

COVENANT MILESTONES

There are now 62 registered BPCT covenants protecting 1104 hectares across Banks Peninsula. Three more blocks covering a further 30 hectares are currently progressing through the final administration stages.

Twelve active projects are underway and there have been over 25 new expressions of interest made within the last year. This increased support shown by the community is really encouraging for the long term protection of our unique landscapes, waterways, and the flora and fauna that depend on their health.



A magnificent New Zealand falcon kārearea in full flight. Photo –The Marlborough Falcon Trust.

FIRE RISK

Following the recent devastating Port Hills Fires in February, many landowners are reflecting on how to prevent or minimise serious fire damage to property including vegetation cover. Meetings in Christchurch and Selwyn districts since February have addressed a wide range of issues including vegetation-fuel types, at-risk sites, fire behavior, climate change, available water supplies, and resulting sedimentation issues. A long term Port Hills ecological recovery strategy is now being put together in response to a wide range of feedback from landowners, council and experts in several fields as part of a wider recovery plan.

Learnings from this event and others are more relevant than ever across Banks Peninsula. There are actions landowners can take in the short term to help minimise long term future risk. In addition to appropriate planting, control of woody weed species and long rank grass, identification and maintenance of key fire-fighting water sources is important.

Many native species have high fire retardant characteristics compared to many common exotic species including plantation forestry on Banks Peninsula. However, fires can display vastly different characteristics according to weather patterns, season, geography, fuel type, plant age, and cumulative burn energy. Dr. Tim Curran (Lincoln University) recently presented flammability research results on several exotic and native species, statistically proving the better retardant qualities of many natives. This supports previous anecdotal evidence by Hugh Wilson, and findings by Forest Research's rural fire research programme. Brochures listing these species are available from the BPCT office.

The National Rural Fire Authority www.nrfa.org.nz have several excellent resources covering vegetation risk management for rural land holders. Defensible spaces around homes and the use of firebreak tools (such as the creation of 'green belts' and buffer zones) are described. Their 'practical guide to rural fire' recommends that fire management be included in the farm business plan and reminds landowners that they must operate within local fire authority rules. Detailed information on the recent fires and the recovery plan can be found at www.ccc.govt.nz/environment/fire/porthillsfire. Further general preparedness help can be found at www.selwyngetready.net.

FALCONS

The recent 'Meet the Falcons day' held at the Okuti Hall in Little River was well supported and it was good to see some covenant holders amongst the crowd. Brancott Estate Winery fund the Marlborough Falcon Trust to train and rehabilitate NZ falcon/ kārearea. Hera, a trained bird travelled on falcon



Rob Lawry falcon handler with Hera a female NZ falcon on his arm. Photo – Laurie Silver.

handler Rob Lawry's arm and an amazing presentation was given by Vikki Smith showing the amazing aerodynamic feats these unique birds are capable of. They are keen to develop ongoing links with BPCT to promote awareness of the NZ Falcon, and learn more about the species' distribution on Banks Peninsula. They welcome any information relating to sightings of these birds which may be submitted through their website www.mfct.org.nz.

FEATURE COVENANTS

Belleau Wood sits below the five Western Valley Multi covenants near Little River. Though relatively small on its own, (1.6 ha) it provides a valuable linkage to a much larger area of almost 800 ha of protected native vegetation. This flows over to Kaituna Spur Reserve, Kaituna Basin covenant, around to The Monument covenant, a DOC reserve, and down to Kowhai Bush covenant. Belleau Wood is an important stepping stone to other covenants in the Little River area and northward to Waipuna saddle. The owners particularly want to protect the beautiful waterway with the aim that increased native aquatic fauna in the future will thrive.

Stony Bay owned by Mark and Sonia Armstrong is an excellent example of pastoral farming and conservation operating harmoniously side by side. The rerouted Banks Peninsula track will pass by this covenant, allowing many people from all walks of life to enjoy the fantastic views and interesting bush. The owners are protecting the waterway which is home to native trout, seals and penguins who can nest in the river bank over one kilometre from the sea. There is rich cultural heritage in this area with a delightful tiny museum displaying interesting items from both Maori and European heritage. The bush adjoins Hinewai Reserve plus an existing QEII covenant owned by Sonia and Mark. The Armstrongs are dedicated pest trappers, which will ensure biodiversity gains through covenanting will be further safeguarded.

Silverstream is tucked away in the hills behind Ataahua between Kaituna and McQueens Valleys. It houses an extraordinary array of impressive mature and regenerating podocarps; kahikatea, tōtara, and mataī. A diverse number of mixed broadleaf species compliment the forest including fantastic stands of pigeonwood, kōwhai, lancewood, five finger, fuchsia and many others. Protecting the spring fed waterway which runs through it will in turn reduce contaminants and sediment reaching Lake Ellesmere –Te Waihora.



One of many regenerating podocarps flourishing at Silverstream. Photo – Marie Neal.

WASPS

Over recent years, Banks Peninsula residents have become increasingly concerned about wasp numbers. Both German and common wasps threaten native biodiversity by taking nectar and killing insects and young birds. They threaten horticultural and apicultural operations, prove a nuisance in recreational areas, and pose a serious health threat to some people. A community meeting chaired by Fiona Nicoll (Community Liaison) was held at Little River in December. This was attended by Akaroa and Wairewa Board representatives, BPCT staff, concerned locals and Dave Hunter of Excel Ltd. As a result, a wasp baiting trial using a new product called Vespex was explored. This innovation award winning wasp-specific fibronil-based insecticide/ protein system was developed by Nelson based company Merchento in conjunction with



New Zealand's two common wasp species: Vespa vulgaris (left) and German wasp Vespa germanica (right) Photo –Landcare Research.



Sycamore Maple *Acer pseudoplatanus*, a serious threat to Banks Peninsula biodiversity. Photo –Weedbusters.



Yellow bumps and brown patches typical of myrtle rust. Photo –MPI.

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DOC. Unlike other methods that rely on the nest site being found, Vespex is carried back to the nest by worker wasps. Existing nests discovered and reported will continue to be controlled by Dave and his team using traditional methods, and a trial for Vespex will be run in hotspot-identified areas when background wasp numbers reach suitable levels. Alternative pre-baiting methods will be tested as the one currently recommended by the Vespex manufacturer has proven ineffective on Banks Peninsula in previous seasons. Funding was made possible for this project through ECan. You can report any sightings of wasp nests directly to Dave Hunter or to one of the two designated community contacts; Alison Evans okuti@ihug.co.nz or Hollie Hollander hollie@akaroa.com.

WEED ALERT – SYCAMORE

Sycamore is an exotic garden escape posing a serious invasive threat to Banks Peninsula that should be removed. It tolerates a wide range of climates and soil types, The 'helicopter' seeds spread mainly via wind dispersal but can also do so with water and the movement of waste garden material. It will invade intact forest as well as open environments including shrubland, tussock grassland and river systems. Weedbusters www.org.nz provide detailed control options for digging out, trunk boring and poisoning, paint stumping or total coverage spraying. If you wish to control a serious infestation, the BPCT office would be happy to provide recommended contractor contacts who specialise in woody weed control.

BUYING AND SELLING COVENANTED LAND

It is important for the BPCT office to maintain accurate records of current landowners so that we can communicate reliably with e-newsletters, invitations for event days, offer support for specific issues, and share relevant items of interest. A changeover is an important time for us to meet new owners, review covenant responsibilities if they are unclear, and review management practices if necessary. If you are buying or selling a land with a covenant on it, we would love to hear from you. We have a one page fact sheet available from the office outlining commitments when going through this process.

MYRTLE RUST

There has been significant publicity recently about Myrtle rust. Though it was discovered in the North Island, MPI and DOC have circulated information country-wide asking for assistance with vigilance and reporting.

Native plant species vulnerable to attack are pōhutukawa, rata, manuka, kanuka, ramarama, rohutu, and swamp maire. Introduced plants which are susceptible are feijoa, eucalypts and bottle brush. DOC staff are actively looking for potentially infected plants in the wild. The impact on native forests will be noticeable if Myrtle rust becomes established.

Fully developed cases can be hard to identify, but if you find anything suspicious: 1) Do not move the plants from the site or your vehicle, 2) Take photos of the suspected Myrtle rust and the whole plant and submit to: mpi.govt.nz/protection-and-response/responding/alerts/myrtle-rust, 3) Do not attempt to touch or collect samples as this may increase the spread of the

disease, 4) If possible, isolate the plants with an igloo-hoop-like plastic cover.
You can call MPI's exotic pests and diseases hotline directly on 0800 80 99 66.

Acknowledgements

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