

## Tūhaitara Coastal Park - taking a holistic approach to restoration

Tūhaitara Coastal Park covers approximately 575ha of land along the coastline from the Waimakariri River mouth to the township of Waikuku. Stretching along the coast for 10.5 kilometres, it comprises many natural features of local, regional and national importance.

The residents of Kaiapoi Pā and in more recent years, members of Ngāi Tūahuriri runanga, have had a close relationship with the lands. Tūtaepatu Lagoon was a rich and important source of mahinga kai, particularly tuna (eel).



Figure 1: Tūtaepatu lagoon. Image: Peter Langlands.

In addition, the area surrounding Tūtaepatu Lagoon contains the urupa for Turakautahi, who was the founder of the Kaiapoi Pā. It is part of the area known as the greatest pounamu trading centre in the South Island.

The name Te Kōhaka o Tūhaitara acknowledges whakapapa and tikanga. Tūhaitara was an ancestress of Ngāi Tūahuriri. The occupiers of the Kaiapoi Pā and North Canterbury were known as the Tūhaitara people or hapu. Kōhaka refers to a nest, to the season of spring, indicating a time to apply vision, new concepts, the sowing of thoughts or seeds.

At present the area is predominantly protection and plantation pine forest and sand dunes. However, the area also includes the Tūtaepatu Lagoon, the largest area of natural open water in the coastal strip between the Waimakariri and Ashley Rākahuri Rivers, and an area of surrounding vegetation of approximately 17 hectares. The overall goal of the proposed restoration of Tūtaepatu Lagoon is “a lagoon with largely indigenous vegetation that supports mahinga kai and spiritual values”.

Park Manager Greg Byrnes is passionate about this project and takes a holistic and long term vision of restoration of the area from the foredunes to Tūtaepatu Lagoon and will gradually transform the pine forest into native coastal forest.

The first step was initiating “Biota Nodes” a series of small pockets of native plantings based around permanent water holes approximately 400m apart planted with berry and nectar producing native plants to encourage birds. Over time each node will



Figure 2: Figure 2: planting biota nodes has been the first stage of the project

slowly increase as will the plant species. Birds will help with the transfer and propagation of native species between these nodes.

Schools and various community groups adopt a node, establish plants and provide the on-going maintenance. Our two main school biota nodes Tamariki of Woodend and Te Puawaitanga o Tuahiwi are about to extend further into the back dunes and heading for the fore dunes. We are about to start our first node at The Pines Beach. We have been in contact with Kaiapoi North School, and it looks like they will be involved with this so very exciting. We have now completed our biota node learning resource and will be launching versions in both English and Māori in the near future.



The Biota Node project is also part of the Dunes Trust's Back Dune Project with valuable research carried out on restoring back dune ecosystems.

This year the first Kowhangatara (*Spinifex sericeus*) was reintroduced after being extinct along this coastline for over 100 years with over 2000 planted at Woodend Beach the significance of this was very apparent to Dunes Trust Trustee Greg Bennett who admitted getting quite emotional about it.

### **2013 Dunes Trust Best Restoration Project Award**

Tūhaitara Coastal Park is a very worthy recipient of the Best Project Award and will provide a range of opportunities to preserve Ngāi Tahu values, retain and enhance rare indigenous biodiversity and provide recreational and educational opportunities for all people for generations in the future.