Kāpiti-Mana Forest and Bird Newsletter March 2022

Chair's opinion. Stewardship land

In December, I talked about eco corridors, large ones throughout North America, NZ-wide ones and those in Wellington Region.

The science behind them, briefly, is something like this. In about the 1960's an idea emerged called Island Biogeography. It was found that small islands had very few species, larger islands more. If the island was close to a mainland it had more, if further away, less. So the principle was "more species disappeared if islands are small and more isolated." Our civilization makes inroads into and through natural areas with roads, logging, farming, recreation, wind and solar farms, mining, water collection, dams, urbanisation… the list goes on. These break up (fragment) natural landscapes until they are essentially islands and Yes! island biogeography principles apply. The smaller and more isolated an area is, the less species it will contain.

The reasons for plant and animal species loss on islands can be inbreeding, large weather events, weed or pest incursions, breeding failure, seasonal food shortage, vegetation change, climate change (can't move south), etc. Species loss is less likely to happen in large areas where lost species may be able to migrate back. Large areas also have more area compared to perimeter length so suffer less from edge effect.

More research came up with rules like

- large reserves are better than small ones
- A single large reserve is better than a group of small ones of equivalent total size
- Reserves close together are better than reserves far apart
- Round reserves are better than long thin ones
- Reserves connected with corridors are better than unconnected ones.

The South Island has a continuous and wide corridor of highly biodiverse, public natural land from the north to the south of the island. You can see this here. In it are land parcels of different colours. Over the next few years, stewardship land (light green) is being reviewed by DOC. National Parks are yellow.

The West Coast and upper South Island are to be dealt with first. You can see them here. This part of the west Coast shows how extensive they are:

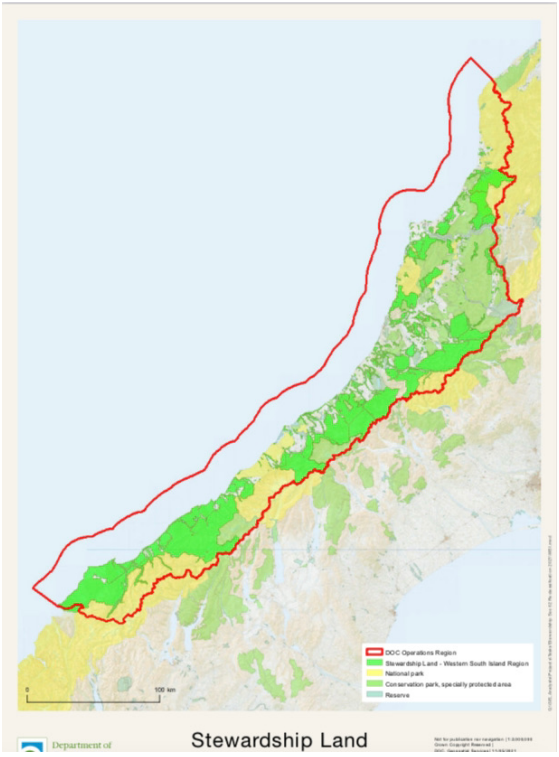

Image ©: DOC (Crown Copyright)

Loss of stewardship land could fragment the north south continuum of the South Island. Although unlikely, Arthur's Pass National Park could be separated from natural lands to the south. This shows the scale of the change that could happen.

A further complication is that species of plants and animals live and use different altitudes and ecosystems at different times of year so removal of part of an area may lead to local extinction.

The message of Island biogeography is that if we want NZ native wildlife to survive, we must provide big, connected areas, and the bigger the better.

Natural public land in the North Island is not as large and connected. Stewardship land adds area to the conservation estate but seldom adds connectivity. We have eliminated and fragmented far more natural lands in the North Island.

The acting Minister of Conservation says: *"The Government intends to progress legislation to streamline, speed up and simplify the process so* (stewardship) *land with conservation value is identified and managed appropriately, while land with low or no conservation value can be considered for other uses. … There is considerable confusion over stewardship land status and ongoing debate over whether it is appropriate to allow economic activity in these areas. These new measures will remove ambiguity and provide clarity as to what conservation values are present and how much protection the land has."*

This is all I know of the intention of the change.

Let's hope it recognises the value of size and continuity of natural land to biodiversity and climate change.

The 58 ha Taungata Conservation Area near the Otaki River is the only area of stewardship land in our region. Though I do not know the value of this area, it is natural land and should be added to our natural estate.

In my opinion NZ should not remove any more of its natural estate.

Russell

Ngahere gecko

(Mokopirirakau "southern North Island")

We were delighted to find a juvenile ngahere gecko on a fence in the forest near our home late last month. At first we thought it was a child's plastic toy but then it moved!

Ngahere geckos are forest and bush dwellers (ngāhere means forest in Te Reo), are largely nocturnal, but occasionally come out to sunbathe (as this one is), and are very similar to forest geckos (mokopirirakau granulatus) which occur further north. They are omnivorous, eating insects including moths and flies, fruit, and nectar and can live up to 30 years in captivity. DOC classifies the species "At Risk - Declining" so we're chuffed to have spotted one nearby. Evidently they are also occasionally seen at Ngā Manu. Below is an adult. To get an idea of size you can see her? tail in the lower part of the picture. Learn more here:

Juvenile ngahere gecko on fence © Russell Bell

Adult ngahere gecko on 4x2 beam © Russell Bell

Stoats and Predator-Free NZ

This link is to a talk by Dr Andrew Veale of Land Care Research about stoats and other mustelids, and possums and wallabies. Dr Veale specializes in genomic sequencing and how this information can lead to knowing how many stoats are left in an elimination exercise area such as the Waiheke Island eradication. Genomic information can tell how far stoats travel and swim, breeding success - all sorts of things you would hardly believe - including how we can reduce them and, in the future, how they might be eliminated. But alongside reducing numbers and elimination is the effect called cascading. If a predator is removed, its prey may explode and that may be worse for the environment. It's complex but interesting. Those of you who trap would especially enjoy this video and don't worry: Dr Veale says we must keep on trapping.

Wetlands

Wetlands have been in trouble for so long in New Zealand, and that's because we have decimated them. There are 10% left nationally and less than 3% left in the Wellington Region.

The Forest & Bird petition promoted in the recent magazine urges the government to do more to save wetlands and to investigate paludiculture (agriculture based on cropping plants that will grow in wetlands). Wetlands need more emphasis, protection and the enforcement of existing rules. Only 4000 people had signed when we checked. Please add your name to the Forest & Bird petition to urge our government to do more for wetlands.

If you are travelling through the Waikato, you could visit the National Wetland Discovery Centre at Lake Rotopiko near Hamilton. The National Wetlands Trust have created three Wetland Trails - one of which starts near the Centre (exploring Whangamarino and Lake Waikare with two short walks and plenty to interest the kids too).

There's also a Wetlands Online map and guide to help you find more wetlands to explore.

© National Wetland Trust of New Zealand

Queen Elizabeth Park

In December of last year, I advised you that farming had ended in QEP but that is not all that happened. The road through the farm from Poplar Avenue to Whareroa Road was opened the cyclists and walkers and tracks have been mown over much of the park that you can now walk on. GW did this with no fanfare. It has made a huge difference. I encourage you to walk the park and get to know the other 60% we've been denied access to all these years. This change would not have happened if Friends of QEP and Kapiti-Mana F&B had not used their influence over many years. Now it is time to put this chapter behind us and embrace the things that we can do together with GW Parks. You might notice the short article in the latest F&B magazine to this effect. Soon Master Planning process will begin. That will determine which areas should be used for what. Our expectation is that none of the wetlands (drained or not) will be used for anything other than passive recreation (walking through them on dry tracks) and that, for the most part, the edges will be planted and more intensive recreation will occur in the stable dunes behind the coastal dunes.

Zoom Meetings

Because of covid, some branches have held meetings on line. It is desirable for those with widespread membership. Our branch has not attracted Mana members to Kapiti branch meetings.

On line meetings can be recorded and sent to branches or put on F&B's Youtube channel.

Before Covid, a speaker in Lower Hutt often spoke at the other Wellington branches too. With on-line recorded meetings, that could all change. Below is a link to a Manawatu Branch meeting on Feral cats to see how you find this experience. What do you miss from an in person branch meeting?

We'd like to know your views;
Would you prefer:
A) in person meetings (when allowed)
B) online meetings as they happen
C) recorded meetings watched later
D) watch branch meetings on F&B's Youtube channel?

We look forward to your feedback to the email address below.

Feral Cat Management in NZ

Watch the Manawatu branch meeting on feral cat issue in New Zealand.
The meeting had two speakers.

The first is Tamsin Orr-Walker (NZOM) of the Kea Conservation Trust about the effect of feral cats on Kea survival.

The second presentation (about 24 minutes in on the video) is by Jessi Morgan explaining Predator Free New Zealand's position.

You can also hear Jessi interviewed about feral cat management Here on a Radio New Zealand podcast with Jessi Morgan from Predator Free New Zealand.

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Your feedback on this newsletter would be most welcome as would contributions to future newsletters.