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FOCUS ON:

Great Barrier Island

Great Barrier Island is rich in natural heritage. Separated from the Coromandel Peninsula long ago, its geology is similarly volcanic in origin and gives rise to a spectacular, rugged landscape and complex coastline. In addition to remnants of once-extensive podocarp / hardwood forest, the island is refuge to some rare and threatened native species, including the Great Barrier Island kanuka, *Leptospermum sinclairii*, which is confined to the island.

Great Barrier landowners are helping to protect the island's natural character with QEII open space covenants. As at 1 October 2006, 7 landowners had registered covenants over 359ha, and 3 more had approved covenants that will protect a further 60ha when registered.



Todd Wheeler Covenant

A few huge kahikatea stand sentinel in bubbles Wheeler's newly registered 137ha covenant behind Tryphena bay. With trunk diameters of up to 1.5 metres, these forest giants would have witnessed – but somehow escaped – the surrounding forest clearance that supplied Auckland firewood in the 1920s and 30s.

Today, Bubbles guards the manuka/kanuka scrub that has regrown on the cleared land, together with the forest remnants that include taraire and puriri and one of the larger kauris in the southern third of the island.

QEII Rep for South Auckland, Lynda Fleming, and Bubbles Wheeler admire the lush undergrowth in Bubble's covenant. Photo: Margaret McKee

Rare Lizard Habitat

Helga and Peter Speck's 14ha puriri-taire forest covenant is home to a diverse range of indigenous species including the threatened black petrel, and the nationally endangered brown teal and chevron skink.

Peter says they haven't sighted a chevron skink for a couple of years but, according to the Department of Conservation, that's hardly surprising as it is a very shy and extremely well camouflaged species.

The skink is one of New Zealand's rarest, having survived only on Great Barrier Island and possibly on Little Barrier Island. Their survival on the islands is probably due, in part, to the absence of predators such as stoats, ferrets, weasels and norway rats (the latter preferring the same damp, streamside habitats as the chevron skink.)



Helga and Peter are committed to protecting the biodiversity on their land; they participate in the Windy Hill – Rosalie Bay pest control programme and are propagating the mistletoe, *Illeostylus micranthus*, to increase the local population.

The Chevon Skink, Oligosoma homalonotum, is New Zealand's largest lizard, measuring up to 30cm long, and is distinguished by the V-shaped markings on its back. Photo: Dick Veitch, Crown Copyright. DoC

Harrison family - safeguarding the coast

The Harrison family has protected two parts of Great Barrier's beautiful southern coast.

Graeme Harrison and his father, the late Bob Harrison gifted to QEII a 6.35ha headland, called Mara Point. Located at the entrance to Tryphena Harbour, it is a well-known landmark to yachties.

Bob Harrison had earlier covenanted another 15.8ha block of virgin coastal forest on the south coast. Accessible only by sea, this block, now owned by Graeme's brother John, contains large puriri and pohutukawa growing right to the water's edge.



*Mara Point
Photo: Margaret McKee*



*Graeme Harrison approaches the pohutukawa-lined shore on the south coast covenant.
Photo: Margaret McKee*

Safe haven

In June 1989, four castaways struggled onto a rocky shoreline on Great Barrier's southeast coast after 119 days adrift in their upturned yacht, the Rose Noelle. They clambered up a steep bush-clad valley to an unoccupied cottage where they gorged on grapefruit before finding help further uphill.

Still a safe haven, the rugged valley is now refuge to native plants and animals thanks to the efforts of the Little Windy Hill Company.

The company protected 116ha under an open space covenant in 1998 and began an ambitious conservation programme the following year. In 2002 the Windy Hill Rosalie Bay Catchment Trust was formed to coordinate the 14 neighbouring landowners who joined the programme, bringing the total area to 450ha.

The Catchment Trust Manager, Judy Gilbert, says, "Pest control, both plant and animal, is the focus of the ecological restoration alongside monitoring of birds, lizards, wetas, rat densities and seedlings. But reintroducing the North Island robin to Barrier after an absence of 140 years has been our crowning achievement."



The Rose Noelle crew found their way up from the coast through pohutukawa, podocarp and broadleaf forest to the Little Windy Hill cottage. Photo: Margaret McKee



Dean Medland and Judy Gilbert carry in rat traps and covers to the Little Windy Hill covenant.

Glenfern Sanctuary - bring back the birds

"When we moved to great barrier fifteen years ago, we couldn't get over the absence of bird life on the island and decided to do something about it," recalls Tony Bouzaid of Glenfern Sanctuary in Rarohara Bay, Port FitzRoy. As soon as they'd established their tourist accommodation business, Tony and wife Mal started planting trees and trapping pests on their 80ha property. Since 2001, with funding from the Auckland City Heritage Fund, they have progressively set up a grid of cat traps and rat bait stations over their own property, the adjacent Orama Christian Community land and the Kotuku scenic reserve. Together, the properties cover a small peninsula between Port FitzRoy and Port Abercrombie. "We now manage this 230ha peninsula with 543 bait stations," Tony says.

An aerial walkway offers visitors to Glenfern Sanctuary a different perspective on the forest.



Dedication has paid off. The Bouzaid's remnant coastal forest and revegetation planting is flourishing and providing habitat to threatened species including brown teal, black petrel, kaka, North Island robin and chevron skink. Birdsong is increasing and 5 pairs of North Island robin, translocated with 17 others from Tiritiri Matangi Island in April 2005, successfully fledged 21 juveniles last summer.

"We covenanted 61ha of our land with QEII because it's the only way to protect this beyond us," Tony explains. "Next, we want to build a predator-proof fence across the whole peninsula. It'll make pest eradication possible and sustainable, using less funding than we currently receive from the Biodiversity Condition Fund. It will also enable other threatened species like kiwi, kokako and saddleback to be introduced.

"What a great example it would be in the effort to eradicate rats and feral cats from the whole island!"



Glenfern Sanctuary manager and QEII Reps Lynda Fleming and Robyn Smith admire coastal views from Sunset Rock in Glenfern Sanctuary. Photos: Margaret McKee. www.glenfern.org.nz