Port Marlborough
Marlborough Environment Awards 2025

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Judges' Report

CATEGORY:

Landscape and Habitat

Oruapuputa Wetlands

INTERVIEWED	Nick Eade
DATE	2 December 2024
JUDGES	Roy Grose, Helen Ballinger, Wendy Sullivan

INTRODUCTION

The Oruapuputa wetland restoration project, undertaken by landowners Nick Eade and Paul and Ash Millen, spans both private and public land. Over the past 14 years, the project has successfully transitioned the wetland from a willow-dominated landscape to one of regenerating native vegetation.

The primary threats to the wetland habitat include invasive weeds, goat browsing, and predators, which are being systematically addressed through targeted control efforts and ecological restoration practices.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The wetland is located adjacent to Queen Charlotte Drive, where road construction has separated it from the Mahakipawa Estuary. Wheadons Stream flows through the wetland into the estuary via culverts. Approximately one-third of the wetland (1ha) is under private ownership, protected by a QEII covenant, while the remaining 2ha is unclassified public land.

The wetland falls within the boundaries of Te Hoiere Project. Launched in 2019, this multi-partner, landscape-scale catchment collective aims to revitalise the Te Hoiere/Pelorus catchment and serve as a leading example of community-driven environmental restoration.

Restoration began in 2010 with the removal of crack willow, allowing native vegetation such as coastal shrub species, reed beds to return naturally. The wetland margins consist of a broadleaf forest, with a few emergent kahikatea. The forest is also naturally regenerating with an abundance of seedlings observed.

The site provides valuable habitat for a variety of bird species, including the At-Risk mātātā/fernbird, pūkeko, and kōtare/kingfisher.

Ongoing challenges continue to be weed control. Crack willow is still reinvading from upstream sources, and convolvulus, which is smothering native vegetation, is an ongoing battle. Considerable effort has been implemented to rid the wetland of other invasive weeds, such as wild walnut, old man's beard and hawthorne, and these are now in low numbers. Outward Bound students are used to assist with plant release and weed control.

Weed control is complemented by planting of seedlings eco-sourced from the immediate area.

Goats also invade from neighbouring Mt Richmond Forest Park and are controlled when possible.

Nick runs 14 predator traps and has also attempted to monitor predator numbers through tracking tunnels. Nick believes while predator control will be ongoing, the weed and planting work should reduce to minor ongoing maintenance in the next five years.

THE JUDGES WERE IMPRESSED BY

- The restoration remained outcome focused. Efforts were focused on enhancing the fernbird population, ensuring actions were purposeful and impactful.
- Planting strategies were guided by the natural landscape and ecological characteristics of the wetland.
- Locally sourced seedlings were potted up to reduce costs and align with the site's natural biodiversity.
- Nick's practical and self-driven approach demonstrated a clear understanding of her expertise and what could realistically be achieved. She displayed genuine ownership and deep connection to the site.

PROBLEMS AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN TACKLED

- While crack willow has been largely eradicated, reinvasion from upstream remains a challenge, and convolvulus continues to require ongoing control. Efforts to manage weeds are supplemented by eco-sourced seedlings propagated locally. Nick uses a minimal herbicide strategy, relying on chemical gel to control weeds while preserving natural regeneration.
- Goats from nearby Mt Richmond Forest Park are managed with targeted control efforts during peak threat periods identified by Nick. Additionally, she has found that by allowing the convolvulus to temporarily smother young palatable native seedlings the goat damage is less as they target the convolvulus rather than the plants.
- Gravel movement into the wetland from roading operations along the northern boundary was addressed by advocating for the installation of bollards and wire fencing along the road reserve boundary, combined with flax planting to prevent further damage.
- Some earlier riparian planting was lost due to flooding. Nick adapted by identifying natural floodways and avoiding planting in these areas to prevent future losses.

SUMMARY

The Oruapuputa wetland restoration project is a great model of sustainable, low-cost ecological restoration driven by practical solutions and ecological understanding. Nick's focused and realistic approach showcases what can be achieved with limited resources. Replicating this approach across the Mahakipawa estuary would provide greater benefits to fernbird and other native flora.

SUGGESTIONS

- Showcase your philosophy and approach through Te Hoiere Project channels, such as hosting a wetland field day or using communication platforms to share lessons learned.
- Explore opportunities to involve groups such as corporate working bees or volunteer organizations to assist with restoration tasks, share weed control efforts and build relationships for ongoing support and funding.
- Build on existing community trapping initiatives by identifying and collaborating with local volunteers and groups already engaged in restoration activities.
- Develop a health and safety plan, ensuring appropriate measures are in place, such as access to a cell phone or a personal locator beacon (PLB) in areas with limited reception.