

The GULLY FIX

April 2010

Greetings! Another six months has passed and it's time again for the first of our two annual mail outs. It's been a pretty variable summer in Hamilton with 240 mm of rain in January (compare that to 4 mm in 2008) making it one of the wettest Januaries on record and only about 8 mm in March. The local vegetation seems to have coped pretty well with this year's conditions, although unfortunately the weeds have also done rather well.

Training update

We often run training at this time of year. This year we are focusing on schools and school communities and will run a training day on the 20th May. If you have kids at a school with a gully do encourage them to send a group along. Contact Tim Newton for more information.

In this mailout

An updated list of gully contacts is enclosed as well as the application form for the plants for gullies scheme. The newsletter gives you an update of the situation with bats, tui, bellbirds and the Waiwhakareke project as well as a solution for folk buying and selling gullies, and highlighting problems we're having with greenwaste dumping.

Plants for gullies scheme

Get an application in for up to 50 Ecosourced local native plants! Applications are now open and will be accepted up until the end of May. Last year we provided an average of approximately 40 plants to more than 40 Hamilton restorers and this year we anticipate doing the same. Whether you're new to gully restoration and looking for some colonising plants or whether you've got a well established gully and are looking to add biodiversity with some of our rarer local treasures, we look forward to receiving an application from you. I was lucky to visit a number of last year's recipients in March and was very impressed with what many of you are achieving in both "new" and longer term restorations.

State of the Bat Environment

Bat monitoring under the brand name 'Project Echo' will be a Hamilton City Council, University of Waikato and Environment Waikato joint project to not only learn where bats occur in the city, but also create public awareness that Hamilton is one of the few confirmed New Zealand cities to host these bats. At the moment bat watchers are a bit concerned about the impact that an airport runway extension will have on a stand of oak trees where a significant number of Hamilton's bats are breeding and roosting. Hopefully any pruning done in this area will meet the needs of both airplane view lines and the bats. Keep your eyes and ears open for any news and developments in this area. Last year some of you came on bat spotting walks in Riverlea and will remember Darren Le Roux, who is conducting bat research including monitoring this area of oak trees. On the trips with Darren we used a hand held device which translates the bats' echolocation signals into a sound we can hear. We now have one of these devices which is available for loan by gully restorers keen to go for an evening or night time walk to try to listen out for bat activity in your area. Contact Tim Newton to book out the bat detector.

What else can you do? Where possible avoid the removal of large or old trees along the Waikato River Margin as these are excellent bat habitat. Council arborists are now using Darren's services to check out any likely habitat trees for bats prior to their removal or pruning where this has been deemed necessary.



GULLY TIPS

1. Buying or selling a gully property?

You can contact me with details of the property you're selling or what you're looking for along with your contact details and I will pass this information on to other enquirers.

2. Dumping of greenwaste

Council have had a number of complaints relating to neighbours dumping greenwaste on council land. We are still battling to dispel the myth that dumping organic material in gullies is not a problem. In fact, it's both a problem and a crime. The best approach if you see someone dumping on council land is to take a photo and get a number plate or street address and send this to the Parks and Gardens Unit, parks&gardens@hcc.govt.nz or phone them on (07) 838 6557. Our first approach is education, but we may prosecute. We do understand that in some situations, where access is very poor, burning gully clearings may be acceptable. Ensure that you have permission from the property owner and also let the fire brigade know what you are doing.

3. Schools Training Day on May 20th.

Schools with gullies are encouraged to send along a mix of students, teaching staff grounds maintenance staff as well as parents and BoT members, principals or DP. The focus is sustainable restoration in schools. Contact Tim for more info.

Tui and Bellbirds

The Hamilton Halo project aims at increasing nest success of birds like tui so they can populate Hamilton City. In the past, very few tui have visited Hamilton to feed during the winter months in gullies and gardens, but that is beginning to change.

Since 2007, pest control to suppress rat and possum populations has been taking place outside the city at key tui breeding sites. This control is targeted before bird breeding begins from October to February. Studies by Landcare Research have shown tui nest success at Halo sites at 73%, compared to no pest control sites at 37%. The tui population has increased substantially in these outlying areas and has also resulted in a sudden influx of tui into Hamilton. Between July 2009 and January 2010, Environment Waikato received 375 tui sightings! A great success together with the restoration of Hamilton gullies over past decades and the hundreds of thousands of ecosourced and native trees going into gullies and natural areas over this time. This means there are increased nectar sources and nesting site available to new tui tenants. Of course, like many of us who enjoy imported food, tui are also partial to some exotics such as camellia, banksai and winter-flowering eucalypts. While these are often short lived and don't play a useful role in gully restoration, they can be useful and attractive garden plants.

The Hamilton Halo programme over the next year includes long-tailed bat monitoring and surveillance, as well as a bellbird relocation project. Bellbird relocation into the city is an exciting next step and getting bellbird to Hamilton will complement other biodiversity restoration initiatives such as the Waiwhakareke Natural Heritage Park, and your gully restoration projects. Bringing bellbird into Hamilton City will also be very visible for visitors to Hamilton Gardens where the birds are being released. To help look after the bellbirds, Environment Waikato will be conducting pest control in Hammond Bush and will co-ordinate with Hamilton City Council staff and neighbours who wish to do their own control (rats and possums).

Waiwhakareke Natural Heritage Park Update

If you haven't already seen the park, don't forget to go have a look. The best views of the lake and restoration are from Baverstock Road, (on the way to the zoo). The project is gaining momentum with recent funding successes and support from partner organisations. Interest has also been expressed by South Pacific Pictures in filming a planting at Waiwhakareke in May for their new show 'Rivers', with well-known New Zealand photographer Craig Potton. The segment would briefly feature on the Waikato River episode of Craig's documentary. This will be something to look out for in the future.

What you can do:

If you are interested in getting involved with this exciting project, please contact Catherine Smith, Convenor of Friends of Waiwhakareke. Email 2smiths@wave.co.nz or phone Catherine on 07 855 8296. Catherine can add you to her email list to keep you informed of progress and invite you to the regular working bees held at the park. Further information is also available on the very informative website www.waiwhakareke.co.nz

Electronic Contacts

Phone or email me with your email address if you'd like to be added to the electronic newsletter list. Email tim.newton@hcc.govt.nz or phone (07) 838 6878.



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