

UPDATE ON OKAREKA MISTLETOE RESTORATION PROJECT

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Work has continued at a steady pace over the last 6 months on this project. On our workday on 16 July we continued to tackle weed issues along Okareka Loop Rd along from the ex Okareka store. We ended up hand pulling, cutting and raking most of the remaining jasmine. The wattle grove further along was completely felled which has made this area look more visually attractive at least. There was minimal weeding to do up at the planting site in preparation for planting.

In September our planting day was reasonably well attended with over 100 plants (mainly kohuhu, fivefinger and tree lucerne) being planted in gaps. Thanks to John and Grant for organising some good sized plants for this year. Plantings lower down slope near the lake are generally doing better than those at the top of the slope where there seem to be more weed issues and it is probably drier as well.

We finished off the year with more weed control and releasing in the marginal strip area in November. Spring brought the usual range of weed species around plantings. Again many of the previous species we dealt with such as convolvulus and blackberry are virtually absent now but exotic grasses and in particular wild turnip along the top of the slope are still giving us problems. Many of last years plantings are now at a size where weed competition is not a great problem and next years releasing effort should be substantially reduced on the whole.

With the volunteers completing the hand weeding and spray releasing in a hour or so this gave us time to recheck and retreat the remainder of the marginal strip towards Calder Rd where previous weed control had occurred. This involved pulling more cherry seedlings, chasing jasmine runners and cutting and painting a few cotoneaster, a Japanese walnut tree and more Japanese honeysuckle. With the weeds now largely removed from

parts of this area the native shrubs such as fivefinger are re-colonising the newly created light gaps in the canopy.

The project continues to receive positive publicity. The latest November issue of Forest and Bird magazine features a story on mistletoe conservation around New Zealand and mentions our Okareka project as a prime example of a volunteer community involvement project in the recovery of the species.

In 2006 our emphasis will continue with ongoing follow up of our weed control efforts at existing sites and ensuring our plantings are released and become self-sufficient. With less effort being spent on our planting area it will hopefully give us more time to focus on follow up monitoring and control if necessary for all our weed sites. Some of this has been difficult over last 2 years as a large proportion of our time, especially over spring and summer has focused on the planting area.

Again thanks to the small number of dedicated regular members who have turned out to help on this programme. It would be good to see some other members turn out as well, even if it is only once or twice a year. Thanks also to the small group of Forest and Bird and Landcare Okareka members who have regularly helped out as well. I have been personally quite amazed at how much a relatively small group of people (usually less than 10 people) can achieve in a Saturday morning.