

URETARA ESTUARY MANAGERS

Newsletter # 2 | September 2006

PAST YEAR

In the past year our group has undertaken several initiatives all focused on restoring our estuary and its shoreline. We have come to realise that what happens in the catchment is critical to the estuary and harbour. The review of the management of Tauranga Harbour undertaken by Environment Bay of Plenty endorsed our view that sediment coming from the catchments is the major cause of the deterioration of the estuary. Our light ash soils are prone to erosion and it does not take an expert to see that stream banks in this catchment are being steadily washed away. Our activities reflect the widening of our horizons in our second year.



Stream bank erosion.

CATCHMENT STREAM RESTORATION

With this in mind we have undertaken a major challenge in successfully applying for a grant from the Sustainable Management Fund of \$51,000 for stream bank restoration in the vicinity of Rawaka Drive. Environment Bay of Plenty is contributing a further \$90,000. Work will be concentrated on a short stretch of the Uretara and on two tributaries, the Boyd and Quarry Streams.

The project area includes a lowland stand of kahikatea covering several hectares, possibly the only one in the Western Bay of Plenty. Restoration will include fencing to exclude stock, and planting with natives. The year-long project is now underway and is being managed by Andrew Jenks, Biodiversity Officer for the Western Bay of Plenty District Council and by Daryll Hall of Environment Bay of Plenty. Most of the work will be contracted out but we hope the community will help the landowners to clean up rubbish on the stream banks and also help with planting next autumn.

We hope that more landowners in the catchment will make use of Environment Bay of Plenty's 75 per cent grant or Western Bay of Plenty District Council's support programme to protect and enhance their stream banks.



This stream bank is vulnerable to further erosion.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT For Uretara Estuary Managers, as a group, to manage the changing nature of the Uretara Estuary, responsibly and on an ongoing basis.

PEST CONTROL

We continued to keep our rodent bait stations stocked through last spring and summer and have re-started our programme this month. The stations now extend along the walkway from the tip of Park Road Point to the private path leading to Binney Road and the new wetland is now ringed with bait stations, 14 stations being placed along the base of the ridge and in the paddock beside the private path. The rats seem to be here in numbers for the baits stations are almost all being cleaned out every fortnight.

Since our last newsletter we approached John Pickering whose property includes some of the salt marsh across the river, and has a boundary with more, and he has been maintaining bait stations along the foot of the ridge close to the salt marsh.

We have also placed bait stations on Sam Dunlop's property where he has let a strip of marshy land close to high tide mark revert to salt marsh. It is home for several fern birds. Sam is undertaking further pest control on his property.

THE NEW WETLAND

For us the establishment of a wetland up-stream from the houses on the walkway is one of the significant moves of the past year. Some of us met with the owner, John Holwerda, soon after he bought the property. Lawrie Donald of Environment Bay of Plenty and Andrew Jenks were able to give him constructive suggestions as to possible development.

Our bird photographer, Brian Chudleigh, has been monitoring and photographing the wading birds that fly in at high tide as the sand banks in the harbour are covered with water.

He has seen three rare species: Brown Teal, Black Stilt and Pectoral Sandpiper. Unusual visitors to the wetland are Wrybill, Banded Dotterel, Pied Oystercatcher, Australasian Shoveler and Grey Teal (sometimes in very large numbers, around 170 on two occasions).

Pied stilts have not been seen in the area for many years but at least 33 young stilts were reared last spring.

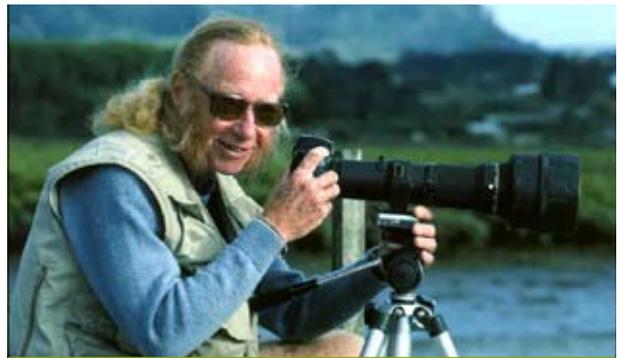
Other birds Brian has seen nesting are the Fernbird (occasionally, in the flax along the fence line), Little Shag, Little Black Shag, Pied Shag, Pukeko, Caspian Tern, Red-billed Gull, Grey Duck, Paradise Shelduck,

BIRD BOOK

Producing a guide to the birds of the Waikaraka Estuary was proposed by Sally Greenaway of Te Puna but it grew into a more ambitious project. Lawrie suggested the book could serve all the estuary care groups, using the body of the book but with different covers for each group. Brian Chudleigh provided his beautiful bird shots and also our cover shot, a view of the lower river.

We met with the landowners across the river from the new wetland and discussed the removal of the pampas along the riverbank and beside drains on their properties. We look forward to assistance from Environment Bay of Plenty to clear this weed. Because the bait stations along the stop bank are constantly being emptied we believe rats living in the pampas are swimming across the river.

This year we provided transport and supervision for Katikati College Year 9 students monitoring water quality in the Uretara but classes will not be following up on last year's pest control in Wilks' bush across the estuary until later this spring. During the summer two polytechnic students have monitored and controlled rats and possums in the bush and extended the cleared lines further across the block. Now the nesting season is underway teams of our volunteers are visiting the bush fortnightly to maintain the bait stations.



Bird photographer Brian Chudleigh doing what he likes doing best.

Canada Goose, Black Swan, White-faced Heron, Spur-winged Plover, Mallard, New Zealand Kingfisher, Harrier, Black-backed Gull, Fantail and Silvereye (both in the flax along the fence line), Chaffinch (in unusually large numbers in the winter), Yellowhammer, Greenfinch, House Sparrow, Starling and Myna.

The wealth of birds coming to the wetland promises to make it an important site for ornithologists and it could become an attraction for both local and overseas visitors.

Te Puna ornithologist Paul Cuming wrote the bird text, Sally the other text and Rosalie Smith helped with proof reading and production. *Birds of Uretara Estuary and Tauranga Harbour* was the second off the press, after Waikaraka's version. Copies have been given to members and supporters and are being sold at \$10 a copy at Jensen's Stationery, the funds helping to pay Uretara Estuary Managers' running costs.

PROPAGATION UNIT

Volunteers led by Ron Boggiss have built a small propagating unit on the grounds of Lexham Park. Half is plastic covered and half covered with shade cloth. Native plants, including kahikatea, mahoe, rewarewa,



Building our propagation unit in the grounds of Lexham park.

karamu, manuka, kanuka, hangihangi, mingimingi and toitoi, all suitable for stream restoration, are being grown. Our expert adviser, Andrew Jenks, assures us the first will be ready for planting out next autumn.



Committee members in front of the almost complete propagation unit.

MANGROVE CONTROL

Following our mangrove clearing trials in February and March 2005, no more mangroves have been cleared while we wait for resource consent. Graham Sparling used his expertise to prepare a draft application which has been completed by Lawrie Donald.

Our trials showed our estuary is an active one. Within weeks of cutting mangrove trunks at mud level they were protruding by two or three centimetres. The beach at Irwin Court is now much longer than previously and will improve even more as the stumps and pneumatophores die. Without proper monitoring we cannot produce evidence but it seems as if the mangrove clearance at just below the river mouth has caused changes across the estuary.

We had several sessions burning the heaped piles of mangroves and learned that while the wood burns fiercely it is sometimes hard to get a clean burn. It seems we left burning too long, after the leaves had fallen off. Also, our heaps needed to be more compact. Suitable days for burning are few and far between. Wind direction varies up to 90 degrees and when burning near houses it is important to be aware of this. As well as having the wind in the right direction burning should be done at neap low tide or soon after, rather than as soon as the heaps are clear of the outgoing tide, to allow the bottom of the heap to be as dry as possible.

SUBMISSIONS

As managers and caretakers of our estuary we have made submissions on the Tauranga Harbour Integrated Management Review and Environment Bay of Plenty's Ten Year Draft Plan. We supported their view that the primary issue facing the harbour was sediment coming from the catchments and we called for strong action rather than continuing monitoring and reviewing. We submitted that estuary care groups, mostly made up of retired residents, could not control the accelerating spread of mangroves across the estuaries and called for support from Environment Bay of Plenty and the mechanical removal of mangroves.

When Environment Bay of Plenty's Operations Committee spent a day in Katikati they viewed stream restoration projects on the Te Mania Stream and the site of our project in the Uretara catchment. They also viewed the new wetland and walked part of the walkway before having lunch at Smith's and hearing of Uretara Estuary Managers activities. Environment Bay of Plenty's chief executive officer, Bill Bayfield, spoke in support of our efforts and the Uretara Estu-

ary Managers representatives were able to make personal contact with committee members and senior staff. In the past year in conjunction with Environment Bay of Plenty, we have mounted displays at the Fruits of Katikati Festival and the A & P Show.



Environment Bay of Plenty's Operations Committee and senior staff visited the estuary in June.

NEW BRIDGE

In a joint Rotary, Uretara Estuary Managers effort Roy Diggelmann and helpers built a low bridge across a swampy area beside the Irwin Court Beach. This has proved a useful amenity with many walkers using it. Roy deserves special mention for his contribution



The new bridge near the Irwin Court Beach

HELP FROM THE EXPERTS

Environment Bay of Plenty's Senior Land Management Officer, Lawrie Donald, has continued to fit wonderful support for us into his busy schedule. His responsibility for the estuary care groups has been passed to Suzy O'Neill but he continues to attend committee meetings and assist us in many ways.

Andrew Jenks, of Western Bay of Plenty District Council's Wild About New Zealand, is team leader of our wildlife recovery group and has a wealth of knowledge about conservation matters. The support of these two men has been invaluable.

Bryan Norton, Western Bay of Plenty District Council's Northern Reserves Officer, co-operates in the management of the esplanade reserves along the walkway.

The Katikati Focus Charitable Trust continues to provide a legal and financial umbrella for our activities.

Funding - Environment Bay of Plenty has continued to provide funding, paying for the cost of material for the propagation unit, for rat bait and other costs including producing this newsletter.

Friends and supporters have again given generous donations and the New Zealand Community Trust provided \$2,400 to purchase two brush cutters

We welcome donations from supporters unable to take an active part in our projects.

THAT

In our last newsletter we reported on our involvement in the formation of the Northern Tauranga Harbour Action Team (THAT) and the visit by the then Minister of Fisheries, David Benson-Pope that they arranged. His promise that the fisheries regulation were being reviewed and that the rules governing scallop dredging were being looked at proved correct. The changes made have greatly reduced the amount of dredging and reports are that the floor of the harbour is recovering.

THAT made substantial submissions on Environment Bay of Plenty's Harbour Review and Ten Year Plan and continues a watching brief. Environment Bay of Plenty Pest Plant Co-ordinator, John Mather, recently met with the committee and discussed control of both land and water pests.

Also worth noting:

- We are planting a small wetland on the edge of the Levely Reserve.
- We continue to press Environment Bay of Plenty to finalise policy that will make it possible to call for a new Katikati Quarry resource consent.



Planting in the wetland on the edge of Levely Reserve.

IN CONCLUSION

We haven't all been involved in all the projects but we have all got to know our neighbours better and enjoyed working together to restore our estuary.

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YOU CAN HELP...

If you would like to **undertake** any of the following, please tick the box(es):

- Propagate bird food trees and shrubs
- Help with tree planting
- Assist with pest control on Wilks' property or other patches of bush (with/without students)
- Monitor water quality (with/without students)
- Monitor sediment etc in the estuary
- Telephone volunteers
- Help with morning tea etc.

To attend a short **training session** on any of the following please tick the box(es).

- Plant propagation
- Weed control
- Bird identification
- Monitoring methods (bush, stream and/or estuary)

Send this form along with your name and contact details to: 15 Francis Drive, Katikati.
Call Rosalie Smith on 07 549 2422, or Judy Noble on 07 549 0984 for more information.