UPDATE ON OKAREKA MISTLETOE RESTORATION PROJECT INAUGURAL WEED CONTROL WORK DAY

Paul Cashmore

In the last issue of the newsletter we announced the intention to of the society to pursue what has become known as the "Okareka mistletoe restoration project" in the Lake Tikitapu Scenic Reserve and neighbouring Lake Okareka marginal strip in conjunction with Rotorua Forest and Bird, Department of Conservation and Environment BoP.

While Forest and Bird has been working away for the last few months in the Lake Tikitapu Scenic Reserve preparing bait station lines for animal control and undertaking bird counts our part of this project (namely the weed control) has had to wait for the warmer spring/summer weather to get the weeds growing in order for control to be effective.

Our inaugural weed control day was held on Saturday 16 November 2002 based at the Okareka marginal strip area administered DoC which is almost opposite the Lake Tikitapu Scenic Reserve where the bait station layout by Forest and Bird is occurring. The weather on the day wasn't perfect with a few showers and hovering dark clouds but this did not interrupt the work. Unfortunately the attendance for this first day could only be described as "poor" with those people associated with DoC who came to help out almost outnumbering botanical society members!!! We had a total of seven people for the day which included one member of the Okareka community which was a small but encouraging start at involving the local community in this project.

The work mainly involved cutting and removing jasmine from an area of the reserve along with felling and hand pulling of cherry, strawberry dogwood and cotoneaster trees and shrubs. A whole host of other weed specie were also found and controlled including hydrangea, montbretia, ivy, German ivy, wandering willie, Japanese walnut, and Japanese

honeysuckle. Although the group was small the mix of skills was perfect for controlling the weed species present. Larger trees were chainsawed by Bruce Mossman from DoC, while the rest of us sawed, slashed, handpulled and cut our way through the vines, shrubs and saplings. All vine and groundcover species were then knapsack sprayed with herbicide to kill them. Most weeds appeared to have come from illegal dumping of garden rubbish in reserve from neighbouring properties over many years. Working efficiently as a team we finished up early afternoon having made substantial progress on the reasonably dense and diverse range of weed species present in the northern end of this reserve. To remind us all of why we were doing this project the mistletoe *Tupeia antarctica* was looking very healthy with its spring foliage and everyone was able to admire some excellent specimens at close range. In summary the day was definitely a success even with the small number of volunteers and I think we can steadily build on this. I think there a few lessons I have learn't from this which we need to consider for next time.

No matter how much you advertise a program like this within the botanical society there is only a small pool of members available to attend. Where therefore need to rely on assistance from other organisations/public in order to keep this program running. As Forest and Bird have their own program in this reserve we should not rely on assistance from their members, especially as in this case our work day was on Saturday and their day was on Sunday. Building relationships with the local community at Okareka by raising awareness of the mistletoe population and the weed problems and getting locals involved hands on in the work will be a key element. To this end we need to advertise our work days better and the Okareka store is a good place to do this. Also articles and advertising in the local ratepayers newsletter will also spread the word. I will work on these two aspects for 2003.

The problem of ongoing dumping of weeds is a serious and real threat and will undermine any of our efforts. Signage is needed to educate people.

With the small numbers of people involved we can probably make good progress with several work days per year well run and organised. To this end I have organised another work day this summer in conjunction with DoC on Saturday 8 March 2003 (details below). Please show your support and help out.

The results of our joint application with Forest and Bird for funding to Environment BoP's Environmental Enhancement Fund was announced in December. Unfortunately our application was unsuccessful therefore in the meantime without additional funds we will need to keep the work low key and work in conjunction with DoC for equipment eg tools, herbicides etc. However there are many other funding options available to groups undertaking environmental projects and some of these should be explored by the committee.

In summary, although its been a bit of a slow start I would like to think that we can build on our initial work day and develop a long term sustained weed control program which even with only a couple of work days per year will still have a huge benefit in this relatively small area.

OKAREKA MISTLETOE RESTORATION PROJECT
STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

(These have been developed by DoC in consultation with Forest and Bird, RBS and Environment BoP).

Vision

-The Lake Tikitapu Scenic Reserve and surrounding lands are restored by allowing natural ecosystem processes to continue, leading to an improvement in native biodiversity values.

-Opportunities are established for community involvement, education and awareness in protecting and enhancing native biodiversity.

Major Participants

The project is a joint initiative between the following organisations:-

- Department of Conservation
- Environment Bay of Plenty
- Rotorua Botanical Society
- Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society of New Zealand Inc.

Objectives

1. Ecosystem Recovery

To facilitate the recovery and maintenance of indigenous forest structure and natural ecosystem processes by the sustained control, to low levels, of introduced plant and animal pests.

2. Species

- Increase the distribution and numbers of two mistletoe species (*Ileostylus micranthus* & *Tupeia antarctica*) within the management area.
- Increase the distribution and numbers of existing native fauna within the management area.

3. Monitoring

Monitoring of biological communities to establish baseline information and measure changes resulting from enhancement activities.

4. Community

Raise awareness and encourage involvement of the public and local communities in the Okareka Mistletoe Restoration Project.

Targets

1. Animal Pests

- Reduce and control possum densities to <3% RTCI (Residual Trap Catch Index) within the management area.
- Reduce and control rat densities to <5% tracking tunnel index within the management area.
- Reduce and control densities of other pest species (with a significant emphasis upon wallaby) within the management area.

2. Plant Pests

Control all important ecological plant pests to near / practicable zero density within the management area.

3. Monitoring

Establish baseline data and maintain monitoring throughout the project for:-

- Native flora (mistletoe, key palatable indicator species).
- Native fauna (key forest dwelling species).
- Animal pest species.