TIMARU
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera ā-Rohe
o Te Tihi o Maru

Your Natural Heritage

SIGNIFICANT NATURAL AREAS

Autumn 2023 Update

Pekapeka – NZ long tailed bat

YOUR PLAN OUR FUTURE

www.timaru.govt.nz

HE WAKA EKE NOA

We are all in this together

Welcome to this update on Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) in the Timaru District.

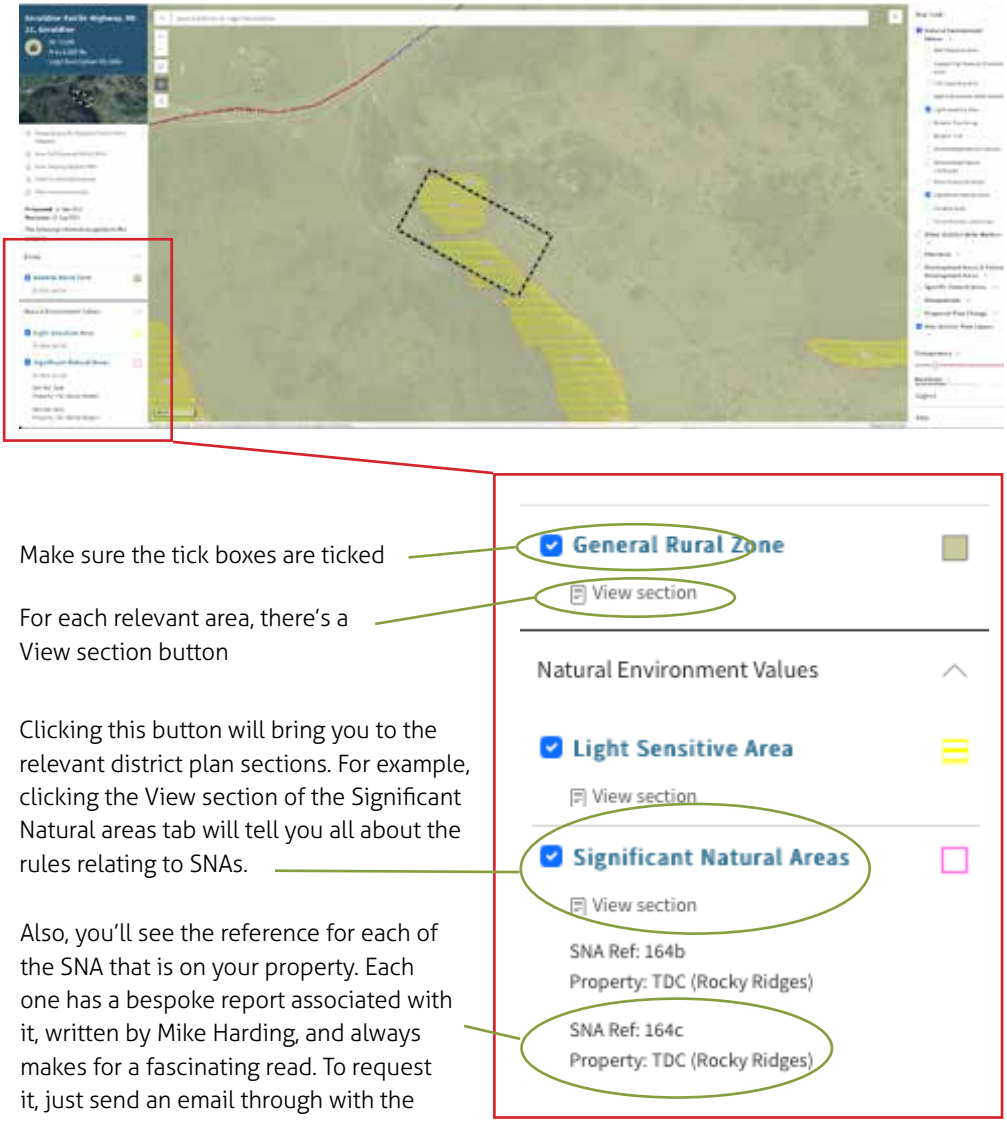
District Plan

We've had some exciting developments since the last update! Namely, the proposed district plan has been notified – we are now reviewing submissions, and a transition process will begin where we move away from the old plan, and move on to the new one.. Some sections however, where deemed by the Environment Court too important to wait for this process, and were declared as taking immediate legal effect. One of those sections deemed to take immediate legal effect – is the Significant Natural Area section.

The new plan is also much easier to look up and search through too, and I highly recommend looking it up. Just go to timaru.isoplan.co.nz – you'll be presented with a page that looks like this:

Note here that you can (1) view the entirety of the district plan (it is of course subject to change as we continue with public consultation) and (2) view the district map. But there's a simple way: just type in your address in the search bar (red circle above) and hit the enter key.

(3) You'll be presented with a map of your property. Conveniently, on the left, is all the information that is relevant to your property specifically.



Make sure the tick boxes are ticked

For each relevant area, there's a View section button

Clicking this button will bring you to the relevant district plan sections. For example, clicking the View section of the Significant Natural areas tab will tell you all about the rules relating to SNAs.

Also, you'll see the reference for each of the SNA that is on your property. Each one has a bespoke report associated with it, written by Mike Harding, and always makes for a fascinating read. To request it, just send an email through with the reference, and we'll provide it to you.

Questions or Queries

If you have any questions relating to Significant Natural Areas, then do not hesitate to contact either William Halkett the Consents Monitoring and Compliance Officer, or Hamish Barrell the Planning Manager, at the Timaru District Council Ph 03 6877200, with any queries you may have. They would be more than happy to assist you.

William Halkett and Hamish Barrell

Gary Foster who is assisting the Planning Unit on a part time independent basis may also be able to help and can be contacted on 0274 310 637.

Roadside Significant Natural Areas

With the assessment of Significant Natural Areas on private property throughout the District virtually completed our focus is now on other land areas where native plant values remain.

In our September 2021 edition of this newsletter we highlighted work being undertaken to identify and protect significant native remnant plants on Council controlled roadsides throughout the Timaru District and since that time work on achieving this has continued with some 70 sites now having been identified.

While these may not seem important in the greater scheme of things, these individual trees or patches of remnant bush represent the very last vestiges of the original land cover now remaining on roadside areas.

The values these remnants possess are not always well known or appreciated, and as such Council is keen to raise awareness of these to ensure that they not only remain but are given every opportunity to do so in good health for the foreseeable future.

To achieve this the value of these remnants needs to be acknowledged by everyone with an interest in the road reserve areas and this includes adjoining land owners, other agencies such as power and communications providers and Council and it roading maintenance contractors.

Over the past few months bright orange markers with the wording "Protected Native Plants" have been placed adjacent to individual trees or in close proximity to remaining groups to highlight their presence.

These markers also provide some information on what can be done to ensure the survival of these remnants and also give contact details for anyone who may have a query about them.

At this time not all plants are marked or recorded but it is planned to place further markers over the next few months.

How you can help

'To assist with retaining these remnants in the long term there are a few things that adjoining owners can do to help. A good starting point is being mindful of those actions which have the ability to damage the remnant and habitat values on our roadsides and include:

- avoiding unnecessary or damaging use of roadside for vehicle and machinery movements,
- avoiding stocking and grazing and look at reducing mowing.
- If possible, avoid overspray from adjacent irrigation systems as the extra water provided by these can dramatically alter the existing habitat.
- Avoiding overspray from weed control programmes on the roadside or adjacent paddocks.
- Avoid using them for storage of silage or baleage and seek Council, approval for this if necessary.
- Reporting any damaged or missing markers to Council so we can arrange to replace these.

Above and below: Roadside remnant identification markers showing individual trees or roadside groupings.

Ecosystems and Biodiversity Steering Group

This group was established in 2018 to assist Council with the development and implementation of a biodiversity policy aimed at ensuring the protection and enhancement of indigenous biodiversity values within the Timaru District.

The group is comprised of representation form TDC Council Planning and management staff, an independent environmental consultant, Arowhenua Runanga, Dept of Conservation, Central South Island Fish and Game, Environment Canterbury, Forest and Bird, Federated Farmers, independent landowners, QEII National Trust and the Forest industry.

Council is conscious that issues relating to biodiversity values are complex and such issues can impact on landowners, and a wide range of stakeholders and interested parties throughout the District. Experiences both nationally and internationally show that protection and enhancement of biodiversity values is best realized though strong relationships with landowners, community support and partnerships.

The Ecosystems and Biodiversity steering group helps with this by ensuring that information and actions contributing to required outcomes is sought from a wide cross section of the community and will lead to decisions being made that are informed, have a broad and inclusive focus, and meet the requirements of the Council Biodiversity policy.

Continuing from the May 2022 SNA Update we look at a further 2 representatives from the Timaru District Councils Ecosystems and Biodiversity Steering Group. Industry rep Sherilyn Byron from Port Blakely Ltd, and Rosemary Clucas of Environment Canterbury

Sherilyn Byron

Sherilyn is 10 weeks into her new position as Health and Safety and Environmental Manager for Port Blakely Ltd. Based in the company's Timaru office. Sherilyn's role is New Zealand wide – her responsibilities include all of Port Blakely's New Zealand Forest assets in both islands.

Coming from a legal background, Sherilyn spent the last 10 years with the Waitaki District Council in Oamaru as a team leader in their Planning Unit dealing with planning matters of all kinds including land use and environmental requirements so brings a wide range of knowledge and skills to her new position.

Sherilyn says that as a company Port Blakely has a strong culture of environmental compliance and is always looking at ways to improve practices and processes around their forests production and land management systems, as this links back to one of their core values, that of Stewardship.

This 'Stewardship' is she says, the company's commitment to making a difference, to having a positive impact on people's lives and improving the health of the company and they resources they manage. Essentially it is managing our assets for multiple economic, social, and environmental benefits.

As a company they have a large stake in the management of Significant Natural Areas locally with their Geraldine and Saddle Peak forests containing over 450 hectares of assessed and protected area, including managing habitat for the highly endangered long tailed bat – pekapeka, and New Zealand falcon – karearea.

She is looking forward to contributing to the biodiversity steering group and says that Port Blakely's role in managing environmental considerations within a highly commercial production forestry setting is both challenging and rewarding and reflects the increasing land use considerations being faced by many landowners today.

Rosemary Clucas

Rosemary works for Environment Canterbury (ECan) as a Land Management and Biodiversity Officer based in Timaru. Rosemary holds a master's degree and PhD in Zoology/Statistics and most previously worked for 8 years as a freshwater ranger for the Dept of Conservation.

She expects that her involvement with the steering group will improve her understanding of the opportunities across South Canterbury and says that working with the group to reach landowners and interest groups will help to ensure the Timaru District Council Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) funding is well spent and that communication with landowners is targeted and constructive.

An important consideration for her is ensuring that indigenous species and habitats are retained and protected including those which do not currently meet the stringent requirements for classification as significant natural areas. This dovetails nicely with her own role as a Land Management Advisor in ensuring that landowners understand the indigenous species habitat/s on their properties and finding ways to work with them towards enhancement. In this way Rosemary believes that working with the group will be complementary to ECan objectives on biodiversity and help her to better understand and advocate within policies and plan changes.

Timaru District Council she says has made good steps in biodiversity protection with its work on mapping and assessing SNAs and is ahead of many other authorities around New Zealand on this.

She believes that the criteria under the Resource Management Act, which remnant habitats need to meet to gain SNA designation, sets a narrow limit. At a landscape level, she says, a lack of applied landscape scale principles, connectivity, and edge effect will ultimately lead to small islands of habitat which require considerable investment to maintain and are not suitable for species which require greater range size and connectivity between fragments.

Monitoring and reporting are essential to establish priorities and the relative state of SNAs on an ongoing basis to see if the values originally assessed are being maintained.

She freely acknowledges that resourcing is the greatest challenge in this but that leveraging benefit from cross organisational alignment is a means of doing it better but may ultimately not be enough.

Freshwater Farm Plans will focus change at a granular level but need to be well supported by both regional and district plans.

As an example, she says, the limestone scarp weed control programme initiated by Council has been a great initiative however levels of funding and long-term planning will be needed to ensure that the gains made from the funding invested can be maintained.

More can always be done, and it is not just about SNAs but the wider ecosystem concerns and better protections for continually eroding indigenous vegetation and mechanisms to protect mobiles species during their life phases that are needed. Slow progress on the proposed National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity has not helped better protections being placed within regional council plans and hence guidance for district councils to implement.

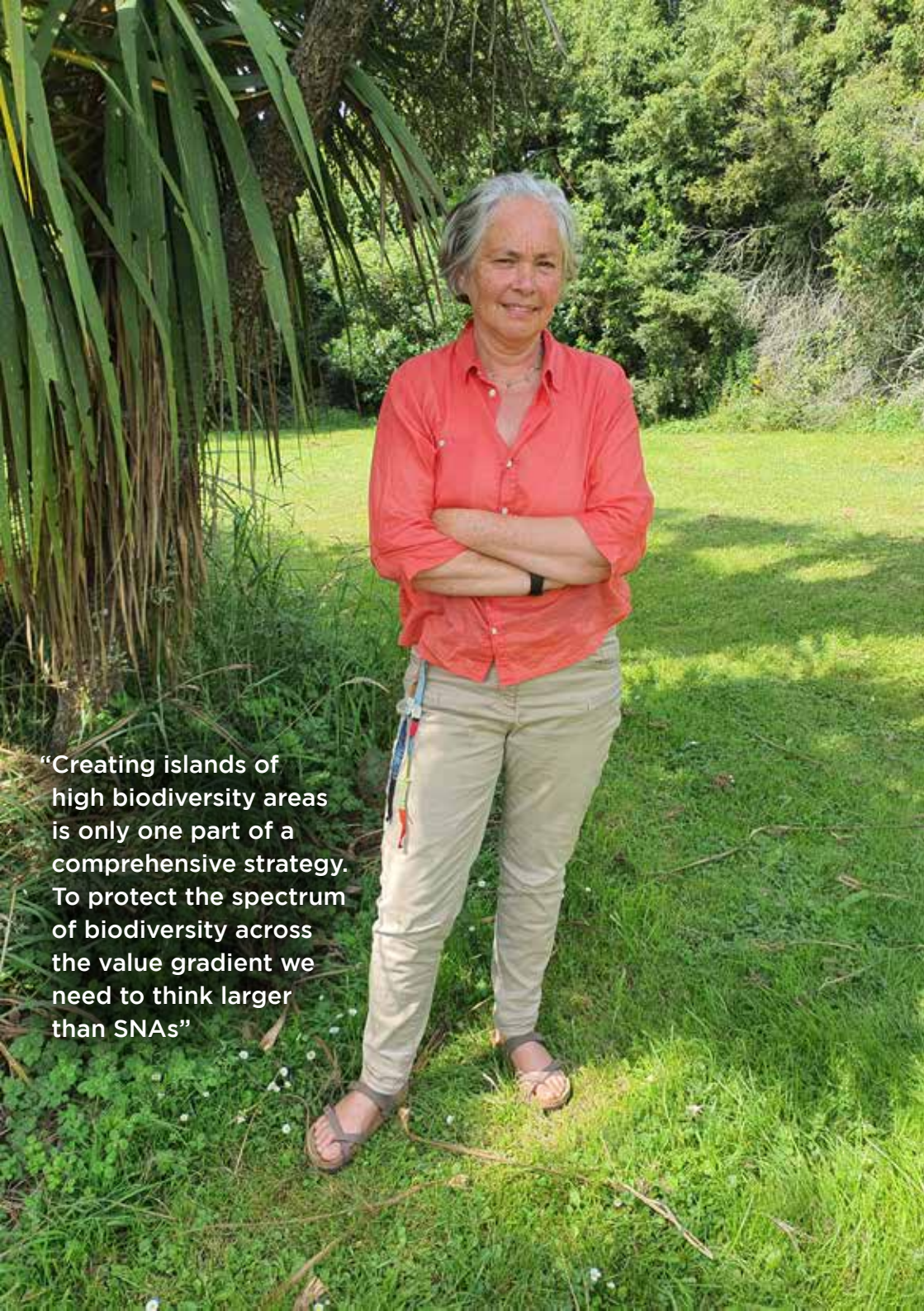
Capacity, Rosemary says is a key variable which would improve the odds within the framework of current plans. Obtaining traction and buy in from landowners means approaching the community in what is now a sensitised environment. We need to develop a communication strategy to defuse some of the concerns which so easily gain a head of steam.

Asked if the rural community as a whole should be more involved with SNAs and remnant management, Rosemary says, most certainly 'yes'. Creating islands of high biodiversity areas is only one part of a comprehensive strategy. To protect the spectrum of biodiversity across the value gradient we need to think larger than SNAs. Nationally, landscape scale examples of protection on privately owned areas have developed and thrived over the last 10 years. Property rights will remain a key concern and incentivising investment through carbon offsets are a way forward if the price is right.

We need to remind ourselves that landownership is not just about extractive rights – it is an intergenerational community good. The dial Rosemary says has shifted from seeing land as purely for resource extraction and believes that the small planet idea is firmly fixed in common imagination.

Rosemary says that given the high level of change being introduced to land management practices and legislation across New Zealand, the inclusion of District Plan rules around vegetation clearance and mapping of SNAs within Farm Environment Plans is an example of how we can ensure understanding and compliance around protections. Supporting that, how we communicate between agencies and with landowners and the farming community will help build the bigger picture and develop a community vision. Mahinga kai is an important outcome from wider protections of indigenous habitat and is bringing many people on board because it deconstructs the protection/use paradigm. Acceptability of obligations and responsibilities to indigenous biodiversity changes as the community accepts and enforces its own standards and we all have an integral role in that.

As a biodiversity steering group member Rosemary is happy for farmers and landowners to talk directly to her about their thoughts or concerns



"Creating islands of high biodiversity areas is only one part of a comprehensive strategy. To protect the spectrum of biodiversity across the value gradient we need to think larger than SNAs"

Space Invaders – introduced exotic plants

New Zealand's native ecosystems are threatened by introduced exotic plants. Many have naturalised; they smother native ecosystems and prevent the regeneration of native plants and their habitats.

Recently (2021) a parliamentary commissioner undertook an investigation into these exotic "Space Invaders" and the impact that these are having, or could have, on our native ecosystems. The report resulting from this investigation can be found via the following link:

www.pce.parliament.nz/publications/space-invaders-managing-weeds-that-threaten-native-ecosystems

The report was called for because despite some of these exotic plants having been of concern for 150 years or more the entire system for managing exotic weeds in New Zealand appears never to have been reviewed. The historical focus has been on weeds that affect production land (farmland, plantation forests etc) and it is questionable as to whether current legislation gives due regard to the risks that weeds pose to our native ecosystems, such as our Significant Natural Areas.

The report found that there are 25,000 exotic plant species already in New Zealand and that around 1800 of these have become naturalised. i.e. establish, spread, and flourish to become self-sustaining and often competing with crops, pastures, and our native ecosystems.

Compare that to the 2300 native vascular species found in New Zealand and our natives are outnumbered 10 to 1 by introduced plants.

On average over the past 150 years around 13 new exotic plants a month have been introduced into New Zealand and of these a high proportion have become naturalised.

Many have been imported into New Zealand as ornamental plants and have subsequently found conditions to their liking here and have become garden escapes.

The report found that "Exotic plants are mostly managed under the New Zealand biosecurity system. However, weeds that impact on our native ecosystems tend to be a lower priority compared with other biosecurity threats like plant or animal diseases, animal pests, or weeds that affect our productive land. While these threats are important, focus on them often means native ecosystem weeds drop off the agenda.

Currently not enough is being done to prevent exotic plants from escaping into the wild or to adequately address the risks from plants that have already escaped. Surveillance is patchy and reports from the frontline often depend as much on luck as systematic surveillance".

The Commissioner recommends making several improvements to the biosecurity system to ensure New Zealand's native ecosystems and species are better protected

from weeds. These adjustments will improve leadership and coordination, clarify desired outcomes and help align national, regional and local efforts. These changes will allow for better guidance about which plants to manage, where and how they are to be managed and by whom, ensuring scarce resources are deployed wisely.

In the meantime, existing weed information systems should be improved to provide everyone managing weeds with a single authoritative and publicly accessible database of all exotic plants in New Zealand. The Commissioner also recommends improving monitoring and surveillance of emerging weeds and establishing an expert team to scan for emerging risks from new exotic plants that may be tomorrow's weeds.

What can we do right now?

A wide range of information on currently known problem plants is available on-line via sites such as www.weedbusters.org.nz, as well as Dept of Conservation and Environment Canterbury. The "Plant Me Instead" guide, available online or from Environment Canterbury or Timaru District Council provides alternative suggestions for ornamental plants to replace weedy species here in Canterbury.

Be familiar with your native bush remnants and keep an eye out for plants that you have not seen before, or seem out of place. Often these will have berries, which is one of the primary sources of spread by birds.

The key with these plants is to recognise them early and initiate some control measures before they can spread further and compete with our native flora and habitats.

This edition we feature Cotoneaster – a family of plants many of which have been introduced into New Zealand from China and the Himalayas, and which are now showing up with alarming frequency in a range of our native ecosystems including forest and shrublands, dry grasslands, bluffs, slips, riverbeds and coastlines.

Cotoneaster in berry – April – May

Space Invaders – introduced exotic plants

Species of concern include *Cotoneaster simonsii, Cotoneaster glaucophyllus*, and *Cotoneaster franchetii.* These form large evergreen bushes or small trees up to 3m high with arching branches and bluish green leaves often covered with white grey hairs beneath.

The plants produce clusters of small pinkish flowers from November to January and these are followed by red or orange berries – much favoured by birds who will carry them far and wide.

The seeds within the berries are high viability and the plant matures quickly forming individual bushes which can quickly become dense stands that are long lived and outcompete other native vegetation. The plants are tolerant of damp and drought, hot and cold, salt and a range of soil types. It is reasonably shade tolerant meaning it can establish at the fringes of, or beneath native plant canopies.

Control measures include hand pulling of seedlings, cutting and stump treating of larger individual bushes, or if denser stands are present then spraying with an appropriate herbicide.

Cotoneaster plant growing on a roadside near Geraldine showing bluish green foliage and arching habit of growth.

Pekapeka – NZ long tailed bat

Bats are New Zealand's only native land mammals.

There are two species of bats in New Zealand: the long tailed bat and the short tailed bat.

Surveys over the past 10 to 20 years indicate South Island long tailed bats are rarer than previously thought. Once common in Dunedin, Invercargill and Christchurch the long tailed bat or pekapeka is classified as endangered – Nationally Critical, and while it has a wide distribution across New Zealand, numbers are low and as a species it is extremely vulnerable.

Their decline is down to a number of causes including

- Past clearance and logging of lowland forests
- Cutting of old age trees for firewood
- Clearance of trees for urban expansion and agricultural intensification
- Predation by animals such as cats, possums, stoats and rats
- Exclusion from their roost sites by introduced mammals, birds, wasps and human interference.

Long tailed bats have a wingspan of approx. 150mm and weigh around 8 to 11 grams or about as much as a $2 coin. They are chestnut brown in colour and are generally believed to raise a single offspring each year.

They navigate by way of echo location and can fly at 60kph. A bat colony can have a range of more than 100km^2.

An aerial insectivore they feed on small moths, midges, mosquitoes and beetles.

South Canterbury supports one of the only known long tailed bat populations on the east coast of the south Island and locally, these bats are known to occur from Peel Forest along the foothill gorges of the Orari, Waihi, Te Moana Rivers, Geraldine, Kakahu and the Opihi River from Arowhenua towards the lower gorge and around the Hanging Rock area.

Geraldine is one of the few towns in New Zealand where it is possible to see long tailed bats where on suitable evenings over summer they can on occasions be seen flitting around the tree canopy in Talbot Forest.

Group preparing for a bat viewing experience

Over the past two or three years the Talbot Forest Working Group has arranged bat viewing evenings at Talbot Forest during January, and just on dusk, and with the help of bat monitors which pick up the bats echo-location blips, they have been successful in showing over 300 locals and tourists these fascinating creatures.

Along with the opportunity to see the bats, visitors have while waiting for the light to fall also learnt about potential pest plants and trapping methods for a variety of animal pests.

The group plans to repeat the bat viewing opportunities again next January and details of dates etc will be advised at that time.

What can we do to help the bat populations?

Protect existing native bush and forest on your property or within known bat areas, and where possible plant more – this will help other species as well as bats.

Retain old standing trees along creeks, in paddocks, around ponds etc. This includes species such as willow and poplar, as well as natives such as cabbage trees. These older trees tend to have more cavities which provide preferred nightly and maternal roost sites for bats, and as they change roosts regularly a good supply of these across the landscape is needed to assist their survival.

Control animal pests such as possums, cats, stoats, rats etc as these predate bats especially when roosting or when raising their young.

If possible, reduce the use of pesticides in known bat areas as this leads to decline in invertebrates which form the bulk of their diet.

Learn more about these fascinating animals and familiarise yourself with the bat protection zones specified in the Timaru District Plan. If you live within these seek assistance to see if bats are occurring on or nearby your property and which trees are areas are being regularly used for roosting.

For further assistance or information on bats contact the Dept of Conservation, Raukapuka area office in Geraldine – ph 03 6931010

Image courtesy of Department of Conservation

Peter and Frances Grant

Peter and Frances Grant purchased their property on the Geraldine downs in 2009 and moved to the site after their new homes was built in 2013.

The abundant birdlife, rolling downs and native bush remnants all provided appeal and a total change to the drier flat plains area they farmed at Rangitata before moving here.

Their property is 66ha in size and has 8 Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) surveyed and registered on it totalling 9.5ha or just under 15% of the property area.

Ecotypes represented in the SNAs are podocarp hardwood treeland, podocarp hardwood forest, and hardwood treeland.

Typical of the Geraldine downs these SNAs cover patches of bush remnants and some standalone trees – the majority of which have been fenced for stock exclusion to prevent damage to them.

30 native species were recorded on their property during the SNA survey including pokaka – Eleocarpus hookerianus, Totara – Podocarpus totara, kahikatea – Dacrycarpus dacrydioides (including a very large specimen with a trunk diameter of 1.5m), narrow leafed lacebark – Hoheria angustifolia, Kowhai – Sophora microphylla, and locally uncommon white climbing rata – Neomyrtus diffusa.

Peter and Frances love the bird life and enjoy seeing things grow, and are enthusiastic about their efforts in protecting and enhancing the native vegetation values on their property. They say it is easier to do this here than on the drier plains where they previously lived.

Both acknowledge the efforts of the previous property owner Bob Swann in protecting the native bush values on the property and hope that their efforts will leave a legacy for those who follow.

Peter in his electric farm vehicle

A specific project currently underway has been the fencing and replanting in one of the larger SNAs on the property. This SNA is a podocarp hardwood forest remnant and over the past winter / spring period some 5000 trees have been planted comprising locally occurring native species to bulk up the understory and improve linkages to other remnant trees within this SNA and others both on their property and elsewhere on the Downs. A significant component of the plantings has been the inclusion of some 1000 new podocarps – totara and kahikatea.

A key undertaking in the preparation for the new plantings was to spray out all grass in the areas to be planted ensuring the new plants were not compromised by smothering grass growth through their establishment phase.

This project was funded with the assistance of a grant from the Timaru District Councils Significant Natural Areas fund was overseen by Allan Laurie of Laurie Forestry Ltd who arranged the plants, and planting.

Peter and Frances are aware that their SNA areas contribute to the patchwork of remnants on the Geraldine downs which collectively provide significant stepping stones and habitat for native birds, bats, lizards and invertebrates – an often overlooked fauna component of our native bush remnants but crucial to the food chain.

All plantings have been protected with biodegradable cardboard Combi Guard tree protectors to guard against hares and rabbits, and Peter says that while there are not large numbers of these on the property, and what is there are being actively targeted with control programmes, they were nevertheless keen to ensure the new plantings were given very opportunity to survive.

Some possums are also on the property and as with rabbits these are being actively controlled.

Planting operations underway

The new plantings are looking good at this stage with only a few failures, and these are in areas that become waterlogged in the recent wet spring weather and Peter says replanting of any gaps will be undertaken with appropriate species in due course.

Bellbird, kereru, tui, fantail, rifleman, shining cuckoo and other native bird species have been observed on the property and Peter says that driving a quiet electric farm vehicle allows him to get close to the birds to observe them without scaring them away.

Canterbury grass skink has also been observed here, and long tailed bats – Pekapeka though not seen as yet, are likely to be present. Many of the older podocarp trees on their property have significant cavities and could host the bats which are known to live in the Geraldine downs area and can be seen at nearby Talbot Forest.

Peter and Frances value the SNA areas on the farm and say that these provide no impediment to the running of the farm activities. They appreciate all native plants and the SNAs contribute to their enjoyment of living on this property.

"Peter and Frances are aware that their SNA areas contribute to the patchwork of remnants on the Geraldine downs which collectively provide significant stepping stones and habitat for native birds, bats, lizards and invertebrates – an often overlooked fauna component of our native bush remnants but crucial to the food chain."

New plantings and existing remnant podocarps

SNA Funding Grants

Each year Timaru District Council has grants available to assist landowners with the protection or enhancement of Significant Natural Areas on their properties. This may include fencing for stock exclusion, animal or plant pest control, revegetation plantings or other activities that will assist with the long-term retention and health of native ecosystems and habitats in these areas.

This financial year 10 grants were approved totalling $83300.00. Projects funded included, fencing of SNA areas to exclude stock and grazing allowing improved regeneration to occur, weed control programmes targeting a range of weed species including barberry, native bat habitat improvements, improved linkages / wildlife corridors between SNAs, and revegetation plantings.

A further round of grant applications will soon be notified for the 2023/24 financial period beginning on 1 July 2023. These will be advertised earlier than in the past so that decisions around successful applications can be made and advised to landowners in a time frame that better reflects the seasonal requirements of many of the projects being undertaken.

As in the past all SNA owners will receive notification of grants via mail and by way of the Council's noticeboard page in the Courier newspaper.

A Canterbury grass skink recently observed at Oliver Dryland during regular monitoring of lizard numbers.

We will feature an article on this monitoring programme in the next edition of this newsletter

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TIMARU DISTRICT PLAN REVIEW

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