



Rotokare Bush Telegraph

May 2008

Greetings Friends of Rotokare Trust

Kia ora and gidday everyone,

Sorry this is a bit late but it's been all go since our last newsletter, so first of all, many thanks to all our volunteers and workers who have slogged away tirelessly during this busy time.

The main thing to report is that our eradication plan is on track and we will be finally dealing to the pests around about July. This is a big operation that has required countless hours of work and preparation, and our track-cutting gang deserves special thanks for the huge task of marking and cutting over 42km of monitoring tracks through the bush – and especially to Gwen for the delicious food every week. There is still a bit to do, so feel free to turn up on any Sunday at 9.00am to help, and of course many volunteers will be needed for the actual monitoring after the bait application.

Special thanks too to Kara and Jenny and trustees and committee for all the paper work and organising behind other developments: the new fence surveillance system is in place and the gates should arrive very soon. The buildings have hit a small snag with the consent process as it was found that the boundary of the road reserve runs through the site, but STDC is working with us to sort this out. The contracts for the supply of power to the buildings have been signed, and the box culvert for the lake outlet will be installed soon. Investigations for a suitable wastewater (sewage, etc.) system are continuing.



In case you were wondering why the sheep are still in the reserve, this is to keep the grass as short as possible before the poison drop in order to give the mice nowhere to hide. Mice have proven to be the hardest of all to eradicate at other sanctuaries, and we want to get them all first time.

Keep up the good work, not long now before we have the top sanctuary in the country right on our back door.

Thanks again – Joe Menzies

Bird surveys

A kiwi call survey at Rotokare planned for early May has been postponed until the first week in June, the next period of limited moonlight. This will mean keen kiwi listeners can participate in a survey in Egmont National Park, then listen out at Rotokare. Bad weather has meant the National Park survey didn't get started on time and it was going to encroach into Rotokare's schedule of listening nights. New listeners are welcome. The survey involves sitting and listening for two hours starting soon after sunset. It's cold work and we don't guarantee you will hear kiwi, but it will give you a new perspective on the Rotokare night life.

Bird surveys during the day are now occurring on the last Sunday of each month. If you have good hearing and an interest in birds, you might like to join the bird survey team. Full training provided.

North Island robins

There were no records of North Island robins at Rotokare until David Medway and I saw a juvenile one in August 1999 in the bush at the head of the north arm of the lake. During a survey of birdlife we saw or heard it several more times in the same area until April 2000. Even though we were still regularly in the area, it was not recorded again and it may have moved away or met a premature death.

At that time, the nearest robin population was in the Hardwick-Smith's 400-hectare block only about 600m east from the Rotokare boundary and 1.4km from where the robin was seen. Another healthy population occupies the Collier/Dickson Covenants about 5km away. Both of these areas have predator control programmes carried out by South Taranaki Forest & Bird. These programmes will encourage a population increase and dispersal of juveniles looking for territory, so it is likely that the Rotokare bird came from there. While robins are not uncommon in the eastern hill country, there are none in Egmont National Park.

In March 2005, during an Auckland Botanical Society trip, a local birder, Wayne Peters, heard a robin on the north-west side of the lake. That bird was not heard or seen until September 2005. The next report was from Kara Prankerd in March 2007 and there have been regular reports since then. In June 2007, two individuals were reported by a visiting Ornithological Society member and also in October 2007 by Kara.

It seems likely, and we hope, that this is a resident pair and the start of a new population.



Green parrots

Occasionally we get reports of kakariki in the reserve, which **would** be an exciting discovery, but unfortunately they are rare in Taranaki and almost only in the eastern hill country bush.

The bird which is usually responsible for the misidentification is the eastern rosella, an Australian species which was introduced as a cage bird but escaped in Dunedin about 1910. They also established in Auckland before 1920. They spread steadily north and south, but until about the 1990s they weren't noticed in Taranaki. The first records came from the upper Mokau and the Waitaanga plateau. Since then they have steadily expanded their range at least into South Taranaki with a small population even on the mountain.

The eastern rosella is a larger bird than most, bigger than blackbirds and even tui, and about 7cm longer than the kakariki. While it has a red head and blue wing tips, it is most often seen flying away when its bright green back is most conspicuous. Eastern rosellas have been seen or heard on a few occasions at Rotokare and are likely to increase in numbers.

Slimy things



While slugs and snails and the like don't have a lot appeal for most people, they are, however, an essential part of the natural world. Rotokare is no exception and recent finds show that some native species are happily going about their daily lives almost un-noticed.

A fairly common native group are the leaf-veined slugs named for the leaf vein-like patterning on their backs. While kiwi surveying one night I came across a number of these slugs moving up the leaves of the flax plants in front of the picnic area. They are about 40mm long and, while mostly nocturnal, can be found in the bush during the day in moist weather.

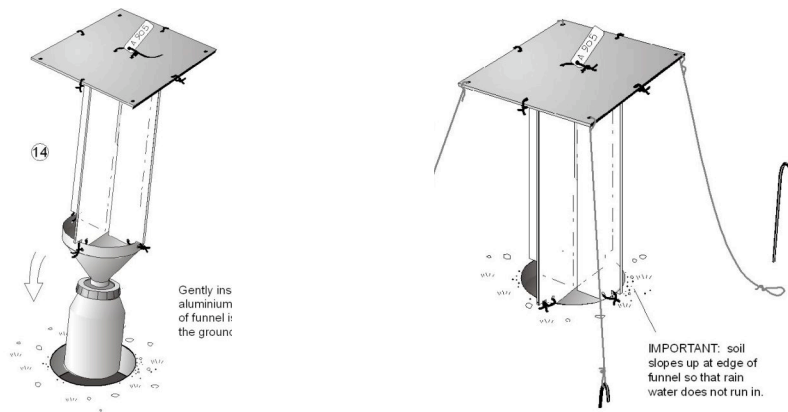
(all photos courtesy of Barry)

What's at Rotokare?

In order for us to detect change following the eradication of pests, we need to know what is present beforehand, as 'baseline' information. With advice from experts, our volunteer teams have been out and about measuring and counting plants, collecting creepy crawly insects, and recording all the data.

Invertebrate monitoring

During summer 2007/08, we installed 20 pitfall flight-intercept traps (15 within the fence, and 5 outside the fence as a comparison). Insects walking along the ground fall in the pitfall trap part, and flying insects hit a clear perspex plane and subsequently fall in the pitfall trap (see diagram below). Insects slide into a collecting pottle filled with mono ethylene glycol (to humanely kill and preserve the insects trapped). Traps were put out for 3 weeks before we collected the samples.



Some of the creatures collected...

(photos courtesy of DoC)

System of classification: an example.

Class: Insecta	Order: Coleoptera	Family: Carabidae	Genus: <i>Gaioxenus</i>	Species: <i>pilipalpis</i>
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The three pictures are of invertebrates in the Order Coleoptera (or beetles).

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| <i>Gaioxenus pilipalpis</i> | = Order: Coleoptera. | Family: Carabidae (or ground beetles) |
| <i>Cercyon sp</i> | = Order: Coleoptera. | Family: Hydrophilidae |
| <i>Inocatops sp.</i> | = Order: Coleoptera. | Family: Leiodidae |

Why do we want to monitor insect abundance? Well, insects are an essential part of the ecosystem – they are an important food source for many native animals including North Island robins that Barry has reported on earlier.

Unfortunately, pest animals can have huge detrimental effects on invertebrates. For example hedgehogs eat about 150 grams per night = about 45kgs per year (allowing for the fact that hedgehogs may hibernate for a few months during winter). And that's just one hedgehog! So far we have trapped well over 850 hedgehogs... you do the math... = _____ tonnes / year ?

We will repeat invertebrate monitoring each summer. If results are anything like those found at Maungatautari Ecological Island in the Waikato, then we could expect invertebrate abundance to possibly triple following the pest eradication! It is also likely that we will find insects that have never been found or described before

Vegetation monitoring

We have marked out half a dozen permanent 20x20m plots in various vegetation types in the reserve. Inside each plot we tag, measure and record the diameter of every tree; count saplings and also record the species and number of tiny seedlings in 18m² per plot. We also have one plot in bush outside the fence – so it will be interesting to compare the two areas to see the effects of predator-free mainland islands.

The vegetation information we record will go into safe storage, in the National Vegetation Survey Databank at Lincoln.

We will re-measure the same plots in 3 to 5 years time (and regularly on into the future). Eventually we will build up enough data to analyse and obtain scientific evidence of changes that have occurred following of pest removal.

The Team (L-R): Kris, Sue, Jenny, Barry (the lucky male!), Susi, Kara, and Shay (photographer) who kindly gave up their day to help last month.



And a special thanks to those people who helped last week – Amy, Fiona & Jack from DoC; Sue & Margaret our great neighbours; Shay from TRC; and Jane from OSNZ ☺

Pest eradication

We are nearly there! As you would have noticed in our last newsletter we supplied quite a lot of information about the up coming pest eradication. We can now bring you a few more details: The first application of bait is likely to be around June, and the second drop 2–4 months later.

Please note, the reserve will be closed during this whole period – likely to be from June through to November.

We aim to have the reserve open again for summer and the boating season.

It is important to note that a third application may happen if we struggle to get most of the mice the first two rounds. The timing of this will depend upon pest monitoring results after the second drop. So, it is possible that this may need to happen over summer 2008/09. We will try our best to avoid this, but if it is necessary we will be very appreciative of your patience.

Official notification of each application will be given before the event in the newspapers, and for some, especially neighbours, we will be contacting people directly. The Trust is following a nationally-agreed Code of Practice. We are working through all the necessary procedures, consultation and paperwork. We look forward to creating a pest-free area and bringing back endangered species for everyone to enjoy.

If you would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact Kara Prankerd on 06 764 8756 or 0272 240 165. In addition, we will be holding a public meeting to present the plan in further detail and answer any questions the community may have. This will be at *7pm on Monday the 16th of June in the Eltham Town Hall*. Everyone will be welcome to attend this meeting.

Volunteers have been working hard to get the monitor lines cut and ready (about 30kms down – 10 to go!) – so a HUGE thank you again to these wonderful people.

Working bees and voluntary work

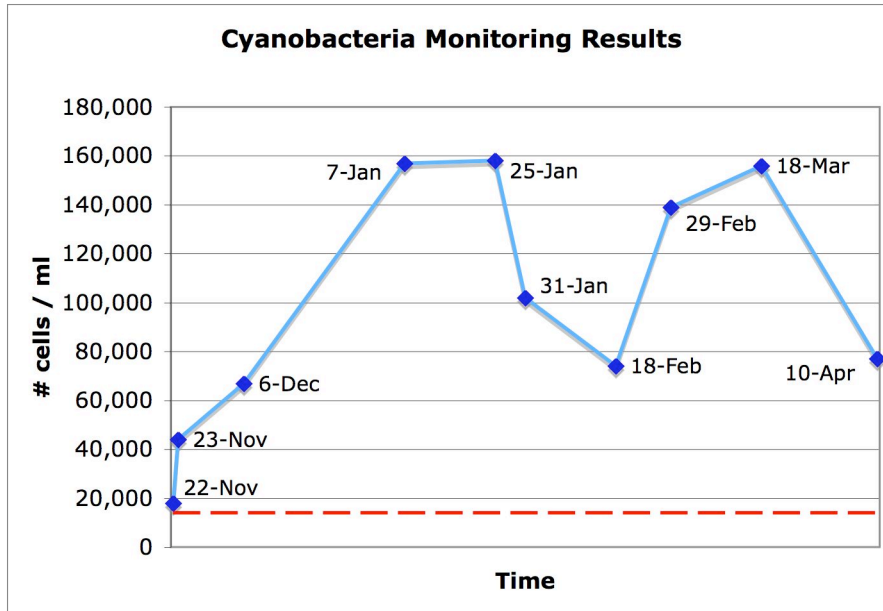
Don't forget the regular working bees to cut pest monitor lines. We start at 9am at the lake each Sunday (great lunch provided!). Page 1 has information on bird survey volunteer opportunities.

If you don't feel up to physical work at the lake but would still like to help in some way (regularly or occasionally), please do get in touch. I'm sure we can find ways to use everyone's skills and enthusiasm.

Cyanobacteria update

We received a number of queries over summer about when the lake was going to re-open for boating (the boating season being 1 Dec – 1 May). Although we have no influence on its closure (that's controlled by the District Health Board and District Council, with scientific monitoring carried out by the Regional Council), we have asked Taranaki Regional Council for an update on results, and we are researching to find out more about this year's unusual algae bloom. See Barry's picture of the lake's recent colour, taken just before the drought broke.

On the graph you will see a dashed red line – this is the 'safe' level – and once the number of cells in a sample go over this, then it indicates that the cyanobacteria are at a potentially harmful level.



This summer, levels have well and truly exceeded the critical level.... the reason for closure. The cause is most likely because of the unusually dry summer we had. For the first time many of us can remember, the majority of the springs in the reserve have dried up. Even the single outlet stream stopped running for several months. These environmental conditions, on top of the natural conditions of the lake (warm and shallow), have been ideal for algae. By the sounds of it, algal blooms have been a national phenomenon this year. Fingers crossed we have a wet winter to flush the lake ready for next season.

Kara

Council comment: John Sargeant

The Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust and South Taranaki District Council have been working in active partnership on the project from the word 'go'. STDCs property and Facilities Manager, John Sargeant, who is responsible for reserves, says that the work of the fence allowing the potential of releasing native birds into a safe environment certainly would not have happened without the Trust. Up to the time the Trust kicked in, Council's role was to keep the toilets clean, mow the lawns, and undertake some pest control.

"What the Trust has done is really incredible" says John, who is convinced the Reserve will be of national significance and international interest. *"Council's role has been very much behind the scenes in terms of legal issues and supporting the Trust in the various jobs which make up the Mainland Island project."*

John adds that it is a model of the community working 'bottom up' with Council (John adds that they are often both the same thing really). He looks forward to the official opening of the gates in the very near future.

John concludes by saying that *"the role of any park is to add value to the community it serves – Rotokare will add value to the nation"*.

Friends of the Lake: Update

I have had many queries about when subscriptions/donations are due again. As the end of the Trust's financial year is March 31st, subs of \$30 will be due now. Some people have already paid this year, so these will carry over until next year. As I have many asking when they last paid we have enclosed a remittance form for those whose subs are due. I hope this makes it clearer for everyone.

To date we have approximately 250 "Friends". More would be nice. So if you know of anyone keen to subscribe please pass them the newsletter or get them to check out the website www.rotokare.org.nz

Your sub entitles you to the fabulous newsletter,unlimited volunteer work!!!, exclusive invites to special events, etc. etc.

As Kara and Jenny are getting snowed under with preparations for the pest eradication, Alex Ballantyne has offered to take over the editing for the newsletter. So please, if you have anything you would like to be included, contact him. We would love feedback from "Friends" so get pen to paper and forward on to him at Rotokare Scenic Reserve Trust, P.O. Box 33, Eltham.

Recently we received a lovely letter from a lady who attended the recent open walk. It read:

"I'm so glad I participated in the open walk on Sat. It was most testing (oh oh that hill!!!) and utmost enjoyable. I'd often read about the development of the fence line but had never even visited Lake Rotokare. So at long last I'll make a donation. I was just overwhelmed by all the work that has been done, and still underway. Congratulations to you all."

Thanks for the letter. The trustees, committee and volunteers appreciate the feedback and comments, and enjoy the occasional "pat on the back."

If you haven't been out to the lake for a visit recently please come. See what is happening. Take a walk. Volunteers have been out there every Sunday morning cutting monitor tracks, controlling weeds, and setting up the fence surveillance systems. And despite the colour of the lake, it is still safe to walk close to the water – and it is too cold for swimming anyway.

Beverley Prankerd
Volunteer Friends Co-ordinator

Barry Hartley snapped this pic of the algae just a month ago – colour not digitally enhanced! Hopefully this is the "end-stage" of the bloom – the water underneath is quite clear.

