



07 AUG, 2021

## Planting teaches students about collaboration, sustainability

Northern Advocate, Whangarei Northland

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## Avina Vidyadharan

Thirty students from four Northland schools learned about teamwork and their responsibility towards the environment by getting their hands dirty and planting 1500 native trees.

Ruawai College, Paparoa Primary, Tinopai and Matakohe schools joined hands with Northland Regional Council EnviroSchools to plant native trees in the wetlands of Native Greens in Paparoa yesterday.

The project aims to prevent silt from running into the harbour and also increasing the habitat for native birds in the area.

With the all-hands-on-deck project, Ruawai College assistant principal Jay Warren said by collaborating with other schools, whether they be in different sectors such as high school or primary or intermediate school, they were trying to develop the value of teamwork in the students.

“We are trying to encourage the students to work together by giving them a project that connects them with the environment. The collaborative approach is the new way of going forward in education.

“In terms of what we are doing, for Ruawai College, it is a cornerstone of how we approach education. So, that was sort of the concept.

“We’ve worked with EnviroSchools for years and years and they have always been really supportive and keen to help where they can. Whether it be organising or assisting in organising a day like today, or whether it is coming to school and doing lessons and working with teachers.

“So, as an organisation and a branch of NRC, they are a group that we have had a partnership with for quite a while and we really value it.”

Warren said the plantation also helped in contextualising learning.

“We can sit in a class and talk about the importance of wetlands for eight weeks but they’ll learn more about the value and importance of wetlands by coming and actually doing something.

“And if what they’re doing is something that is community-centred and something that has high value environmentally, then the initiative and concept all align with each other.”

More than 20 Ruawai College students took part in the tree planting. Warren said they were connecting the curriculum, through culturally responsive action, to Mātauranga Māori and learning.

“We are trying to weave as much as we can, giving credibility and agency to Māori ways of doing things and sharing that as a collective.

“We are also encouraging the philosophy of Tuakana-teina (a Māori traditional model where older students guide the younger ones) in our teaching module. The tree planting serves as the best opportunity to do that.

“The old ones get a lot out of it in terms of leadership and the younger ones are seeing positive role models. When they see them doing good for the community, it inspires them to follow the same.”

As a school, their focus was on the environment, said Warren.

“One of our strategic goals in the plan is to develop relations with the community by doing environmentally sustainable actions.”

Paparoa Lions Club co-ordinator Jim Rowlands had worked at the Native Greens for 25 years and said they had been protecting the native bush and birds since the mid-90s.

Native birds such as wood pigeons/kererū, fantail/piwakawaka, tūi, kiwi, banded rail, morepork/ruru, grey warbler/riroriro, bitterns, fernbird, and others had their habitat in the native bush.

“Although we know a lot of native species were endangered here, we were hoping to reintroduce brown teal and create an ideal situation for them.

“We have a very unique situation, with native bush right beside the salt marsh, which is very rare

in New Zealand.”

Rowlands had spent his life developing a good environmentally sustainable place and looking after the 25 hectares of Native Greens land in Paparoa. He appreciated the students’ involvement in the planting.

“They are learning so much about the environment that needs to be protected. We are losing so much so rapidly; it is good to see the young generation taking an interest in preserving our native flora and fauna.

“A young bittern was spotted recently, so we know that they are breeding in the area.

“These trees will help with improving the habitat.”

Northland Regional Council land management advisor Simon Webb was confident the planting programme would increase the habitat of native birds in the area, by increasing their food source.

“Increasing the size of the ecosystem will only benefit the population of native fauna.

“The native birds’ habitat had been declining through clearance of bush for farming over a century.

“Later they realised, they were forcing some native species to extinction. Since then, there have been some movements starting — but not really taking shape until the green revolution in the 70s — to dial it back to reclaim the lease from the farming area for their habitat.”

EnviroSchool facilitator Jacqueline Knight believed the main aim was to link students with community and environmental projects, so they get role-modelling influences from the outside.

“We like it to be integrated with learning.

“We have got a lot of representatives from the community, so the students are getting lots of role-modelling and creating links outside of school, they are learning about the environment and meeting people who are working in the fields protecting our environment.”

Through the planting, they were protecting the harbour and awa, but also increasing the hab-



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itat for fernbird, banded rail and bitterns, said Knight.

**"Increasing the size of the eco-system will only benefit the population of native fauna."**

Simon Webb



Ruawai College student Zoey Kirk ploughing the soil to plant the sapling.



Ruawai College deputy principal Jay Warren.



Young student Ecclesia Davis is very passionate about the environment.



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Ruawai College, Paparoa Primary, Tinopai, and Matakohē schools joined hands with Northland Regional Council EnviroSchools to plant native trees in the wetlands of Paparoa.

PHOTOS / AVINA VIDYADHARAN