



Sound environmental management is good business
**CAWTHRON MARLBOROUGH
ENVIRONMENT
AWARDS
2023**

Sponsored by



JUDGES' REPORT

LANDSCAPE & HABITAT

EAST COAST PROTECTION GROUP

INTERVIEWED

Sally and Rob Peter, Shannon Mears, Sonya Roxburgh. Herb and Pip Thompson (by phone)

DATE

3 November 2022

JUDGES

Chris Beech, Dave Hayes and Wendy Sullivan

INTRODUCTION

East Coast Protection Group (ECPG) is a not-for-profit incorporated society that works to protect and enhance the coastal environment and biodiversity of the east coast of Marlborough.

The group work with the Department of Conservation, Marlborough District Council, iwi, research agencies, schools, fishermen and other recreationists, advocating for protection of the coastal ecosystem.

The main impacts on the wildlife and landscape are predators, human disturbance (particularly vehicles) and weed encroachment.

ECPG conservation activities include predator trapping; monitoring bird, insect and lizard numbers; weed control and advocacy.



GENERAL INFORMATION

The East Coast Protection Group started in 2017 and their work encompasses 42 km of coastline from Marfell's Beach to the Waima River.

The coastline is identified in the Proposed Marlborough Environment Plan as an area of outstanding natural landscape and has natural character values of high to outstanding. The length of the area from the western side of Cape Campbell through to the Needles in the south is an ecologically significant marine site. Almost the entire terrestrial aspect of the coastline is mapped as a threatened environment.

The area is important for threatened species such as banded dotterel, black-fronted terns, Kiwaia 'Cloudy Bay' moth, katipo spider, coastal tree broom (*Carmichelia muritai*), and sea holly (*Eryngium*). It is also an important resting point along the migration path for species such as godwit and ruddy turnstones, and haul-out area for seals.

The community, particularly adjacent landowners, have long been aware of the values of the coastline and have been undertaking conservation activities such as trapping, and implementing Significant Natural Areas (SNAs).

The human impact on the area increased following the 2016 Kaikoura Earthquake. With the uplift of the wave platform, the intertidal zone and dunes have been easier to access via vehicle. This has resulted in increased disturbance for shore birds and mammals and damage to the sensitive dune ecosystem. Vehicle traffic also results in more dogs in the environment (despite being prohibited in most places). It also causes increased erosion of the mudstone rocks, which subsequently inhibits regrowth of seaweeds and exacerbates erosion.

In 2020 the ECPG received three years of funding from DOC's Jobs for Nature fund to begin the Limestone Coast Restoration Project. This allowed a significant extension to the existing trapping and bird monitoring programme that had previously been done by volunteers and landowners. The objectives of this project are: "To restore the environmental balance of nature and protect flora and fauna for future generations from Marfell's Beach to the Waima River". The funding enabled the employment of 1.5 positions, including an Administrator, Monitoring Operator and Pest Control Operator.

Predator trapping along the coastline and 250m inland covers 100ha and will expand to 300ha by year 3. The most predators caught are hedgehogs and feral cats. Data is inputted in Trap NZ. The experienced operator draws on an in-depth knowledge of the predator species, using innovative measures such as feather lures, and wild prey such as feral pigeons, fish and possums as bait.

A bird monitoring programme provides data on species, survival, productivity and predator impacts. ECPG is collecting the data for a University of Canterbury programme which is intensively studying dotterel productivity in a core area of the project.

As time allows, monitoring also includes lizards, seals and people. The group assists DOC and MDC to undertake monitoring on rare species such as the kiwaia 'Cloudy Bay' moth. The project is also part of Sustainable Coastline's litter intelligence programme.



The ECPG undertake a weed control programme, focusing on removing the invasive marram grass. The group also supports MDC's dune restoration project to replant dunes with pingao and spinifex. Approximately 7800 plants have been planted to the end of 2022.

Community involvement and education has been an important component of the group, and this has expanded with the engagement of the Administrator. Human disturbance and interference are one of the main impacts, so there is an effort to increase awareness of the unique values of the area and how human behaviour can affect that. Knowledge and appreciation are critical for increasing survival and productivity of breeding birds, and to limit erosion to the substrate. The group's advocacy measures include articles in local newsletters and other media, facebook, public talks and field trips, school involvement and signage.

ECPG have also had a significant involvement in submitting on MDC's proposed vehicle by-laws.

THE JUDGES WERE IMPRESSED BY:

- Determination to continue to take measures to protect the coastline, despite controversy and conflict, which often comes at a personal cost.
- Engagement of well qualified contractors who have hit the ground running, expanded the trap line and quickly set up monitoring.
- A high level of monitoring over a wide range of species.
- A high component of advocacy and education through local newsletters, Facebook and school involvement, to build awareness in the local community.
- Collaboration with a multitude of stakeholders, including all coastal landowners, DOC, MDC, University of Canterbury and Forest & Bird. Working on shared projects results in greater support and gains achieved.
- Buy-in from adjacent landowners means there is access to all parts of the coast and no gaps in the programme.



PROBLEMS AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN TACKLED

- Working within an environment without strong regulation has resulted in difficult working conditions without clear compliance support. ECPG members find the safest way to work is to avoid confrontation with users, while advocating to local and central government for more support.
- Conflict between users and environmental values has resulted in signage being vandalized, intimidation, cameras being stolen and nests deliberately harmed. Contracting an Administrator has allowed a greater increase in education opportunities and platforms being utilised.

SUMMARY

Not only are ECPG working on mitigating typical environmental impacts of predation and weeds, but this group must also contend with immense human impact. They are working in an emotive and politically charged situation, currently unresolved, with the vehicle by-law proposal still in the submission process when the judges visited in November 2022.

Throughout this they have remained focused on their purpose of protecting the flora, fauna and landscapes of the threatened limestone coastal habitats.

The group is having clear success with their trapping programme and contribute to wider restoration with their support of the dune planting programme.

Their advocacy ensures the issues are highlighted within the community and wider district, and their monitoring programme will provide data and knowledge for policy and decision-makers. This bodes well for the future support for the project.

SUGGESTIONS

- Develop a five year strategy to set objectives, clarify risks and identify opportunities. A Strategy would:
 - allow you to celebrate success of each individual goal, rather than being overwhelmed by issues outside your control.
 - increase operational efficiencies.
 - provide a succession plan beyond the immediate Jobs for Nature funding.
 - highlight when and where additional resourcing is required.
 - be a gatekeeper for potential opportunities to avoid being distracted from core work.
 - give potential funders more confidence that the project is well thought out and a plan agreed to by all stakeholders.
- Create a shared data storage system such as Google Drive, which will provide accessibility and security of raw data.
- Investigate the feasibility of a sponsorship agreement with a commercial tourism operator to provide low-impact educational guided tours. This has the potential to provide socio-economic benefits to the wider community.
- Seek corporate funding and partner with MDC for a field advocacy and compliance ranger. Advocacy rangers not only assist in enforcing regulations but provide visitors with a greater appreciation of biodiversity and in so doing enhance their experience. The [NZ Dotterel Watch](#) project is an example of this.
- Work with DOC to increase advocacy through their camp host programme.
- Continue to look for opportunities to involve tangata whenua.