

OUR TEAM



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Project Executive



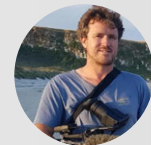
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Project Manager



Colin Delahunt
Project Manager



Morgan Trotter
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Bill Morris
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Natalie Willis
Secretary



Margo Hall
Nursery Manager



Carolyn Steele
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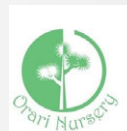


Jack Steele
Nursery

OUR STRATEGIC PARTNERS



OUR SUPPLY PARTNERS



Steele Fencing

A1 Irrigation



THE SCROLL

The Newsletter of Tiaki Maniototo



April 2025
Edition #04



Managing Willows

An inter-generational job

Report: p5

A WORD FROM THE PROJECT MANAGERS:



This past summer has been a season of exciting progress for the project. In January, all hands were on deck for the second year of the Taiari Wai River Festival, which was a great success, thanks to the hard work and planning of many. With that event behind us, our staff have been busy meeting with landowners and organising additional restoration sites.

Thanks to funding from the Otago Catchment Community, we've been able to support a local farm in developing a sediment trap to capture soil particles suspended in the water before they flow into the river. Our staff have also been working in the Styx Basin, planting native species to replace old *Pinus contorta* shelterbelts, which landowners have been removing with the support of the Central Otago Wilding Conifer Control Group. This work plays a crucial role in reducing the risk of wilding conifers spreading across the Rock and Pillar range.

In February, we conducted environmental monitoring in selected areas along the river and its tributaries. This work is essential for understanding the health of the river and the factors that impact it. The monitoring included electric fishing, measuring water clarity, and sampling the invertebrate life within the creeks and river. Additionally, we supported the Department of Conservation (DoC) with their surveys along the Taiari.

Tiaki Maniototo partnered with landowners, DOC, and Habitat Restorations Aotearoa to carry out two weeks of willow control at several of our planting sites. This work is crucial to giving our native plantings the best chance to establish successfully. More details on willow control can be found in the following pages.

As we move into autumn, we've been involved in the catchment action planning process led by Upper Taiari Wai in collaboration with the community. Funded by the Otago Regional Council, this initiative is designed by and for the local community to identify and prioritise areas and pressures on the catchment that need some attention.

It's safe to say it's been a busy and exciting summer! Meanwhile, the plants in our Patearoa nursery have been thriving, thanks to the dedication of our nursery staff. Hard to believe that by the time we write the next edition of *The Scroll* in three months, the nursery will be settling into hibernation for winter.

Taiari Wai River festival recap pg. 4



LOOKING TO THE PAST TO GUIDE OUR FUTURE

Ōtākou rūnaka are, alongside Kāti Huirapa Rūnaka ki Puketeraki, one of two rūnaka who hold manawhenua, or territorial authority, over the upper Taiari/Taieri region.

For centuries, their ancestors inhabited this area, gathering, storing and transporting kai (food) from the wetlands, rivers and surrounding hills. It was they who named this place Mānia-toto —the plain of blood, for the red tussock that at the time blanketed the basin.

Tūmai Cassidy (Kāi Tahu), from Ōtākou, has been spending lots of time in the Upper Taiari in recent weeks, as part of the Te Nukuroa o Matamata team controlling willows in the upper part of the river.

Tūmai grew up hearing oral histories of the Mānīatoto, and has thoroughly researched his people's connection to this place. In the Upper Taiari, he says, food was never in short supply.

In addition to the tens of thousands of tuna (eels) and kanakana (lamprey) that Kāi Tahu people gathered here in the old days, enormous amounts of birds were also harvested. These included many species of ducks, but also crested grebe, native quail (now extinct) and weka. The upper Taiari, says Tumai, was famous for the amount of weka that lived there.

Whio, or blue duck, which are now considered endangered, were common in the Taiari and Tūmai's ancestors were still harvesting these into the 1850's. While we can likely never return to the abundance of those old days, we can take steps towards restoring at least some of these natural values to the upper Taiari. Planting and fencing of waterways is a great first step in restoring health to the ecosystem.

Protecting patches of native biodiversity on farmland also helps build a healthier, stronger environment, which benefits everyone who lives there. "I think ultimately, it's about understanding the natural functions of where you're living," says Tumai. "It's been a pretty common strand around most of the country for the last 100 or so years of trying to manipulate and control the environment. I think over time, we've just seen that it can get quite expensive to maintain. We might need to start taking a different approach in allowing the landscape to function a little more closely to what it would have before."

Indigenous histories, he says, offer important knowledge, gained over hundreds of years, about how the environment should function in a more natural state. "It's really the inter generational memory of the land, and of the species that inhabit the land, that no one else has." Tumai says landowners are becoming more interested in learning about Kāi Tahu's ancient connection to this landscape. His message to landowners who have questions is "don't be shy to reach out." "The tribe is really quite open to working alongside landowners, especially when it comes to things like restoration and enhancing mahika kai (food gathering sites)."



Tūmai Cassidy (right) with Chris Kavazos (DOC).
Credit: Claire Concannon/RNZ

RECREATION SITES

Developing recreation sites along the Taiari/Taieri River is a key focus for Tiaki. Some of our recreation sites include the Loganburn confluence, a planting site on the Winmill family farm, and the Creamery Bridge. We are committed to working closely with the local community to ensure these spaces are designed in ways that people will genuinely want to use and enjoy.

Project Manager Caitlin has been working to get as many people as possible to visit the recreation sites, including an upcoming visit from students at St John's School to see how their plantings from two years ago have grown.

"I think it's really awesome for the kids to see what they've achieved—it might even inspire them to bring their families back," she says.

At Creamery Bridge, we have cut back the large willows which had become a hazard and are now replanting that area in natives. On April 11th we are holding a social planting session there. These events, says Caitlin, are about "much more than just getting plants in the ground. They're about making use of these places to bring community together, just as they have done for generations."

"These events are also about catching up - bring a brew, it'll be a Friday arvo - and take a moment to think about the bigger picture," says Caitlin. "What do you want to see here in the future?"

"You certainly don't have to be fit and you don't have to be into planting trees to come. There are lots of other things can do to help, like folding guards, helping move some plants around or just being there to show your support."



CREAMERY BRIDGE SOCIAL PLANTING - FRIDAY APRIL 11th 3PM - 5PM

Please RSVP by Thursday the 10th with Margo (021 052 8255)

UPPER TAIERI WAI CATCHMENT GROUP

The Upper Taieri Wai Catchment Group committee have been doing a huge amount of work behind the scenes to ensure the success of the group for the future. We are in the process of appointing an administrator to help with the building of membership and our presence in the wider community. Our Facebook page is live, so please pop on over, like & follow to keep up with all that is going on.

A group of 15 community members attended our first Catchment Action Plan (CAP) workshop late last month where the focus was on vision and values for the group & identifying the environmental issues within our catchment. As facilitators, the ORC is in the process of writing these up ready for workshop 2 which was held on the 26th of March. One issue that has been discussed at length is the willows in the catchment. Willows are a divisive component of our landscape, but as with any introduced tree, they need close management. Crack willow has been planted in the Upper Taieri since as early as the 1940's in a bid to manage river movement.

Unfortunately these trees were never adequately managed, and were allowed to spread and grow very large. They now pose a major threat to our towns, roads and farms. Left untended, they will eventually collapse into the river, hastening erosion and potentially causing flooding.

The Otago Regional Council has embarked on an ambitious aerial spraying programme to reduce the amount of willows in the Upper Taieri. By killing the bulk of big trees in the main stem above Creamery Bridge, the hope is that landowners will be in a better position to tackle willows on their own properties.

Willow control will always be an ongoing job in this catchment, as crack willow can regenerate from a single twig or branch, meaning it's unlikely we will ever be able to entirely eradicate it here. This ability to regenerate vegetatively means it's important to kill a willow tree before cutting it down, as cutting down a living willow will simply result in a forest of new trees sprouting. This is the reason aerial spraying is preferred as a starting point for control.

Upper Taieri Wai is committed to working with Otago Regional Council on these efforts and has put in a bid to the ORC's Ecofund to assist with ongoing willow control work.

Ultimately, we hope to see the Taieri river return to a more natural, safer state, in which biodiversity can flourish and natural floods can move more sedately downstream.

Our contacts are:

m: 027 699 3422

e: uppertaieriwai@gmail.com

FB: Upper Taieri Wai Inc.Catchment Group



REGENERATIVE TOURISM: THE FUTURE OF CONSERVATION ?

Regenerative tourism is tourism that gives back more to people and places than it takes. It puts communities and the local environment at the forefront, and asks the question: how can tourists contribute to not only the economic, but also the environmental well-being of the places they visit?

The wide open spaces, extraordinary biodiversity, and the rich Māori and Pākehā history of the Mānīatoto/Maniototo area make it attractive to the type of tourist that wants to learn, be adventurous and active, and be inspired to affect change.

But as anywhere, there are environmental challenges here that need to be addressed. That's where tourism can potentially play a role, bringing in money to the region, a portion of which can be diverted to conservation work. Tourists can also have the opportunity to get involved in hands-on conservation projects, enriching their experience.

Yi Bian, a PhD student with Griffith University in Queensland has been researching regenerative tourism and the Tiaki Maniototo project. She sees massive opportunities for the Maniototo and says farmers are in a great position to benefit from regenerative tourism.



Photo Credit: Geoff Marks

"I think farmers are the perfect target group for doing this kind of tourism, as they own the land," she says. "They have the species, they have those beautiful landscapes, waterways and forests. So I think they have the basic conditions of tourism."

Tiaki Maniototo are currently working to develop educational cycle tourism opportunities for the region and Yi says that this is a natural fit for the area.

Maniototo farmers, she suggests, could be developing farmstay experiences and tours that give cycle tourists a chance to get to know local farming culture, and also see the hard work farmers are doing to be good environmental stewards.



Yi Bian

MILES ANDERSON - MP FOR WAITAKI

Congratulations to the Tiaki Maniototo project team and the wider Upper Taieri Wai Catchment Group for the work you are doing to drive community-led actions for the fantastic waterways in your area.

I had the pleasure of visiting members of the group in the Maniototo last year and I was very impressed with the work being done to preserve and enhance the variety of unique habitats in your great part of the world.

Your actions with planting, revitalisation, pest control and community engagement are creating a meaningful impact which will benefit the waterways and communities which reside within the catchment. Tiaki Maniototo provides a shining example of the benefit of having a well organised, passionate group of people working together for the good of our environment.



Outside of Parliament I am a farmer, and also a member of my local Pareora Catchment Group. I have experienced the frustrations and complexity caused by unpractical regulations that often stymie good work on a local level. I firmly believe catchment groups are the best way forward for enhancing our local waterways and responding to localised concerns and interests.

The Government is on the same page too. We want to provide greater empowerment to catchment groups as community-led actions and strategies create far more positive impact than a one-size-fits-all approach that tend to come from local and central government bureaucracy. It is the people and communities of the land who are essentially stewards of the environment, so it makes sense for decisions and actions to be led by you rather than a disconnected central or local government agency.

The Maniototo economy, the livelihoods and prosperity of the people who live there, is based on the appropriate use of water. This Government strongly recognises the importance of water management and storage that enables places like the Maniototo to thrive.

We are going to see positive change come this year as the Government goes about replacing the Resource Management Act. We're reforming the RMA and planning rules as the primary sector has been weighed down by unworkable and costly regulation for too long. This reform will not come at the detriment of the environment. When the RMA was developed, the key downfall was integrating management of development and the environment into one purpose, which has treated development as a privilege. We're going to change that by replacing the RMA with two Acts with distinct purposes – one to manage environmental effects arising from activities and another to enable urban development and infrastructure.

Councils will have clarity on what environmental effects and domains need managing, what needs to be considered when setting limits appropriate to their regions, and the tools available to manage resources within those limits. These tools should include innovative methods for things like water allocation and discharges, so scarce resources go to where they're needed most, and supply can respond to demand.

The Government is moving to review and update national level policy directives that impact the primary sector. These changes relate to, amongst other things, freshwater, indigenous biodiversity, and water storage. By the end of the year, we will introduce a replacement National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management, an improved Freshwater Farm Plan system, ensure Significant Natural Areas are applied with common sense by amending the National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity, and enable key productivity initiatives such as water storage.

Better regulation will allow areas such as the Maniototo to thrive even further, and with the valuable hard work and stewardship being provided by Tiaki Maniototo I have full confidence the area's waterways and ecosystems will continue improving so future generations can enjoy this wonderful and unique environment.

FAREWELL TO COLIN AND ÉILIS

After two and a half years with Tiaki Maniototo, team members Éilis Hogan and Colin Delahunt have moved on to new opportunities in the Waikato. Colin says their time with Tiaki Maniototo has been hugely rewarding.

"For a couple of people who turned up from Ireland two and half years ago, I definitely don't think we could have imagined that we'd end up where we have and the people that we've met along the way," he says. Colin says highlights of the role have included monitoring the health of waterways and seeing progress on water quality issues. "Getting to see the progress of the restoration sites has been truly amazing and inspiring." Working with the Maniototo community, he says, has also been a thrill.



"It's been great to see so many people receptive of establishing restoration sites on their properties, and wanting to take small steps that lead to big impacts over time."

The establishment of the nursery, he says, has also been a source of pride for the project.

Tiaki Maniototo would like to take this opportunity to thank Éilis and Colin for their pivotal work in driving the project over the last two and half years. They will be greatly missed, but we wish them all the best for their next adventures.



Tiaki Maniototo Nursery is Open for Business

Specialising in native plants, grown from local seed stock for our Central Otago conditions.

Nursery open by appointment, contact Margo on 021 052 8255 during working hours or email nursery@tiakiamaniototo.co.nz to place an order or arrange a visit.

NURSERY UPDATE



We are very proud of our nursery, which is found on the site of the former Patearoa school. Over the last three years we've managed to build an amazing community asset – a nursery packed full of native plants grown to suit the harsh local conditions of the Maniototo. We see this nursery as not only a source of great plants, but also a centre for education and community involvement.

At the end of 2024, we built a shade house, and in January, we began pricking out seedlings. The seed, which was collected from across the Maniototo where possible, was germinated by our Project Manager, Caitlin, as we do not yet have an appropriate facility for this.

By early February, over 10,000 seedlings had been transferred (pricked out) into 7cm pots, with a very high survival rate. They are thriving, and the shade house has proven to be a great success. These seedlings will remain in the shade house until spring. The mature plants in the nursery have been growing exceptionally well, requiring some regular maintenance, including light pruning to encourage lateral growth.

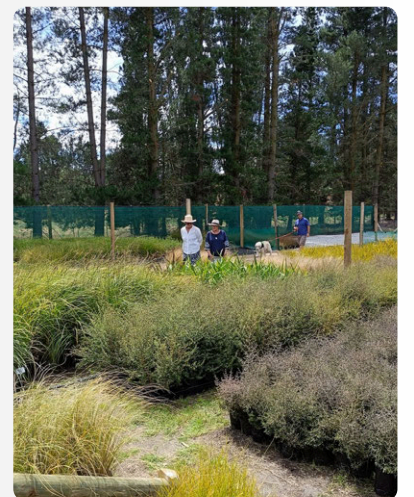
From late February to April, we have been closely monitoring native plants around the region for seed collection. Once the timing is right, our team have been collecting seed from various sites. Each species is carefully prepared for storage—some require scarification and peat storage, while others are sieved and refrigerated, until they will be sown in spring.

In March, the nursery team expanded its services to include maintenance work on previously planted sites. This involves assessing plant health, repositioning or removing cardboard guards for better weed control, and ensuring long-term success. Additionally, we are now offering site planning and planting services, allowing us to support restoration projects from seed collection to establishment. Whether you need maintenance for existing plantings or expert help in planning and planting a new project, our experienced team can now assist.

As April approaches, we will begin 'winterising' the nursery, ensuring plants are well-prepared for the colder months. The nursery will remain open by appointment for plant purchases until mid-April, after which the nursery will close for winter and reopen in September. The rest of our operations will stay open and we are available to assist with any future planting or maintenance plans you may have so please do get in touch, even over winter (it's a great time to do some planning).

Caitlin says the earlier people get in touch, especially in regards to larger planting projects, the better. This gives us time to grow plants to the desired size well in advance, saving people money and ensuring large healthy, robust plants. "It takes about 18 months from collecting a seed to getting it a size that most people want to buy. At the moment we've got plenty of good stock. But going forward, it's going to really useful if people can get in touch early, so we can make sure we've got the stock and sizes people are wanting. It also allows us to plan where to collect our seed from."

She encourages anyone looking to do some spring planting this year or autumn planting next year to get in touch now so we can plan your order. We offer discounts for larger (wholesale) orders.



TAIARI WAI RIVER FESTIVAL



The second annual Taiari Wai River Festival was a massive success, with several hundred people making the trip out to Pātearoa to enjoy a fantastic community day out in the sun. This simply couldn't have happened without our primary sponsors, Otago Community Trust, Aotearoa Gaming Trust, the Maniototo Promotions Fund and Ranfurly Transport.

The crowd enjoyed performances from Skin and Bone, Mads Harrop and the Tess Liautaud band, while talks from Pete Oswald of the Central Otago Wilding Pine Trust and entomologist Brian Patrick were well received in the schoolhouse.

Jack Mathieson from Otago Regional Council was again on hand to educate kids about freshwater ecosystems, alongside Solis Norton from the Healthy Taieri project and Chris Kavazos from DOC. Fish and Game's casting game again proved an enormous hit and Bruce and Steve were kept frantically busy all day running it.



Fantastic food was provided by our vendors, the Waipiata Hotel, Maniototo Area School, Stacey Weir's coffee cart, the girls from Alchemy Alley, and Marty the Ice Cream guy. There is of course, a serious objective to this festival, and that is to get the community connected to the Taiari/Taieri river together to celebrate and learn about the catchment and the issues that affect it.

Storm clouds threatened late in the day, but we got the gear down just in time, thanks to our amazing volunteer crew. Special thanks to Ewan Mason without whom this just couldn't happen. Having run this event two years in a row, we're really excited about its future. We hope to make the festival a regular event on the Māniatoto calendar, so we look forward to seeing you next year.



With thanks to our partners



Maniototo Promotions Fund

WILLOWS UNDER ATTACK

In recent weeks, Otago Regional Council has embarked on an ambitious programme to fight back against willows in the catchment. 118 hectares of willows have been sprayed by helicopter in the main part of the river near Cogan's Bridge.

Tiaki Maniototo are supporting these efforts where we can, offering on the ground support and liaison with landowners. For Otago Regional Council Team Leader of Biodiversity Pete Ravenscroft, who has coordinated this latest assault on willows, its crucial work. "You won't have a scroll plain, nor will you have wetlands within the scroll plain, if we don't control them," he says.

Chris Kavazos, of the Department of Conservation, says willows are an enormous problem for the Taiari/Taieri catchment. "They quickly drown out all the native vegetation, that a lot of our native species rely on to provide habitat," he says.

The scroll plain is a unique, delicate ecosystem. The river breaches the banks during floods and fills all the isolated wetlands periodically. Willows, says Chris, interrupt this natural rhythm. "The scroll plain is really important for a number of threatened species of plants, fish and invertebrates. We need to maintain that functioning of the river as a scroll plain to maintain those threatened populations."

Willows also drop huge amounts of leaf litter into the water, which creates an artificial spike in nutrients. This can trigger algal blooms that lead to "blackwater events" – periods of low oxygen that kill fish.

"The scale of the problem is huge," Chris says. "Almost every metre of bank along the river and the tributaries are infested with willows." DOC is working with Tiaki Maniototo to remove willows from the uppermost part of the river. A highly experienced team from Otākou rūnaka-led conservation project Te Nukuroa o Matamata are on the ground doing the spray work.

By tackling the lighter infestations at the top of the river, says Chris, we can start to slow the spread further down. "These trees are mostly germinating from sticks and debris moving downstream. By removing those willows high up in the catchment you start reducing that load of debris coming downstream and causing more willows." "It's a big problem," he says. "It's going to take many years to get on top of."



Willows at the top end of the Taiari. The dead ones have been sprayed



Pete stresses the aim is not to eradicate willows, as that is likely impossible. It's about getting them back to a more manageable level so that ongoing control work can be far less onerous and costly.

"It's really to return the processes of the river back as much as we can to a relatively natural state."

Without control, he says, willows will continue to encroach and push further and further out into farmland. Controlling them will allow flood waters to flow through the system faster.

Willows, says Pete, were almost completely eradicated from the Upper Taieri in the 1990's. A lack of ongoing control work has seen them return in force.

Community buy-in, says Pete is crucial to the success of the programme. "We're completely and totally reliant on the community. It won't fly unless they want it."

Farmers in the basin, he says have been really supportive of the work.

"The community generally want [the scroll plain] to be functioning properly," he says. "It's not just a regional council thing. Farmers are ecologists in their own right. They look out the back door, and I'm sure that they would like the scroll plain to behave the way it historically did."