

Uretara

Estuary Managers



Newsletter #

November 2005

By Rosalie Smith with input from Andrew Jenks and Brian Chudleigh

Members and friends may think nothing has been happening around the Uretara Estuary but it's time we reported on what has been going on — quite a lot.

Mangroves

Since the Whangamata publicity and the “illegal” mangrove cutting at Athenree we have been keeping a low profile, as have the Athenree and Tanners Point people. We are not planning any working bees to cut mangroves in the meantime

Half a dozen of us set off to burn the cut mangroves on the first day for weeks there was a fresh south-westerly but found it was extremely difficult to get a good blaze. David Lind from Waikaraka Estuary offers this advice:

1. Stack carefully with a person on a ladder on top with loppers cutting branches and compressing the heap — too late for that.
2. Two or three months drying seems best at Waikaraka — we've left ours about eight months..
3. Wait for neap tides to burn.
4. Wait till the water has gone from round the heaps for some two or three hours before burning.
5. Light your fire at the base of the windward side.
6. To prevent embers going down your gumboots wear long pants hanging over them. Also long gloves.

More attempts will have to be made.

More brush cutters

UEM has received funding of \$2400 from the New Zealand Community Trust to purchase two more brush cutters so when we get going again on cutting mangroves we will have plenty of machine power.

Planting

Team leader Andrew Jenks is providing us with flax and native shrubs to be planted along the walkway bank. We will have a working bee at 9am on 19th November. Gather at the eastern end of the houses with spades etc.

Pest control

The members maintaining the bait stations along the walkway have checked their stations fortnightly since mid-August and noted varying degrees of activity. We are collecting lots of useful information and it is very important to continue accurately

recording the dates and amounts of bait taken. If half a bait or more is eaten please round up to one bait, and less than half can be recorded as nil. Bait take will then be recorded in whole numbers so we can avoid having to write descriptive statements such as “some bait taken” or “a little more than half taken” etc. Please keep up the baiting using the standard procedure of loading the bait station then checking 10 days later, refilling as needed. We will make a decision about variations to this procedure if needed in a few months. The warm summer months ahead plus lots of food is usually the recipe for rampant rodent reproduction (the original 3 Rs?) so keep up the good work.

Andrew has been working with John Pickering whose land includes and bounds on some of the salt marsh across the river and John is now maintaining bait stations on the shore side of the marsh. This is important habitat for rare fernbirds and banded rail.

Andrew, Brian Chudleigh and I met with Dan Rolleston, chairman of the Tahawai Trust, and plans have been made to cut a track around that property from the Tahawai Bridge on SH2 almost as far as Pickering's boundary. (Dave Eddy's property has a narrow frontage on to the marsh between Pickering's and the Trust.)

Brian and I are setting up stations on Sam and Edwina Dunlop's property east of Wilks' bush. Sam will maintain these.

Across the river from the flooded land beside the walkway are three properties that are bounded by dense belts of pampas, along the stop banks and beside internal drains. I made contact with Diane and Ian Stevens, who overlook the area and they invited all the property owners of that land to their home last Saturday. Not all could attend but Diane said all agreed they wanted the pampas removed. Judy and Robert Noble, Andrew and I represented UEM. That the pampas is a haven for rats was evidenced when we went to view the problem and a rat ran across almost at our feet. Help is being sought from Environment Bay of Plenty experts on what will be a big job. The plan is to remove the pampas and replant with native trees and shrubs.

Polytech students Sara and Ritchie have completed their monitoring and pest control project at Wilks and submitted their report for marking. Andrew has a draft of Ritchie's report which shows that after a fairly severe hammering (6 rounds at 10 day intervals) rat numbers were starting to decline. However, mice appeared to be more abundant and weta were also staging a comeback! There are many interesting insights resulting from this project and both Sara and Ritchie are keen to find a time to present their findings to our group.

Another project by Tristan Connelly-Cook aimed to find the relationship between rainfall, flow velocity and suspended sediment in three Uretara stream tributaries. The Quarry stream was certainly the dirtiest but Tristan experienced some problems with the determination of suspended sediment – more research needed. Andrew will contact the Polytech Environmental Studies tutor and discuss opportunities for other students to carry out research with us next year.

Resource consent application

Graham Sparling has almost completed preparing an “application for a coastal permit to remove mangroves from the Uretara Estuary”. We are fortunate to have such a well qualified person to do this. Delays have slowed the completion of the application but it should be in EBOP's hands within a few weeks. Thank you Graham.

Community propagating unit

What began as a few gardening enthusiasts agreeing to do some small-scale propagation of natives in their gardens has now grown, thanks to an expert volunteer, Ken Fay who is a retired nurseryman. We were unsuccessful in gaining funding from Transpower but Environment BOP, through Lawrie Donald, has agreed to grant \$1500

for a small propagating unit. It will measure 5m x 3m with work benches and shade cloth on one end and ?? on the other. There will be stand out room for about 1500 plants outside. Lexham Park has agreed to let us build it on their land. A committee of Andrew, Ron Boggiss, Ken, Judy and Robert, Margaret Cameron and I are working on this with Ron serving as chief builder.

Our catchment

Recognising that most of the problems facing us on the estuary begin upstream, a group comprising Andrew, Maurice Fletcher, Ian Gordon and I, with support from Lawrie Donald of Environment BOP, has made an application to the Sustainable Management Fund for \$60,000 to begin riparian restoration upstream of the town. A grant would cover 12 month's work so it has been decided to concentrate on a 1.5km stretch of the Uretara which includes the Boyd and Quarry tributaries. Some members have viewed these tributary streams to which Andrew takes senior college pupils for stream monitoring. Funding is requested for preparing, clearing and planting the banks. We hope this application is successful. If so you will hear more about it in the future.

College field trips

Andrew will be leading class trips to the Uretara Stream and Wilks' bush over the next few weeks. If you can help with transport please give me a call or an email (549 2422, rosalie31@slingshot.co.nz). You will find it very interesting. More tracks have been cut so almost the whole of the bush visible from our walkway is now accessible.

Tauranga Harbour Action Team

Our group called a well-attended meeting in mid-June to discuss issues relating to the Tauranga Harbour. Sam Dunlop, Syd Hopkins, both of Kauri Point, David Ogilvie of Tanners Point and I, representing UEM, have formed a core group to progress action on these issues. The Tauranga Harbour Action Team (THAT) is now operating under the umbrella of the Focus Katikati Charitable Trust (as does UEM). Marine biologist Bill Brownell has been employed to produce a scoping report to find the gaps in existing coverage of harbour issues, using funding of \$3800 from Western Bay of Plenty District Council.

Bill contributed to a review of the Tauranga Harbour carried out by EBOP staff members and a draft of their report is soon to be available. An early copy shows it is an honest view of the issues and the present situation. EBOP will be calling for submissions in due course and the core group sees making a well-researched and full submission as its current priority. Sediment runoff is seen as the most serious issue. While THAT will not ignore that problem, it plans to devote its energies to marine issues, including scallop regulations, sea lettuce, siltation of the harbour floor, mangroves, black swans and fish stocks. Funding is being sought.

A meeting of the whole group will be held before Christmas.

The flooded paddocks

It is several months since the flood gate was removed from the land beside the walkway beyond the houses and the flooded land has attracted many birds. Brian Chudleigh reports that where once the bird life was Pukekos, the odd Mallard and Spur-winged Plover, now we have a much greater variety, many of the birds native species never or rarely seen in the area previously.

Pied Stilts were among the first to appreciate the exposed mud. When flooded out of the harbour mud flats at high tide they began coming to the area to roost and for a late feed at a time of year when they were fattening up for breeding. In August they

began nesting and though many nests were flooded during torrential rain coupled with spring tides they re-nested and are hatching chicks. A few early chicks are now almost fully grown.

Later, a Black Stilt joined them, actually a hybrid bird, mostly black with a white rump, face and underwing patches, which flew up from the South Island, first seen by Elaine Fisher on a pond near the Haiku Pathway. Later a pair of Shovelers arrived. Like the recent Black Stilt sightings they are usually seen on an outgoing tide in paddocks nearest to Riverlea Drive. Paradise Shelducks are regular, noisy visitors to the area. Welcome Swallows made good use of the area during winter and early spring, up to 100 of them, usually at high tide when they would be sweeping low over the flooded area.

Mallards may be imports and common but they have attracted a lot of attention from strollers along the stop bank, anything up to half a dozen females with young in attendance seen at any one time. The earliest hatchlings are now as big as their mothers.

Once the fences are removed the area will be more visually appealing. The most important thing is to retain the drains around the area to discourage people and dogs from entering the area and disturbing the birds. Stilts will certainly not nest there again if people and dogs disturb them. Plantings of trees and shrubs should only be done on the perimeter. A larger intake would extend the area covered by the tide and enable gradual natural restoration of salt marsh flora. Already bright yellow Cotulas are flowering now that grazing cattle have gone.

Uretara Estuary Managers

Maurice Fletcher (Chairman) 549 3309,

Ian Gordon (Secretary), 549 4581

Ron Boggiss (Treasurer), 549 0500

Judy Noble, 549 984

Andrew Jenks, 549 0064

Jack Ripley, 549 2894

Rosalie Smith 549 2422 and about 60 other interested residents.