

Uretara

Estuary Managers



Newsletter #

July 2005

Our story

A year ago residents living near the end of the Park Road point banded together to see if they could help increase the number of native birds in their neighbourhood. They monitored rat numbers and set out bait stations along the walkway. Ever since then rats have taken the baits. We assume that as we have poisoned the local rats others have come in to fill the vacuum. As this kind of pest control in a suburban area is unusual, we are working things out as we go along.

During the spring we saw some reward for our efforts – a morepork reared four young in a pine tree, a grey warbler nested and there was an anecdotal report of a kakariki observed. Also we have become much more aware of the bird life on and around the estuary – the scaup, dabchick and shovelers living with or visiting the ducks on the river, the occasional banded rail or fern bird that is brave or foolish enough to cross the river from the salt marsh opposite the walkway. And after surveying bird food sources we realise we need more planting of shrubs and trees that provide food for birds.

Uretara Estuary Managers – Clearwater Group

In December, in response to concerns over the spread of mangroves across the estuary, the Wildlife Recovery Project called a meeting which formed a group concentrating on improving the estuary environment.

Learning from the seven years' experience of the Te Puna-based Waikaraka Estuary Managers we knew we must be concerned for all aspects of the estuary's health and must work towards gaining a resource consent if we were to control mangrove spread. That means using professionals to compile a report on the whole estuary and catchment to provide the basis for the consent application. We are applying for funding to cover the five-figure sum to pay for this report.

To ascertain the effect mangroves have on the estuary, trials are underway. We have held working bees, each attracting about 20 people, to assess the best methods to control the spread of mangroves. This has been heavy physical work for the people involved. It has almost always been made more difficult by the dirty, smelly mud which in some places is calf deep, making keeping one's balance the first priority. Some have found the work just too strenuous and opted out. Our thanks to them for trying: it is a dirty arduous task.

To all the others who have turned out we are very grateful indeed. Many acquaintances have been made through the working bees, and whilst it is a filthy job, the mud is a great leveller. We have professional people, tradesmen and, mostly, retirees. All are equal when covered in mud.

It will be best to cut the plants and breathing tubes at ground level so that wave movement will wash the mud away. As the mud level lowers so the trunks and breathing tubes must be re-cut to the new ground level. The Waikaraka experience is that three or four cuts will be necessary before firm sand is reached.

Monitoring of water quality and mud level in the estuary will begin shortly. This monitoring is essential if we are to provide factual evidence to obtain a resource consent.

Generous donors

The two groups have been fortunate in the generosity of the financial support offered. Dr Jeff Friis donated \$1224, the cost of our first brush cutter, not any brush cutter, but with a powerful motor and special blade to do the tough job, on top of a \$550 donation to the Wildlife Recovery group. The Katikati Community Board has recently donated funds for a second brush cutter. Several other residents also made substantial, worthwhile and much appreciated donations.

Donations to the wildlife recovery group have been spent on plants to combat erosion near the end of the point. More planting is planned for this winter. Money given to the Clearwater group has been spent on maintenance and fuel for the brush cutters. The \$10 subscription requested of members when the Clearwater group was formed is covering running costs.

The donations of time and effort have been enormous –working as individuals, residents have cut two tracks to give access to our major trial area, where the river enters the estuary; work has also continued in the vicinity of the Irwin Court beach.

Without donations of time and money our projects would come to a halt. Our thanks to all who have contributed. Residents who are not up to the physical work can assist with donations, both large and small.

College field work

Members of both the Wildlife Recovery and Clearwater groups have provided transport and supervised groups of Katikati College students undertaking fieldwork in two areas.

- Pest monitoring and control have been undertaken by Year 9 classes on a bush-covered slope running down to the Uretara Estuary and owned by the Wilks family. It is opposite the Park Road point.
- Years 9 and 12 classes have been monitoring water quality in the Uretara Stream and two of its tributaries, one of which drains from the Katikati quarry.

The adults have enjoyed participating and the stream monitoring was particularly interesting for the students were able to identify a large number of different insects and other small invertebrates living in the stream bed.

Help from the experts

The Wildlife Recovery project has been led by Andrew Jenks of the Western Bay of Plenty District Council's Wild About New Zealand project. Bryan Norton, District Council Reserves Officer, has co-operated in the management of the esplanade reserve along the estuary. Also on the job has been Lawrie Donald, senior environmental officer with Environment BOP. The Uretara Estuary Managers has become one of EBOP's Care Groups under Lawrie's wing. The help these people have provided has been invaluable. The two groups were set up under the legal protection of the Katikati Focus Charitable Trust. They have now united as the Uretara Estuary Managers with one committee, still under the trust's umbrella.

Tauranga Harbour health

The estuary managers offered to support Sam Dunlop in his efforts to get some action on issues relating to the northern Tauranga Harbour and a meeting was held on June 14. Many issues were discussed but the harbour environment is complex and must be viewed as a whole. Further meetings are planned and high priority issues will be addressed while a management plan for the northern harbour is developed.

The Minister of Fisheries and Associate Minister of the Environment, David Benson-Pope, was to a meeting in Katikati on the morning of July 7 to be told firsthand of our concerns. A helicopter flight over the northern harbour was also planned.

The Katikati quarry

In response to requests for information on the situation regarding silt entering the catchment from the quarry, Environment BOP officers have told us that the quarry's resource consent dates from 1976 and "allows a significant discharge of suspended solids into the watercourse". We have been told that EBOP's proposed Water and Land Plan is currently under appeal. Once it comes into operation it will allow EBOP to review resource consent where water classifications cannot be met. "This may be the case for the Uretara Stream," wrote A C Bruere, manager consents and compliance. It is anticipated the plan will become fully operative by the end of this year. However, parts of it could become operative earlier as appeals are settled and signed by the Environment Court.

We will keep a watching brief and will surely make a submission at first opportunity

Waikaraka Estuary

We have made two visits to Waikaraka Estuary. It is inspiring to observe the return of shellfish and fish to the estuary once the mangroves are cleared.

The walk begins through deep mud along a track cleared of mangroves. A couple of hundred metres down the estuary the most recent clearing has resulted in much less mud, and snails appearing in great numbers. A little further down, there are whelks, then the crabs can be seen scuttling into their burrows. Further down, as the estuary widens and where the first clearing was carried out, snapper have made hollows in the sand. In the channel are small flounder. The clean, firm sand is a pleasure to walk on. Then banks of eelgrass give proof of the health of the lower estuary.

Call Rosalie Smith, 549 2422, if you would like to join a group to see for yourself.

This year the Waikaraka Estuary Managers gained their resource consent and they can now get on with cutting back the mangroves that have spread over the estuary in the last 20 years.

The people of the local hapu have been closely involved in the Waikaraka project. They say, "We have regained our kai moana". In the mangroves yet to be cleared is a hot spring where the children used to play. Regaining access to it is part of the plan.

The future

- We hope to gain a resource consent within the next 12 months so that we may make headway on improving our estuary and shoreline.
- We hope to spread our field of action and enlist support for pest control round the estuary and up the river banks.
- We plan to continue planting and beautifying the walkway and reserves in our area, concentrating on species that are attractive to birds.
- We are dedicated to decreasing the silt load entering the Uretara Stream and Estuary.
- We will seek inclusion of bird sources in a list of acceptable plants for planting on Council reserves.
- We will continue to advocate the benefits of pest control on local private land.

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, ***

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 weed control,

Help with tree planting,

Assist with pest control on Wilks' property (with/without students),

Monitor water quality (with/without students),

Monitor sediment etc in the estuary,

Bird monitoring,

If you would like 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 to 15 Francis Drive, Katikati.

Call Rosalie Smith on 07 549 2422 or Judy Noble on 07 549 0984 for more information