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JUDGES' REPORT

LANDSCAPE AND HABITAT ENHANCEMENT

Kaipupu Point Sounds Wildlife Sanctuary

INTERVIEWED   Jenny Keene, Barry Maister, Allan Izard, Andrew John, Trudy Nicholas

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JUDGES   Sandra Sewell, Tom Stein, Lew Metcalfe

INTRODUCTION

The Kaipupu Point Mainland Island Society (KPMIS) was formed in 2005 to work alongside

Port Marlborough and the Department of Conservation to manage the 40 hectare reserve area as a "mainland island sanctuary" for native wildlife.

This successful partnership, along with the equally successful harnessing of local volunteers to help implement the project, has resulted in an impressive range of achievements since this time. These include the completion of a predator proof fence in 2008, completion of a jetty with floating pontoon for access and a 2.5 km circular track around the peninsula.

Pest control efforts were significantly stepped up in late 2012 with an aerial control programme using brodificoum and intensive follow-up ground control through the volunteer programme. Possums, rats and stoats were virtually eradicated but mice have posed an ongoing challenge. A part-time paid volunteer programme coordinator role has been created and this adds impetus to the work programme.

It is a project that Society chairperson Barry Maister described in one word - "volunteers". Kaipupu has successfully harnessed the value that volunteers bring to the Sanctuary.   Barry also described how they operate as "having a focus, having good planning and co-ordination, doing things step-by-step with close involvement and engagement of the community and professionals supported by good data and information".

This is clearly a long term programme and actions are carefully considered and done only when the time is right to avoid mistakes that could set the project back several years.

The active education programme across all ages led by a trained educator Andrew John emphasizes the long term approach to improving conservation and the sustainability of the project. Education is not only hands-on involvement such as planting trees, track construction and weed control but also includes activities and information at their central Picton Information Centre. Andrew said that "long term commitment comes from the heart not just from knowledge". Andrew also said that "teaching the family as much as the children is a long-term investment in the project and understanding conservation".

GENERAL INFORMATION

The project has a highly professional approach to all its activities. This is clearly demonstrated by the recent preparation of a Strategic Plan (2014), regular meetings by the focus group to consider options and direction, the production of a regular newsletter, payment of key personnel in the organisation, engagement of experts as required, data recording methods, and information collection and monitoring systems to measure success and co-ordinate actions.

The sponsorship, large number of volunteers and rapid progress to date also reflects the aim of the project to have long-term sustainability. This brings credibility for all those involved and those who are considering being involved (eg. potential sponsors)

This is a "volunteers" programme designed so anyone can participate. The new pest team co-ordinator organizes a series of rosters, volunteers can participate anytime they want and can stipulate the steepness of tracks and days they are available. A volunteer training manual is in place.

The project places strong emphasis on communication. This includes excellent use of website, Facebook, a blog to engage the community and great connections to the public and tourists via information/display board on the Bluebridge ferries. Signage that has been installed acknowledges sponsors, provides basic information and is an excellent start.

Pest management is a core activity and alongside the regular volunteer trapping and monitoring programme a SWAT pest team is on standby to immediately respond to any pest incursions on the peninsula.

The project aims to create a haven for birds to spread into surrounding areas such as Picton and the Victoria Domain creating a "halo effect". By doing this they contribute back to the Picton community long term. The vision encompasses catering for flora and fauna from the soil to the tree tops with a focus on enriching the existing environment rather than recreating it. Invertebrates are not forgotten with two separate invertebrate accommodation systems in use, a corrugated material (Onduline roofing product) and wooden disks.

There is a strong educational programme managed by a trained educator. On-board education/information programme with Bluebridge ferries taps into the NZ and overseas visitors that pass the Sanctuary each day. According to project coordinator Jenny Keene – "you can't put a price on engaging people".

Since judging in 2012 there has been considerable progress. Key achievements include:

o   Continued predator control work with rats, possums and stoats effectively eradicated and an ongoing focus on mice

o   The completion of the track along with a lookout table and seating, wildlife water stations constructed and tank system close to installation

o   New signage

o   Adoption of CatchIt and Wild Apricot software to manage operations more efficiently and record predator control

o   New monitoring lines and new lightweight traps designed and in use

o   Updates to manual and documentation

o   Two "Pestival" events in Picton in 2013 and 2014

o   Appointing a pest team coordinator

o   Planning work on first trans-location using outside expertise

o   Ongoing community involvement, guided tours, weed control, participation at events to maintain public awareness.

PROBLEMS AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN TACKLED

Traps boxes were too heavy for volunteers to carry and manage so a new light-weight trap box that is 60% lighter, meets all relevant specifications and is easier to use and handle has been developed. This is very transferable to other groups and restoration projects.

Kaipupu has successfully trialed CatchIt pest management software developed by Auckland University to record all pest control and manage all data. This provides information for the website so the public and volunteers can easily access predator numbers and therefore remain enthusiastic and focused.

Use of Wild Apricot cloud based software for membership and volunteer management helps improve administrative efficiency.

In response to the increasing visitor numbers the KPMIS is applying to the Department of Conservation to hold the required concession and partner with travel companies and cruise ship groups to manage visitor numbers and impacts.

To address the lack of water on the peninsula, a new (soon to be installed) tank system will provide water to wildlife water stations which have been installed at strategic locations. The tank will have an extended water capturing structure.

Kaipupu is continually extending its programmes, a recent example being new sand traps to record/monitor bird and pest footprints.

To assist with the potential translocation of birds, expert Peter Gaze was engaged to develop a plan to establish South Island Robins on the peninsula.

SUMMARY

This project is impressively directed and managed by a team of mostly volunteers that are aiming for a clear and simple long-term vision. The project connects very well with the community on all levels and has excellent communication and on-going support. Paid positions are targeted to assist the group to successfully achieve its goals with additional expert advice sought as necessary.

The project is at the point where exciting activities such as the introduction of new wildlife is about to begin and the vegetation is regenerating noticeably. This will increase visitor numbers and overall community interest.

Kaipupu Sanctuary has an excellent jetty facility, well-formed tracks, new seating on the north side, a successful predator control regime, a new water containment and wildlife watering station system under construction, good signage and many improvements since judging in 2012.

The standout features include the use of innovative software technology, the Strategic Plan (2014 -2017), the new light-weight trap, a clear long-term vision supported by a sound management structure, use of experts and professionals to provide sound advice, recognition of the need for paid project coordinators, outstanding community interaction and the commitment from a large team of volunteers.

SUGGESTIONS

This project was hard to fault and all of the suggestions below are actions that are being investigated or are already under way.

- Install improved signage that provides tree and bird identification, educational information and directions. Consider signage that assists safe evacuation of the Sanctuary should there be a fire or emergency. Use Q code technology as a means to provide multi-lingual information.

- Install steps on access at the start of track/jetty to overcome steep gradient and make it more user friendly especially for older or less able visitors (e.g. cruise ship passengers). There is a high risk of slipping going downhill at present. Install steps at north lookout up to new seating and table.

- Place gravel on the route that is most likely to be used the most from jetty to new lookout on northern side

- Construct bird tables and feeding stations to increase visibility of birdlife throughout the day for visitors and provide greater educational value. Consider having several sites around the sanctuary so that it doesn't draw all birds to one place and spreads the points of interest. The importance of having one site on the sunny side of the hill is acknowledged.

- Develop a robust safety management plan (if not already completed) and continually assess the safety needs of the public and volunteers.

- The halo effect project could be more strongly promoted with strategic neighboring property owners/managers to start building traction for wider pest control activity outside of the sanctuary boundaries.

- Investigate establishment of an endowment fund or similar funding entity to provide a vehicle to receive bequests and other forms of donation to secure future funding streams and investment opportunities without compromising existing funding.