

UPDATE ON OKAREKA MISTLETOE RESTORATION PROJECT

Paul Cashmore

Since the last newsletter RBS have had a further 3 workdays. In July our workday focused on clearing the blackberry area which had been sprayed back in April. A small team completely cleared the dead vegetation and Mike Goodwin undertook some further spraying of grass along the bank, in preparation for planting.

In September our planting day took place. We had a reasonable turnout of volunteers and divided the several hundred trees between the new site and filling gaps in the old site. Stock planted was mainly large fivefinger and kohuhu with a small amount of tree lucerne. A surprisingly large number of plants were needed along the top of the bank at the existing site as few plants had survived here following spraying that had taken place by council contractors the previous summer.

Our releasing workday planned for November was postponed until the start of December to combine with Forest and Bird's end of year BBQ. Again, as in previous years, extensive releasing of weeds was required along the top of the bank at the existing site as some plants were struggling to establish. With the plantings towards the bottom of the slope now several years old and getting large, only minimal releasing, mainly of convolvulus, was required in much of this area. The newly planted area had minimum weed encroachment as a result of our previous site preparation.

With the hand-weeding finished we were able to respray the sites along Okareka Loop Rd which the RBS has been regularly controlling and monitoring. Cherries were hand pulled, jasmine and aluminium vine sprayed and a new infestation of old man's beard discovered to cap the day off. Unfortunately with strong gusty winds we were unable to release spray at the restoration sites so Mike Goodwin's offer to carry this out subsequently were much appreciated.

Slightly late RBS members trickled around the corner to Acacia Rd to the Blakely residence to enjoy a BBQ lunch, (courtesy of EBOP) in the hot sun. This was a nice way to finish the project for the year and to chat to our fellow Forest and Bird members. One aspect of the project this year has been the increased communication and co-operation between RBS and Forest and Bird and DOC on the Okareka Mistletoe Project. This led to several combined meetings during the year looking at wider issues in the reserve including track development, signage and interpretation, some of which the RBS will be involved in.

So in summary I feel we have had a fairly successful year with this project and I think overall it is going from strength to strength. One of the most pleasing aspects for me personally is just talking to members of the Okareka community that you meet in every day life. Most are not involved in the project at all but the majority of the community now seem to be aware of, firstly, the existence of mistletoe in the area and secondly, that there is a project occurring in the area to enhance it. This is a big change from 10 years ago when I first noted mistletoe at Okareka, and started talking to landowners about it and realised the total lack of awareness about the presence and plight of the species in the area.

To finish I should also take the time to once again thank our regular supporters both within and outside of RBS who have made our continued progress possible as follows:

- DOC who have supplied all the spraying equipment, herbicides and tools for weed control throughout the project along with regular advice and support.

- EBOP who have provided EEF funding for the purchase of plants

- the members of the Okareka community (most of whom also belong to other groups involved in this project), namely Mike and Sandra Goodwin, Rod Stace and Sarah Crump.

- the core RBS members from outside Okareka who have consistently turned up to volunteer for workdays, in particular John, Barbara, Joan, Grant, Chris (and myself!!).