for Community Volunteers links volunteers with conservation projects around the country; www.conservationvolunteers.org.nz/

Manawa coordinates information from Auckland's environmental care groups; www.manawa.org.nz

NZ Ecological Restoration Network can be found at www.bush.org.nz

The Department of Conservation provides information on how to get involved in conservation in your own community, and details events, awards, volunteer opportunities and community conservation resources; www.doc.govt.nz

Community Net Aotearoa has an internet guide for community organisations, full of useful resources including how to get started, run meetings, committee roles, legal status etc; www.community.net.nz

Kaitiaki New Zealand is a site for Maori working on behalf of whanau, hapu and iwi, particularly on environmental and resource management issues; www.kaitiaki.org.nz