

# Successful year for Forest and Bird

In a challenging year, the Hauraki Gulf branch of Forest and Bird has had a pretty good year, all things considered.

Branch committee member Lincoln Jackson says that the group had a target of 2700 trees to plant in 2020 and, even though the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic put a hold on volunteer work, the local environmental group managed to get all the trees into the ground.

“It got done and it was a big success,” Lincoln says.

Whereas in previous seasons, planting may have already started by the time the first lockdown kicked in, Lincoln says that because of last summer’s drought, planting wouldn’t have been able to get going at that time this year anyway.

The drought finally broke at the end of Level 3 and 4 restrictions and, despite challenges around people gathering from May to October, a mix of both local and off-island volunteers planted all 2700 trees across two of Forest and Bird’s Waiheke reserves at Mātiatia and Onetangi.

To make up for the later start, Lincoln says he simply made the volunteer planting days more regular than usual, although Covid gathering restrictions meant just 10 people could take part.

He says most of the volunteers joining the Mātiatia planting days travel to Waiheke from town, helped out with free

ferry travel supplied by Fullers360.

“They’re virtually always young people, students or international workers and they get their first major experience of a restoration project,” says Lincoln.

And in a positive outcome from the pandemic’s disruptions, Lincoln says this year he received more referrals from the volunteer agency in Auckland of people who were looking for something to do with their time after they had lost their jobs.

Lincoln says that although having off-island volunteers help out in the reserve isn’t always creating local ownership of the reserves, it’s still spreading awareness.

“Especially with younger people, they get that experience that they have for the rest of their lives.”

At Mātiatia, the planting was carried out in Atawhai Whenua re-

serve on land gifted to Forest and Bird by Nick and Nettie Johnstone in 1993 and where 50,000 mānuka trees were planted to re-establish the bush over what had been farmland. Once the mānuka was established, over the intervening years infill planting has been carried out with more than 100 different species of native plants, says Lincoln. However, the mānuka that was initially planted has come to the end of its natural, and seemingly short, life, he says.

“In a wetland they can grow for 70 years but on the dry hillside they’ve lasted about

20 years.”

In the harsh climate and terrain, the result has been that there are areas in the 17-hectare Atawhai Whenua reserve where not a lot else has survived and the land has returned to bare grassy patches where weeds have once again taken hold “really badly”, says Lincoln.

“In the past four or five years with the help of volunteers and donated money, we’ve had huge weed control and planting programmes through there, focusing on those spots. We’ve almost completed it.”

In terms of the revegetation programme, Lincoln says there’s still a bit of weeding to do but most of that is complete and they’re getting the reserve back on track.

“That feels like a huge win,” he says.

As well as dealing with the effects of climate, there’s an ongoing battle with the island’s ongoing rabbit epidemic.

These pests are running rampant on Waiheke at the moment and eat many species of native plants, says Lincoln, explaining that walkers are likely to come across plenty of places where they’ve put wire netting around trees to protect them. Rabbits will ringbark large coprosmas and big kowhai trees which means even large kowhai have had to have mesh on them, he says.

“And we’ve been using some rabbit bait, but we’re still in the early stage of figuring out the effect it has on their numbers.”

Over summer, the group is more focused on weeding and the number of volunteers involved is usually about half of what it is for planting days, he says.

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**“We’ll be focusing on local volunteers to plant that number of trees, so hopefully we can maintain a good number of volunteers for that.”**

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From left, Forest and Bird volunteers Lincoln Jackson, Lulu Cullen, Nat Primak and Kseniia Goluban.

2500 free trees for Forest and Bird to plant on its Waiheke reserves.

“There are 600 going into Atawhai because we’ve nearly finished with the infill there. Once that’s done, we can look at planting specimen trees there, like rimu.”

The majority of next year’s trees will go into the group’s Onetangi reserve which will be largely complete by the end of next year’s planting, apart from a few spaces, says Lincoln.

“Because of Kauri Dieback Disease prevention, for Onetangi we only have

local volunteers. We don’t use off-island volunteers in case they’re carrying something on their shoes.

“We’ll be focusing on local volunteers to plant that number of trees, so hopefully we can maintain a good number of volunteers for that.”

Lincoln expects the planting season to begin around April or May, “when the ground starts to get wet enough”. And if planting sessions are carried out weekly, six or seven volunteers will be required each time.

“This year, at the beginning of the planting season it was still dry deeper down, but once you crack through the soil and then plant the tree, then when it rains next, the rain can percolate down through the trees.”

Anyone wishing to get involved with the volunteer work can contact Lincoln by email at [lincolncjackson@gmail.com](mailto:lincolncjackson@gmail.com). Anyone wishing to donate to the group can do so at the Forest and Bird Hauraki Gulf Islands bank account: 38-90120113206-01. • Erin Johnson

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