

Whangawehi regenerating

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Community group's restoration efforts show progress

by Michael Neilson

IT has been a "huge" year for a community group restoring the Whangawehi awa (river) in Mahia and the fruits of their labour are now showing.

The group planted 65,000 native plants during this year's planting season, bringing the total number planted since 2014 to 135,000.

A community planting day in July attracted 60 volunteers to help plant 6000 native plants.

"Landowners are thrilled to see the birdlife coming back to the site," said Whangawehi Catchment Management Group project manager Nic Caviale.

The community project works to protect and enhance the natural, physical, cultural and spiritual resources of Whangawehi catchment as a whole.

Its goal is to return the river to a pristine condition, flowing into the mahinga kai (food gathering areas) for future generations.

The group is made up of landowners, tangata whenua of various marae, Hawke's Bay Regional Council, Wairoa District Council and the Department of Conservation.

"This collaborative approach with the community support has made positive steps toward returning the Whangawehi awa to its most pristine condition for future generations," said Mr Caviale.

Te Mahia School students have also pitched in, continuing their planting project initiated three years ago. They have planted 600 native plants and have

"Te Mahia school children have gained sufficient knowledge and skills to better manage and care for the catchment, awa and freshwater fisheries in Mahia," said Mr Caviale.

The project now enters an active monitoring and maintenance phase, including release spraying, weed control and site maintenance.

Eight kilometres of river have been retired, covering 42 hectares with five hectares of native bush. The area is protected and will eventually be covenanted.

A goat control strategy between HBRC, DoC and Nga Whenua Rahui, has resulted in 5000 goats culled from the area, to the benefit of the native plants.

The group now manages 350 traps and receives support from a pest control officer.

Two French interns helped the group this year develop a community-based insect monitoring tool and assisted with the bird monitoring programme, pest control, water monitoring and blog development.

They trained the community and left resources behind, including weta houses, to carry out the insect monitoring programme in the future.

The houses are installed in different areas and will be checked once a year as part of the invertebrate monitoring programme.

Cultural health coordinator Arthur Bowen carried out water testing and observed many changes along the river

Whitebait were observed in the Mangatupae stream, which shows the project is working. The river banks are also starting to grow abundant crops of water cress, indicating that the mahinga kai is returning. ”

— Arthur Bowen,
cultural health coordinator



NATIVE REGENERATION: The Whangawehi Catchment Management Group at Mahia planted 65,000 native plants during this year's planting season, bringing the total number planted since 2014 to 135,000. The community project works to protect and enhance the natural, physical, cultural and spiritual resources of Whangawehi catchment as a whole. Picture supplied

swimming in the stream up in the forest," said Mr Bowen.

"Whitebait were observed in the Mangatupae stream as well, which shows the project is working.

"The river banks are also starting to grow abundant crops of water cress, indicating that the mahinga kai is definitively returning.

"Water clarity was extremely good with no algae growth observed yet."

Along the river a whare (house) is being built to provide shelter for people who frequent the area.

specimens, donated by Landcare and Research, were also planted around the site of the whare.

"The idea will be to provide a high quality supply of different types of flaxes and develop with the community, weaving activities around the whare," said Mr Caviale.

In recognition of the group's efforts the group was runner-up in the Heritage and Environment category at the Trust Power Community Awards.

"Three years ago the group won the supreme award for the district, and it