



Kiwi - the catalyst for change.

East Taranaki Environment Trust

We are a Registered Charitable Trust – We have 5 trustees, they have remained the same since being set up which gives us stable base.

The Trust is involved with two projects – kiwi project at Purangi / Matau/ Pouiatoa; and the whio project based just outside the Park, to support DOC's project within the Park.

Today I will focus on the kiwi project and how the catch cry “saving kiwi in Taranaki” has brought tiny rural communities together to make a difference. Kiwi is probably the one emotive word that galvanizes us all; after all it's what we call ourselves. It's the one native species we all relate to.

The decline of kiwi in New Zealand is something we are all familiar with. Through media it has become one of the key conservation messages, yet for many, they have stood on the side line not knowing what to do to help.

This too was the case in rural Taranaki, as people talked about the birds which were simply not there any more. Rural areas where kiwi inhabited were shrinking – Awakino – gone; Tarata – gone; Douglas – gone; and on it continued. It was not that people did not care, they did. It is more that people did not know how to help the kiwi.

The tiny area in East Taranaki called Purangi still had a relative strong kiwi population back in 2004. Bob and Karen Schumacher discovered they had kiwi on their 197 hectare property, and that is where this story began. They were aware that the Department of Conservation had set up 5 strategic sanctuaries, and the kiwi in Taranaki were consigned to quietly becoming extinct. Rather than watch this happen they developed a trapping plan to help their kiwi. Neighbors began to ask after “their” kiwi and expressed keen interest.

A little more than a year later a public meeting at the local community hall resulted in the decision to increase the size of the protected area. The tiny community of Matau and Purangi agreed to have a network of traps on their property.

By the end of 2005, 3,000 hectares had predator protection. Suddenly the community was talking about “their” kiwi. The interest in kiwi and what was needed to help was huge. Everyone was aware of the risk presented by stoats and were on a personal crusade to deal with them. They became aware of the need to look after the bush “for the kiwi”, feral goats were being looked at – no longer a source of revenue for marginal hill country farmers, but as an enemy of the bush and kiwi. Landowners were stopping and considering wider issues before they cleared land or undertook bulldozer work – checking on how things would affect “their kiwi”. Neighbors just outside the original project area wanted traps to stop the stoats before they could get into the kiwi area. Most of the field work is done by locals in the community.

Such was the interest that before long the neighbouring community also wanted to join the project and save their kiwi. After much planning and sheer hard work, in 2009 over 50 kms of tracks were cut and more stoat boxes were deployed. The total area of 13,000 hectares has a network of 1300 stoat boxes, 1000 permanent bait stations for possum control and periodic goat culling.

This has meant for the Trust that our project is more about landscape ecosystem management rather than a single species management, but we have targeted kiwi as our indicator species.

Landscape ecosystem management fits well with our trustees – it tends to have a strong focus on the process, and acknowledges that humans are part of that process. Equally it recognises that there is multiple use of the ecosystem, which in our case is what we are dealing with. Being a community driven and managed project overheads have been able to be tightly controlled. The high level of acceptance by the community has seen volunteer input to the value of \$71,000 for the past 12 months, and further \$30,000 cash donated. The project cost of around \$25 per hectare is small compares to the positive outcomes. The kiwi call survey in 2007 recorded 87 calls, this increased to 161 calls in 2009. Something the locals are very proud of.

There are a number of key points which we believe need to be factored in for a successful community project and we have worked on these:

- Ecosystem services approach – the need to have a holistic approach to the ecosystem not have an add-on
- Recognise the critical role of information – for policy; for the project; for the trend data. We are reasonably formally structured with written policy, reporting, data monitoring and use a lot of DOC reporting spreadsheets. If it is not measured how do you know if you are making a difference?

- Ensure the correct property rights regime. We acknowledge that economic goals have the same importance as ecological ones to some of the landowners. We respect this and work with everyone in our area, and do not impose our views on any landowner within our project area. In other words respect their property rights and their right to earn a living. We have found by developing this personal relationship and involving landowners in the process has strengthened the project.
- Interactive institutional framework – We work with –2 district councils (NPDC, SDC), Regional Council (TRC), Central Government (DOC, MfE, Biodiversity), plus landowners, farmers, communities, forest owners, iwi, Maori Women’s Welfare League, National funding groups, and regional focus groups.
- It is essential to have partnerships for progress. Partners are critical both for your support and to tap into for specialist knowledge.
- We believe our project is a template of how communities with different priorities can work together. It recognises that both human and the environment need to co-exist. We are silent on farming practices respecting the landowner’s right on his/her own property. We have found this philosophy has developed a high level of acceptance. The overwhelming result is that the communities are driving the change rather than it being a regulatory approach.

For the local communities it is all about ownership – they know they are making a difference to ‘their kiwi’.