

# Marlborough Environment Awards Judges' Feedback, Landscape/Habitat Enhancement

Sound environmental management is good business



Morgans Road  
Nursery

**Project name** Te Hoiere Bat Recovery Project, Pelorus Bridge Scenic Reserve/Titiraukawa

**Owner/Person interviewed** Debs Martin and Siobain Browning

**Date** 26 November 2012

**Judges** Tom Stein, Sandra Sewell and Robin Dunn

**Award category** Landscape/Habitat Enhancement

## Introduction

The recently launched Te Hoiere Bat Recovery Project boasts a significant degree of local community involvement and has organised an effective volunteer pest-trapping team and monitoring programme.

The pest control focus is primarily for the protection of the Long Tailed Bat, which is a nationally critically endangered species and one of only two land-based NZ mammals. However due to the Pelorus Reserve forest's value as a wildlife refuge, the additional benefit to the forest and to other indigenous species of the trapping programme will also be significant. As such, the judges were very impressed with this project's vision, objectives and achievements to date.

This project was initiated in 2005 by Debs Martin, the Top of the South Field Officer for Forest & Bird, who observed a long tail bat (*Chalinolobus tuberculatus*) when camping at the reserve. In 2008 Forest & Bird began work to locate, monitor and protect bat populations in the top of the South Island and three were found.



Pelorus Bridge Scenic Reserve appears to be home to the largest population and is unique in having the largest remnant of unlogged lowland alluvial forest in the region. It is one of the last remaining fragments of this type of primeval podocarp forest. Because these large podocarps have no branches 20-30m from the ground, the bats are able to roost in cavities in the trunks, which gives some protection from predators. There are also streetlights at Pelorus Bridge which attract moths and other insects in the summer months for the bats to forage.

Bat habitats have been decimated by intensive logging of lowland native forests and the introduction of pests brought by European immigrants – rats, stoats, possums and feral cats. High populations of introduced wasps also eat forest insects which reduces the food supply for bats.

Strong relationships between DOC, Ngati Kuia (who have donated funds) and Forest & Bird have developed since the start of the project. Dr Brian Lloyd from Moutere is a bat specialist and has undertaken a survey and analysis over the past five years, made possible with Forest & Bird funding.

### **Current Activities and Future Plans**

Volunteers clock up some 80 hours per month checking 12 different trap lines, each with 10 to 60 traps – some 500 traps in total over a 150ha area.

Members of the public using the reserve will see signs explaining what is being undertaken and along the walking tracks pink ribbons show pest trap lines and blue ribbons mark tracking tunnels.

Volunteers use DOC 200, possum master and rat traps, with no poison due to the public use of this reserve. A toxin programme may be considered for rats particularly when a “mast” (high infestation) year occurs, however the logistics of this are still being explored.

The project’s records are kept by a local resident and show the trapping trends over the past two years. The rat index has reduced from 15% in July to 7% in October and mice from 73% to 63%. Bait data, in relation to pest numbers caught, are collated and entered into a database. Co-ordination of the volunteer programme for checking the trap lines is managed by another local resident.

An overall written strategic plan has yet to be completed, however the project’s objectives are well defined and targeted trapping rates have been identified and have been met so far.

The Pelorus Camp Ground manager is very supportive and helps on the lines and with publicity. Bat detector boxes are available from the camp shop for members of the public to “hear” the bats.

A shed provided by the camp ground manager is used to house all the trapping essentials for the volunteers including reflective jackets, roster and recording sheets, identification photos, bait and repair kits, sign in/sign out documents etc.



Future plans include extending the trap lines, particularly at the margins. Pinpointing key areas of bat roosting sites (as bats only produce one pup per year), would assist in the placement of traps. They would like to do count surveys for birds such as kakariki, South Island robin and kereru, as they are still low in numbers and the outcome of this intensive pest control should see an increase. In partnership with DOC, weta are to be monitored as another indicator of the success of the operations. Wasps are to be chemically controlled with Fipronil which has proved successful at Lake Rotoiti.

DOC is expanding the role of community joint projects and this project appears to be an excellent model. With Forest & Bird, DOC and the local community working together, a public education programme including Marlborough and Nelson schools is planned. They will use a local botanist and other educators to demonstrate the unique ecology of this forest.



Seventy-six children from Kiwi Conservation Club have been involved and an old DOC building on site may become a future “classroom”. The University of Canterbury is collecting podocarp seed and this eco source could be used by local schools for a native plant nursery similar to the work undertaken at Rai Valley School.

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Members of the public have an opportunity to learn about the project from signage, bat spotting evenings, when camping on site and through open days and public education. It is hoped that these initiatives will attract more volunteers to become involved in protecting threatened species and increase the interest in and stewardship of this remnant podocarp forest.

Funding is being sought from many sources within NZ and overseas – such as Bat Conservation International, Lotteries Commission, MFE, local Council, Biodiversity Fund etc. Donations and volunteers are sought through Forest & Bird's website [www.forestandbird.org.nz/bats](http://www.forestandbird.org.nz/bats) and printed flyers.

### Problems and how they have been tackled

- Wekas entering traps had been a problem but setting the traps at eye level has alleviated this.
- Pests entering the area from the margins will be managed with their plan for further monitored traps and/or use of Good Nature self-setting gas traps.
- There had been issues with organising volunteers and communication before the instigation of a dedicated co-ordinator. The centralised management shed for storing gear has helped too.

### Stand-out Features

This project's protection initiative is visionary and well targeted, as it has made a commitment, researched the optimum methodology and taken positive steps to protect a nationally critical species.

The partnership with DOC, local iwi, Council and community is inclusive and enables effective communication and the ability to access information and resources to achieve effective results.

Organising volunteers to achieve what was once thought of as a role only for DOC and Government broadens the possibilities of what can be achieved through community partnerships. Te Hoiere is an excellent model for other projects to follow.



Although the project's primary focus is the protection of one species, the pest control will undoubtedly benefit the entire forest ecosystem and all indigenous fauna and flora.

The level of community involvement is also impressive.

### Suggestions

- Seek professional assistance to have a written strategic plan prepared. This would also assist with future funding applications and ensure resources are prioritised and used to best effect.
- Seek a corporate sponsor to champion the cause. (Pink Batts insulation?)
- This project has all the hallmarks of what could be a lifetime project and needs to be future-proofed to ensure Pelorus Bridge Reserve's 150th celebration finds it in even better shape than it is now.