

Sandspit SOS Inc Newsletter

Spring 2016



www.sandspit.org

Community restoration planting on the Brick Bay Drive reserve

A great turnout again for the community planting in June. The SSOSI nursery grew and provided more than 600 plants.



restoration planting

A big thank you to all who helped plant and mulch the trees and to Brian Morrison who again supplied mulch to the planted area. Another big thank you to the Nevilles for a loan of fencing materials subsequently needed to protect the plantings from rabbits. However, pukekos can fly, so a regular watch is kept on these much loved but pesky investigators of the roots of freshly planted trees. In early July, there was an enormous downpour which swept away most of the mulch because of adjacent blocked drains, which then flooded the planted area.

Auckland Council supports SSOSI's initiative to restore the banks and wetlands of the Brick Bay Drive reserve. This area is designated as a Significant Ecological Area (SEA) in the Auckland Unitary Plan. The Brick Bay Drive stream has been proven to be a healthy habitat for whitebait species

and long finned eels, both of which are endangered with extinction. The longer term aim is to create a safe spawning habitat for whitebait species. Later in July, a volunteer from Whitebait Connection (www.whitebaitconnection.co.nz) together with SSOSI members placed and firmly anchored pallets of straw within the saltwater wedge area of the wetlands to investigate inanga (whitebait) spawning.



anchored pallets of straw for whitebait spawning

Then another huge deluge! Just like the children's nursery rhyme, down came the rain and washed the straw away. The good news was that the wetlands' mangroves caught all the straw and ropes so that we can try again next year.

Wetlands are regarded as the kidneys of an estuary and with 90% of New Zealand's wetlands having been drained, every remnant remains precious.

The planted area of the reserve will provide shelter for the secretive and endangered banded rail and towards the wetlands a picnic table on the grassed area will encourage bird observation and contemplation.

Wading bird high tide roost

The sand bar of the Dean's island lagoon, together with the lagoons and the sandy, shelly bank at the end of the Sandspit reserve are the only natural high tide roosts in our estuary. Wading birds cannot swim. Instead they require a safe, secure roost, above the high tide line where they wait until the tide drops so that they can resume foraging on the shellfish beds. It's great to see that the newly restored roost is attracting most of the species we observed pre-2014.

Red billed gulls

Once regarded as very common shore scavengers, they are now listed on the DOC Threatened List. Scientists think that one reason is the over-fishing of such species as kahawai and trevally decreasing the availability of the gulls' favoured diet (when breeding) of krill, which are driven to the surface by the foraging fish.

International good news

The Miranda Naturalists' Trust reports that China and New Zealand have signed a Memorandum of Arrangement "to work together to protect areas used as roosts for our migratory waders.... aimed at protecting these small birds that fly non-stop between our two countries, forming a bridge between us and connecting us as people." For Sandspit it refers to our internationally threatened godwits, which we continue to hope will return to again use the restored roost.



godwit on the shellfish bed

Shellfish monitoring

When it comes to protecting our environment, long term data collection is essential. Congratulations to the Unitary Plan which recognises that the shellfish beds east and west of the spit now have equal conservation value - SEA Marine 1. The foreshore west of the spit, the lagoons and the Brick Bay Drive stream outlet are designated SEA Marine 2. These areas along with the Brick Bay Drive stream's wetlands have our greatest concentrations of the endangered banded rails. Sandspit is regarded as the easiest place for bird watchers to see this species.



banded rail family

SSOSI now world famous in British education circles

A great magazine article about the involvement of children in citizen science can be seen on the SSOSI website

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