



Biodiversity Without Borders, Pukekohe November 13th, 2024

The Biodiversity without Borders Wānanga took place on the 13th of November at Franklin, the Centre in Pukekohe. This event was the first of its kind, in which the Waikato Biodiversity Forum and partners (Auckland Council and QEII Trust) ran an event with our Neighbouring region to the North. A major reason for hosting this event was in recognition of the growing number of restoration groups who regularly work between both regions, and therefore work with multiple territorial authorities, which may differ in approaches, rules and opportunities offered. Having these political boundaries is needed, to help us provide autonomy in governing our distinct regions, but as we know they are only relevant to us humans. The flora and fauna we love and cherish, as well as those we are less fond of, will take absolutely no notice of these. So there is a direct effect that we have all have on each other in terms how we manage the land and water on each side. So working together, or at least understanding each others approaches is vitally important to make our work more effective and efficient.

The first speaker, following the mihi and introduction from the Sam McElwee the WBF coordinator was Zion Flavell from Ecoquest, who spoke about the Finding Franklin Bats (FFB) project. Zion, a Ngāti te Ata decedent came into the project initially as kaitiaki ranger for the project. He admitted that he knew little about pekapeka, (NZ native bats) initially, but quickly became fascinated with the taonga species. This work then led to Zion being offered a field team leader role at EcoQuest at the end of the summer period 2022, where he has since been co-leading the pekapeka work. Zion and EcoQuest have now done an extensive five-phase survey covering several sites across Franklin, mostly on privately owned land. This project has evolved into a bat catching and tracking project with widespread voluntary community participation to learn more about Pekapeka ecology. As a lead up to the project, there was a drive to increase awareness about the project through community events, like predator control workshops, bat walks, bat hui and workshops on radio telemetry and bat acoustics. Through this work, it was found very often the commonly available information is not necessarily scientifically right. There still seems to be gaps in the awareness about pekapeka in the region, as well as uncertainty about the role of landowners as kaitiaki of biodiversity in their backyard. Zion described how some landowners in the region are unaware that New Zealand has bats at all. This is why the project is now undertaking work to understand the remaining gaps in knowledge surrounding both FFB and the bats themselves. This will help understand what information and resources community members need, to contribute towards positive and effective outcomes for pekapeka in ways that enhance satisfaction, learning, and values of FFB volunteers.

[Click here to see presentation slides.](#)

The next speakers were, Reuben Libline and Annemarie Robb from Waikato Regional Council. Followed by Gabi Ezeta and Kelly Wootton from Auckland Council, who all spoke about pest management on each side of the border. Both councils began by introducing their regional pest management plans and how



Zion Flavell - Ecoquest



Reuben Libline and Annemarie Robb – Waikato Regional Council

they implement these on the ground. The vastness of areas covered in both regions and the huge array of pest plant issues, accompanied by the limited resources to control the problem, means that the approach must be highly strategic and pragmatic. Eradication of a pest species completely from a region, can only be undertaken if the plant is in low numbers and in a small number of isolated areas. This is why weeds like woolly nightshade have been taken of the list of offensive plants in the Waikato, as the plant has become far too wide spread to enforce removal of effectively. There are also instances on both sides of the border that priority sites of significance (natural, cultural, economic) may also be focused on for intensive pest plant control, where deemed appropriate and achievable. Both sides of the border described different pest plant species that are currently on their priority lists. In fact, there are constantly more pest plants being discovered and becoming issues. Some of these have been controlled successfully, many not and complete eradication is extremely difficult. [Click here to see presentation slides.](#)

Lenny van Heugten was last to speak. She described the remarkable recovery of a very special, at-risk native bird, the North Island kōkako. These birds were prolific in the Hūnua Ranges in the early 1900s, but by the 1950, through habitat loss and predation, the population had been put under a huge amount of pressure. The number of birds continued to dwindle, not just in the Hūnua's, but also nationally. By 1994, only one breeding pair of kōkako remained in the Hūnua Ranges. Lenny then described in detail the herculean effort by the Auckland Regional Council, the Department of Conservation and an army of volunteers to control pests in the Hūnua Ranges. These efforts have led to the area becoming the second largest mainland kōkako population at more than 250 breeding pairs by 2022, with 4,000 traps and bait stations over 200 kilometres of tracks, all within an hour of downtown Auckland. [Click here to see presentation slides.](#)



Lenny van Heugten – Predator Free Franklin

