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Summertime in the Abel Tasman National Park

Happy Holidays from Project Janszoon

December 2023

Since our last newsletter in winter, we've seen our education programme get super busy as our students embrace the opportunity to get out into the Abel Tasman National Park. We sorrowfully farewelled Erik Lander, our Golden Bay-based Tautoko who passed away suddenly in October and will be much missed.

Our pest monitoring data indicated rising rat numbers in the lower elevations of the park, putting the security of the gains we've made in forest bird abundance at risk. We met this challenge with an aerial pest control operation in November, the operation went off without a hitch and we are seeing signs of a favourable outcome which we expect to see reflected in footprint tracking data collected after the operation.

We've just published our [2022-23 Annual Report](#), which gives an overview from our Board Chair Gillian Wratt and Project Director Bruce Vander Lee of what we've achieved over this period and our vision for working with our key partners to ensure the gains made will be maintained and improved upon in the future.

There's evidence that kākā are breeding again in the park, we are monitoring progress but won't have any definitive results to share until autumn next year.

And, hot off the press, we've just completed a whio/blue duck release in the park's interior as we work to ensure that all available whio habitat is providing homes for this taonga species.

We wish you all a sunny, relaxing Christmas break!
The Project Janszoon team



Cover image - Pipipi/brown creeper/Bradley Shields

Our [2022-23 Annual Report is available online](#) now. Eleven years ago, we set out to transform the ecological prospects of the park by controlling key plant and animal pests, restoring important ecosystems and species, and working with others to build a community of support that will see these gains maintained and improved into the future. We set measurable targets, and we're making steady progress towards them with some already ticked off, and others well on the way to being met.

As we successfully manage the invasive weed and pest species that threaten our native species, we're seeing steady improvements in our native wildlife. Our species monitoring shows many re-introduced birds once missing from the park, like kākā, whio/blue duck and pāteke/brown teal have settled in back home and are breeding. Forest birds like toutouwai/robins, which were slowly declining in some areas, are being seen and heard in places they've been absent from for a long while.

And we've had, to date, over 8000 students passing through our education programme - over 1300 this year alone.

We hope you'll enjoy reading about the achievements that have been made by a remarkable community of partners, supporters and volunteers who have come together for the good of our natural backyard. The results speak for themselves.

A sad farewell to our Tautoko, Eric Lander



Golden Bay Based Tautoko Erik Lander with a student in the park.

Project Janszoon staff, volunteers, and Education Programme teachers and students were devastated to hear of the sudden passing of Eric Lander, our Golden Bay-based Tautoko. Eric supported our Education Programme Coordinator Brooke Turner and spent many hours out in the park with students, inspiring them to care for nature and each other.

Eric joined the Janszoon team in 2021 to support the teachers and students at Golden Bay High School and Motupipi Primary School. He also helped lead the Abel Tasman Youth Ambassador programme, sharing his understanding of Mātauranga Māori and joining our young leaders on many trips into the Abel Tasman National Park.

We will remember Eric for his kindness, generosity of spirit and ability to connect with students of all ages, as well as his endless energy, sense of humour, positivity and constant smile. On overnight trips into the park, Eric used to wake the ATYA crew in the morning by singing Waiata, it was a beautiful way to wake up in the park. We will miss his energy, presence, and ability to help young people tune into the wonders of nature and te Taiao.

Kua hinga te tōtara, e te rangatira Eric moe mai rā, haere ki tō moenga roa ki te taha o tō tūpuna ki Hawaiiki. Nō reira ka tangi te ngakau, kua wheturangitia koe o Matariki e, haere haere haere atu rā.

Whio fly home for Christmas



Seven juvenile whoio released into the park/Aneika Young

Project Janszoon, iwi and DOC made the most of the pre-Christmas sunny weather to release seven juvenile whoio into pristine habitat in the park's interior. The whoio were hatched and raised at the [Isaac Conservation and Wildlife Trust](#) in Christchurch as part of the Top of the South Breed for Release programme.

The whoio were blessed at Nelson Airport by Kamātua Barney Thomas and then helicoptered into the park. Golden Bay High School ATYA student Aliana Bowden, Aneika Young (Ngāti Rarua), Project Director Bruce Vander Lee, Harvey Ruru (Te Ātiawa) and DOC Ranger John Henderson attended the release.

We've now released 48 whoio in the Park – 24 of them this year - and are looking at options for a final release in early 2024 to meet our target of whoio occupying all suitable habitats in the park.

We're also expanding our river survey work to monitor whoio in the park and get a clearer picture of how the introduced birds are doing.



L-R: Air New Zealand Staff, Aliana Bowden, Barney Thomas, Aneika Young (Ngāti Rarua), Bruce Vander Lee, Harvey Ruru (Te Ātiawa) and John Henderson at the blessing of the whoio before they were flown to the release site in the park.

Snail hunting with ATYA

Science and education combine
on a nighttime trip to Wainui



Our science advisor Ruth Bollongino has been out on recent spring nights monitoring our threatened native snail populations. Last week she took ATYA students from Waimea College, Motueka High School and Golden Bay High School on a nighttime adventure to look for snails and find out more about these elusive arthropods - they were delighted to find a snail out and about despite it being a drier evening. Ruth also demonstrated using a light trap to attract insects - they saw a huge variety, including stone flies.

Ruth has observed that our weka exclosures at Wainui are hot spots for snails and insects, and will be reporting back on the data she has collected later in the year.



Student finds on a night out snail and insect hunting

Alliance recognise strategic alignment



Kotahitanga mō te Taiao

Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance, highlighting its contribution to a shared vision for the long-term ecological resilience of the Te Taihu/the top of the South.

Kotahitanga mō te Taiao is a partnership of iwi and councils from the top of the South/Te Taihu and Buller/Kawatiri, with the Department of Conservation, Ministry for the Environment and Fisheries NZ in partnership with its global supporter, [The Nature Conservancy](#). It connects conservation projects across the region that have been recognised as aligning with the [Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Strategy \(2019\)](#) and its vision:

“Our extraordinary natural heritage is flourishing, having been restored over large areas, including where people live. People live, care for, and benefit from the environment in ways that bolster natural ecology and the communities that live within them.”

This alignment will support engagement between Project Janszoon and other conservation efforts within the rohe. Kotahitanga mō te Taiao is prioritising work to manage invasive species, build connected ecosystems, restore marine ecosystems and strengthen community connections across the region.

Project Janszoon Board Chair Gillian Wratt said that recognising the alignment of Project Janszoon’s goals and visions with those of Kotahitanga mō te Taiao will lead to stronger regional connections, sharing of ideas and expertise and better outcomes for the region.

“Nature is connected across landscapes, and pest species move in and out of project areas - as do our recovering native bird populations,” said Gillian. “An alignment with Kotahitanga mō te Taiao and other projects under its umbrella will support the ongoing resilience of the achievements we have made in the park, which have impacts well beyond its boundaries.”

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