

1 April 2003

Dear Researcher

Maungatautari Ecological Island – Research Agenda

The Science & Research Committee of the Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust extends an invitation to researchers to join us in investigating the social, physical and natural science of this unique project.

New Zealand's environment developed in the complete absence of land based mammals except for three species of bats and was the last major land mass occupied by humans only approximately 800 years ago. Since this time humans and other introduced mammals have had a devastating impact on the biodiversity of the country and as far as we know have made extinct:

- 32 percent of indigenous land and freshwater birds;
- 18 percent of seabirds;
- 3 of seven frogs;
- at least 12 invertebrates such as snails and insects;
- 1 fish and 1 bat and perhaps 3 reptiles; and
- possibly 11 plants.

(The above figures have been supplied from "The New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy – Our Chance to Turn the Tide" – February 2000.)

The Trust aims to create a "mainland island" of 3,400ha. on a 2 million year old forested extinct volcano lying in the heart of the Waikato region of New Zealand's North Island. The remnant indigenous forest will be surrounded with a state of the art mammal-proof fence, all introduced species eradicated and indigenous species reintroduced including some endangered species currently restricted to off-shore islands.

Maungatautari is one of only two significant areas of indigenous forest left in the Waikato basin and is a natural "island" surrounded by pasture. Three quarters of the forest area is a Scenic Reserve administered by the Waipa District Council. The remaining one quarter is in private ownership either fee simple title or multiple ownership Maori land. Maungatautari has significant cultural and spiritual value to local Maori and was a centre for Maori prior to European settlement with more than 5,000 believed to be living on the slopes of the mountain.

The Trust is a community initiative supported by local and national government agencies and research organisations. The Research Committee includes scientists from the University of Waikato, Landcare Research, Dexcel, the National Institute of Water and Atmosphere Research, the Department of Conservation and the Waikato Regional Council.

The project is attracting considerable national and international attention. The concept is a first on this scale and could show the way for the future of species management and survival. This ambitious, but achievable, project provides a unique opportunity to research a wide range of ecological restoration theory, techniques, and responses, as well as aspects of community involvement and culture.

The Trust has identified priority research areas and seeks expressions of interest from researchers. We may be able to assist with access to background information, local scientific knowledge and volunteer field support. While the Trust currently has little research funding, we are actively seeking to build a funding base to assist future projects. The first priority is for base-line data, and any funding would be directed initially for this work.

The timetable cannot be determined accurately because many factors are involved. However, subject to finance, weather, and the final approval of all those affected, fence construction should commence in the spring of 2003 (October onwards) and be complete within 18 months from the starting date.

The Waipa District Council has the statutory responsibility for the management of all matters pertaining to the management of the Reserve but fully supports the Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust. All research enquiries should therefore be directed to the Trust for coordination and approval.

We welcome your interest and need your expertise. Please contact the Chief Executive, Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust, P.O. Box 476, Cambridge, or e-mail at:- mail@maungatrust.org.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Stephenson
SCIENCE & RESEARCH COMMITTEE CHAIR