

Longbush Ecosanctuary: A Legacy Project for 2019

A Five Year Plan

Background

The Longbush Ecosanctuary serves as an 'ark' for rare and endangered species of native birds, plants and animals. It is reached by a winding gravel road up an inland valley along Riverside Road, just 9 kilometres from Gisborne city. From high hill ridges to the west, three streams tumble down steep valleys and across a plain, entering the Waimata River to the east.

A rare surviving strip of lowland bush (Longbush Reserve) runs beside the Waimata River. The bush is alive with the sound of birds, including tui, bellbirds, fantails, kingfishers, whiteheads and many kereru or native pigeons.



At 110 hectares, Longbush Ecosanctuary is the largest intensively managed restoration project on the East Coast, from Wairoa to Opotiki. In 2005 Longbush Reserve, a rare strip of riverside bush, was recognized as a Priority 1 RAP [Recommended Area for Protection] by the Department of Conservation.

The Ecosanctuary site is protected by three QEII covenants, and public access to Longbush Reserve is maintained. Longbush is linked with three other QEII covenants nearby, and Donner's Bush, a DOC scenic reserve.

Close to Gisborne City, the Ecosanctuary is perfectly placed for visitors, and for educational purposes. It is sited on the banks of the Waimata River, a waterway much loved and used for kayaking, paddling, rowing, fishing and swimming, whose waters flow past the site where Captain Cook and his companions first came ashore.

From the beginning, Longbush has been planned as a place where locals and visitors alike can encounter rare and endangered species of plants and animals in their own habitat. In this way, Longbush is complementary to Eastwood Hill, the National Arboretum that specializes in exotic species of trees.

The Longbush Trust enjoys a close relationship with many local organizations and individuals, including the Williams Trusts; the Gisborne District Council; the Eastland Institute of Technology, which has carried out many voluntary projects; Turanga Ararau (the local Maori PTE); the local office of the Department of Conservation, the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society and the Queen Elizabeth II Trust; the Waikereru Weavers (a group of local weavers), and many local individuals who carry out voluntary work at the Ecosanctuary.

A WORLD-LEADING PROJECT

The Longbush Ecosanctuary has a reputation for innovation in ecological restoration.



Our ecological advisor, Steve Sawyer of Ecoworks, is renowned for his work in restoring endangered species of birds and invertebrates. From his headquarters in Gisborne, Steve also works in Tasmania, Fiji and Hawai'i, assisting their governments with the recovery of endangered seabirds.

Steve has achieved a number of world firsts, pioneering the use of sound attraction to bring petrels, gannets and other birds back to their historic habitats. He is expert in the restoration of kiwi, weka, native robins, tuatara and gecko, along with many other species, and has been responsible for the spectacular recovery of indigenous plants and animals at Young Nick's Head and the Motu Kiwi Creche, along with many other projects in the district.

At Longbush, Steve and his staff have been working to restore an inland colony of titi (muttonbird) in the hills, with a series of successful translocations. With the support of the Williams Trusts and the Biodiversity Fund, native robins have been brought back to Longbush, the first time that these birds have bred in Poverty Bay for over 100 years.

Wildlife corridors have been planted to link Longbush Reserve along the Waimata River with the Waikereru Hills, and a native arboretum has been planted along the foothills, with large groves of native trees, interspersed with the 60 varieties of flax in the Orchiston Harakeke collection.

Recently, inspired by the Longbush project, a brilliant young architect, Sarosh Mulla, volunteered to design and construct a Welcome Shelter at the Ecosanctuary. Sarosh, who won an AMP National Scholarship for this project, has already exhibited his work at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.



The Waikereru Hills will provide a very beautiful backdrop to the Welcome Shelter, and a superb destination for visitors. The tracks and visitor experience in the hills will be designed by Megan Wraight, New Zealand's leading landscape architect, who has also created an overall landscape plan for the Ecosanctuary. Megan was recently made an Arts Laureate by the New Zealand government.

The Welcome Shelter is designed as an outdoor classroom, with a large floating roof over three elegant wooden 'boxes' used for storage, a composting toilet, water and a lookout tower. Small terraces and planting boxes create a space in the landscape to welcome visitors, and to explore different aspects of Longbush and its rare and endangered species of plants and animals.

The Welcome Shelter is currently being constructed at Longbush by a stream of volunteers. When it is completed, more than 70 sponsors and 100 volunteers will have contributed to its construction, and a \$1.5 million structure will have been designed and built with a zero budget, entirely by volunteers. Again, this is a highly innovative project, of wide international interest.

At the Welcome Shelter, stories will be told about the pre-human landscape at Longbush, its plant and animal inhabitants, the impact of the first Polynesian arrivals and Maori settlement, the first European arrivals and its settler history.



Megan Wraight has also produced a sketch design of the 1769 garden, based on descendants of plants collected on the East Coast by scientists from James Cook's ship Endeavour, now growing at Kew Gardens in England.

Anne Salmond has carried out detailed research on these collections, with the help of Ewen Cameron, a botanist at Auckland Museum, and curators at Kew and the Natural History Museum in London. Planting will begin this year and carry on during 2015-6, so that the plants can mature in time for the commemoration activities in 2019.

A LEGACY PROJECT FOR 2019

The Longbush Ecological Trust is planning five main projects for the period 2014-2019.

1. A Tunnel of Bush leading to a Secret Valley

Like the Waimata River, Riverside Road is much used for leisure activities, in this case walking, cycling and running. The Longbush Trust hopes to make this safer and more pleasurable by working with DOC and EIT to create a walkway in a 'tunnel of bush' at Donner's Bush, the DOC Scenic Reserve on Riverside Road, with clearings for riverside picnics.

This 'tunnel of bush' (reminiscent of Hongi's Track on the way out of Rotorua) will lead to Longbush Ecosanctuary, with its new Welcome Shelter and 1769 garden. Locals and visitors alike will have the pleasure of being able to visit a 'secret valley' close to town, immersing themselves in a beautiful landscape filled with rare and endangered species of birds, plants and other animals.

2. Riparian Restoration along the Waimata River:

We aim to re-establish native bush to the river's edge along Longbush Reserve. With the assistance of the Williams Trusts, some riparian plantings have been successfully trialled, and we would like to be able to extend this.

It is vital to ensure the long-term health of this rare stretch of riparian bush, registered as a Priority 1 Recommended Area for Protection by DOC, by ongoing planting, fence maintenance and pest and weed control.

3. A Kiwi and Weka Haven in a Black Beech Forest

Behind the Welcome Shelter, the Longbush Trust is restoring the Waikereru Hills, 100 hectares of hill country, as a Kiwi and Weka Haven in a black beech forest.



According to a recent study by Dr. Mark Smale from Landcare Research, the hills in this part of Poverty Bay were originally covered by black beech trees, interspersed with Northern rata and three varieties of mistletoe, along with many other rare and endangered plant species. Once restored, this forest will be a beautiful place to visit.

Over the next few years, the Longbush Trust also intends to bring back kiwi, weka, geckos and tuatara to the Waikereru Hills, along with other endangered birds, lizards and invertebrates. With three bush-clad stream valleys, these hills provide a perfect habitat for these species. We are planning an innovative pest-control fence which can be built and maintained by local people, making it safe for these rare and endangered species of plants and animals.

4. A Koura Pond with a walkway around Pa Hill

To the north of the Welcome Shelter, linked by walking tracks, the Trust is restoring a pond with an island filled with rare East Coast plants, and two streams as part of a freshwater restoration project.

This includes the restoration of koura (native crayfish), eels and other rare freshwater species to the site, with a timber walkway to a koura pond, leading to a track around Pa Hill, giving visitors spectacular views up and down the valley.



5. A Pa Harakeke (Flax Collection) in a Native Arboretum

When the Longbush Ecosanctuary project began in 2002, Anne Salmond approached Rene Orchiston, a Gisborne woman who had built up an extraordinary collection of 60 different named varieties of harakeke (native flaxes), now regarded as a national *taonga* or treasure.

Rene had collected these plants in gift exchanges with Maori weavers, who shared a great deal of knowledge with her about the different varieties. When she left the family farm, Rene tried to have the collection established on another site, but the flax plants were neglected and many of them died.

Rene was delighted when the entire collection was transplanted to Longbush, where it has been cared for in its home region by the Longbush Ecological Trust and the Waikereru Weavers led by Janine Te Reo, who observe the *tikanga* or customs associated with these plants.

While the *harakeke* are thriving, they are now more than 10 years old, and need to be replanted in properly designed rohe (tribal areas) with good access for the weavers and dumpsites for wood mulch.

When the Orchiston collection was established at Longbush, groves of berry-bearing native trees – usually 20 trees in a grove – were planted around the semi-circular areas where groups of flaxes were planted. This native arboretum has enjoyed spectacular growth, and now needs trimming, and the removal of some interplants that were planted to protect the young plants from the wind.

