

For me personally it has been a steady and heady learning curve, as I imagine it has also been for farmers, who continue to manage most of the Peninsula's 100,000 hectares.

Now, in 2021, conservation needs are widely seen as acute, the way we manage local land and the entire planet is increasingly urgent, human challenges come thick and fast – but awareness and action are growing hugely too – grounds for a lot of hope.

The old adage is that we should think global and act local. As I see it, the Banks Peninsula Conservation Trust has been acting locally in excellent ways. Personally I've loved being part of it, peripherally at least, right from the beginning, and I hope I can continue to contribute. The local place we call home and are responsible for is an astonishingly wonderful and beautiful place. It is worth all our efforts.

Piki mai kake mai! Up and at it! On we go!

Banks Peninsula Conservation Trust 20th Anniversary address

Dr David Miller

Banks Peninsula Conservation Trust, Trustee



(Photo: Jon Sullivan)

Tēnā koutou katoa, and acknowledgements to Andrew Turner, Eugenie Sage, Lyttelton Port Company staff, Andrew McCarthy, distinguished guests, Trustees past and present, Banks Peninsula Conservation Trust (BPCT) staff present and past, covenanters, corporate partners, supporters and friends.

It was (almost) 20 years ago today

We've already heard about some of the signature projects that the BPCT has helped establish, but I prefer to focus on the human vision that has led to this moment. The story of our Trust is a story of brilliant vision, great collaborations, and sheer human passion and commitment.

Most of us know that the BPCT grew out of widespread dissatisfaction with the Banks Peninsula District Plan, from the Banks Peninsula District Council. A Banks Peninsula Task Force was set up by the council in 1998 to address this dissatisfaction.

The Task Force presented recommendations to the District Council in 1999, a key proposal being the formation of an independent Trust to encourage landowners to actively manage and conserve the landscapes and natural resources of Banks Peninsula.

Under the leadership of Rick Menzies, fellow farming landowners (including Pam Richardson, Kit Grigg, and Helen Ricketts), Don Ross from the NZ Landcare Trust, and Lesley Woudberg from the Ministry for the Environment, set up the BPCT. They were joined by Kate Whyte, Francis and Shireen Helps, Jill and Richard Simpson, and Annelies Pikelharing.

The BPCT became a covenanting authority under the Reserves Act in 2003, the only non-governmental covenanting body in New Zealand, partnering with landowners to protect biodiversity on Banks Peninsula – to date protecting over 1,500 ha, with lots more in the pipeline.

The generosity of collaborators

I think of the Trust as a pool or a beautiful fern-fringed lake, full of wisdom and experience, fed by many streams. Those streams are the multiple people and their ideas and activities that, when combined, have led over the years to our strength as a Trust in conservation. It is a fabulous story! It is all about people. For example:

- **Mark and Sonia Armstrong** who, over 30 years ago, started active trapping of predators of penguins. There's a story from 1995 of Mark driving a post to the top of a 200 m cliff, tying a rope to it (and to himself), and lowering himself down to create a protective fence for tītī (health and safety issues there, Mark) – the start of a nationally significant protection effort. Mark's original chicken wire has been replaced by a tītī predator-proof fence built with essential support from DOC, CCC, Josef Langer Trust, and ECan.
- Landowners **Shireen and Francis Helps** are well known examples of farming conservationists. They were so used to the sound and smell of little blue penguins that they were alarmed when in the 1980s penguin numbers started to plummet. Predator control, building nest boxes, and monitoring nests has seen numbers grow year on year to make Pohatu the largest mainland penguin colony in New Zealand.
- The Hinewai vision and the depth of knowledge **Hugh Wilson** was willing to share were so influential in the establishment of the BPCT. Our covenanting plan was based on Hugh's research and detailed reflections.
- DOC Ranger **Robin Burleigh** managed the comprehensive Banks Peninsula little blue penguin census in 2000/01. The penguins were found in greater numbers from Le Bons Bay to the Akaroa Headland, and there was a higher range of diversity in the biota with fewer weed pests and exotic habitats than on the wider Banks Peninsula. Robin was the visionary who dreamed of The Wildside, an area with biodiversity worthy of special protection, and he worked with landowners who were deeply engaged in conservation that needed support and collaboration with agencies. Robin talked to key researchers, with agencies (DOC, CCC, ECan and BPCT) working on multi-species predator control and protecting nesting sites across the north-east corner of Banks Peninsula, and with landowners – and thus (and with the trapping skills of **John Stuart**) The Wildside was born and thrives. What a legacy!
- **Sue and Murray Johns** signed their covenant deed – the first BPCT covenant - for Paua Bay Covenant in November 2004. They then went on to complete two further covenants in 2008 and 2019. Murray is a

6th generation Lelievre family descendant and their covenant at the southernmost limit of nīkau palm, special ferns and titoki, is home to several important species.

- The establishment of Haley’s Heritage Covenant by the **Haley family** in February 2008 added to the protection being offered by Hinewai Reserve. **Jill and Richard Simpson** had covenanted Whangairimu / Fisherman’s Bay in 2006, then Hugh’s Covenant (named in Hugh Wilson’s honour) in November 2011 – together they formed Banks Peninsula’s (and we believe New Zealand’s) first complete Ki Uta Ki tai – a summit to sea legally protected catchment. The Haleys also went on to establish two new close-by covenants: French Heritage and Etienne’s Bush in 2017 in the top of the next catchment – Paua Bay.
- **Vicki and Chris Parr** established the 334 ha Te Ara Pātiki Covenant in Kaituna Basin in November 2015 – the largest BPCT covenant. Ecologically impressive with ancient podocarps kahikatea, mataī, and tōtara, diverse shrublands, and regenerating forest, it also has key waterway protection, public access and excellent connectivity to a 1000 ha core area. Many reserves, private and public, are included in the area. It now sustains breeding falcons in the top rock bluffs.
- Kakanui Reserve Covenant was added in July 2017 in **Koukourārata** with several hundred Māori landowners and the neighbouring farmer. The first covenant in the country that protects ecological *and* cultural values, it has wāhi tapu status. It is home to many threatened and fascinating species, including fierce lancewood, leafless clematis, bloodwood, and climbing aniseed. It is a stronghold for lizards and many bird species. The Covenant – joined to the ocean via the umbilical cord of Mother Earth, Papatūānuku by beautiful native plantings down a stream corridor, is a neat project.
- Top of Le Bons Bay is Langer Reserve, the result of a wonderful collaboration from December 2017 between the **Josef Langer Trust** and the **Rod Donald Banks Peninsula Trust** to protect this publicly accessible reserve. At 205 ha – the second largest BPCT covenant – it has a unique “geocology”: plants have adapted closely to the world-renowned volcanic geography and geology. Distinctive trachyte dome formations are home to a very rare montane gentian, its only site on Banks Peninsula.
- The recently covenanted **Nelcimor** at the top of Flea Bay Road has been a highlight. It has the last stand of red beech to be protected on the Peninsula, and is home to a plethora of fascinating and unusual fern life.
- Increasing connectivity between isolated patches of bush is an ongoing aspiration so that flora and fauna are given ecological stepping stones to go forth and multiply in new areas. In many situations this has the inbuilt bonus of protecting waterways. A recent highlight has been the protection of Sally’s Bay Covenant by the **Fisher Family** at Ataahua, a key headwater leading into Te Waihora / Lake Ellesmere with amazing remnant podocarp forest.
- Over 95% of Banks Peninsula’s wetlands have been destroyed so it is crucial to protect what little is left. The rare stunted bog forest of French Farm Wetland above Wainui is quite other-worldly, and we are thrilled to have the Stencliffe raupō wetland project underway thanks to **Jane and Hugh Eaton** at Pigeon Bay.

Belief in working together

The Trust has fostered a belief that we can do more TOGETHER and has facilitated many wonderful, collaborative ventures. These are some examples:

- Tūi translocation and monitoring (2009-2010) led by **Patsy Dart** and **Frances Schmechel**, and supported by **Laura Molles**, Lincoln University, CCC, DOC, the Josef Langer Charitable Trust, the Eureka Trust, artist **Claire Reilly**, iwi, and a huge range of supporters. This project has captivated our communities who have followed the antics of the named, banded birds to form what is now the largest data set of community sightings like this in New Zealand. For instance, The Bishop was banded by **Phil Cochrane** in Akaroa. Keen tūi spotters recorded observations of him in Akaroa, then Governors Bay, and finally as far north as Leithfield in May 2013, before he returned to the Peninsula. Hilariously, The Bishop chose Phil Cochrane’s backyard in Cashmere to stay in for several days, en route back to Akaroa.

- The 2050 Ecological Vision for Banks Peninsula launched by the Associate Minister of Conservation in 2016, developed under the oversight of Professor **David Norton** and ecologists at the University of Canterbury, Lincoln University, and Landcare Research, and widely supported by our partners and the broader community.
- Te Kākahu Kahukura – Goal 4 of our Ecological Vision – the second biodiversity hub inspired by landowner need/opportunity arising from the Port Hills fires. The Te Kākahu Kahukura collaboration is a community-driven effort stretching from Gebbies Pass to Mt Victoria in the southern Port Hills, including Living Springs and Ōtamahua / Quail Island. It aims to restore, protect, and enhance native forest and indigenous biodiversity on the southern Port Hills. It includes many private landowners, community groups, and agencies working together to foster what we hope will become a thriving and resilient native forest supporting an abundance of native birds and invertebrates.
- The vision of a Pest Free Banks Peninsula (PFBP) – Goal 8 of our Ecological Vision – and our most comprehensive partnership yet. We have 14 formally linked partners, all of whom actively support and many of whom finance the implementation of this major project. Key support comes from ECan, DOC, CCC, the Summit Road Society, Selwyn District Council, Rod Donald Trust, Ngāi Tahu, and all of the Banks Peninsula rūnanga, Living Springs, Cacophony Project, Predator Free NZ 2050, corporate partner Merrell, and local landowners and supporters. In addition to targeting possums, feral cats, and mustelids, we are after feral goats as well! This project has already employed 12 full-time staff and is poised to make a significant difference in Kaitōrete and the expanded Wildside, while also finding means to support local groups on other parts of the peninsula.

The People: passionate and committed

I wish to warmly acknowledge 20 years of passionate, engaged staff who have contributed so much to the BPCT success story: **Frances Schmechel, Kristina Townsend, Diana Stronach, Rachel Barker, Melissa Hutchison, Brooke Turner, Marie Haley, Alison Evans, Marie Neal** (our inspiring Covenants Manager), **Sarah Bisley, Sophie Hartnell, Alice Webster, Sarah Wilson**, and the brilliant General Manager of BPCT, **Maree Burnett**. We are here because of all their hard work!

New PFBP staff – **Tim Sjoberg, Mark Lelievre, and John Williamson** have recently joined the team, and eight new field staff will be starting after Easter. And ‘honorary staff’ were so important along the way – people like **Annelies Pekelharing, Dennis Blomquist, and Prue Kennard**.

The inspired leadership of **Rick Menzies** got us going, established enduring foundations and *created our identity*, then **Mark Christensen** gave leadership at crucial later stages of the BPCT’s development.

We’ve benefitted from 20 years of passionate landowners and the community leading the way, supported and encouraged by agencies and generous sponsors/benefactors. Many are here today and we want to acknowledge you all. Over the past 20 years, our key sponsors and funders have included:

- Anderson Lloyd - Foundation Sponsor providing significant support from the beginning.
- Independent Line Services - long time Gold sponsors of The Wildside project.
- Lyttelton Port Company (LPC) - Foundation sponsors from 2014, a crucial relationship for us, not least with their community focussed Port Saddle project, and now principal sponsorship.
- Vicinity Solutions - Gold sponsors signed up in 2015.
- In 2016 we signed our first principal sponsorship thanks to Andrew McCarthy (Hue Salons Ltd).
- Fox and Associates, land surveyors - Gold sponsors signed up in 2016.
- Boffa Miskell, ecological surveys (and other support) - Gold sponsors signed up in 2017.
- Bayleys - Gold sponsor 2020.
- Merrell - Gold sponsor 2020.

- Rātā Foundation, Rod Donald Banks Peninsula Trust, and Josef Langer Trust - long standing support funding.
- Agencies - CCC, DOC, ECAN.
- And most recently Predator Free 2050 Ltd - August 2020 \$5.11M for our eradication programme.
- The families, and individuals who have signed up as “Friends of the Trust”, making regular donations.

Research partners who ensure our decisions are science- and evidence-led include the University of Canterbury, Lincoln University, Manaaki Whenua / Landcare Research, Zero Invasive Predators Ltd (ZIP), Cacophony Project, and Applied Intelligence.

In 2016 the volunteer programme was established with funding support from the Rod Donald Banks Peninsula Trust. This programme, run by **Sophie Hartnell**, is supported with volunteer labour from individuals, and other non-profit groups - of note, Conservation Volunteers NZ, Church groups, and corporate partners. It provides significant support with covenant management to landowners who need it.

Finally, our local schools are the next generation of Banks Peninsula’s stewards of nature. They’re great contributors to the BPCT’s work:

- **Akaroa School** – BPCT supports their enviro group with the Wildside Coordinator actively supporting ecological projects and mentoring individual students.
- **Christ’s College** – has brought students for a service week of volunteering on projects across the Peninsula every November since 2017.
- **Little River School** – regularly volunteers at Hauroko Covenant in Birdlings Flat.
- **Heathcote and Lyttelton Schools** (with Enviroschools support) help with the management of the Port Saddle Restoration Project and regularly use the site as an outdoor classroom.

This is truly community conservation at its best!

Ngā mihi nui ki a koe.

Acknowledgement

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