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Tiromoana Bush field day finds favour with friends of Biodiversity Trust

A field day and guided tour through Tiromoana Bush, the 407-hectare regenerating lowland native forest on Mt Cass Road in Waipara, attracted an attentive group of over 40 people interested in learning about the ambitious restoration project.

The field day was organised by the Hurunui Biodiversity Trust. Trustee Sara Heard says the attendees were able to connect with each other while seeing first-hand how biodiversity can be restored and enhanced.

‘We organised this event to enable people to learn about the challenges and opportunities of restoring biodiversity’, says Sara Heard. ‘The field day also provided an opportunity for people to make connections and have conversations about their own experiences with biodiversity, to learn from each other’s experiences.’

The field trip was hosted by Dr David Norton, emeritus professor from the University of Canterbury’s Te Kura Ngahere | School of Forestry who wrote the original *Tiromoana Bush Restoration Management Plan* in 2004 and provides ongoing advice to Transwaste Canterbury (the owner of Tiromoana Bush) on the restoration project. Professor Norton was joined by Fraser Maddigan who has taken over the on-the-ground ecological management of Tiromoana Bush.

Professor Norton talked to the group about how Tiromoana Bush is a key biodiversity area and at 407 hectares is the largest area of protected land within the 51,000-ha Motunau Ecological District, comprising coastal hill country between the Hurunui, Waikari, Omihi and Waipara Rivers and the coast. While heavily impacted by human settlement, there are still many key biodiversity values present in the coastal hill country says Professor Norton, which is why conservation work is so important and rewarding.

‘Remnant patches of podocarp, black beech and areas of regenerating bush, especially kānuka, can be found throughout the Motunau Ecological District’, says Professor Norton. ‘There are also unusual plants such as the southern rātā and native mistletoes. The range of indigenous fauna is equally inspiring with spotless crane, kereru, tui, Canterbury gecko and skinks all thriving in remnant forests in North Canterbury. That’s why the restoration work we’re doing in Tiromoana Bush should be an inspiration for landowners throughout Hurunui.’

Professor Norton says discussing the restoration project in person with a small group means people can ask questions and learn the context around why decisions have been made about planting and pest control.

‘People wandering through Tiromoana Bush might wonder, and many have asked me, why we leave the gorse growing amongst the bush’, says Professor Norton. ‘The answer is that the gorse is a nursery crop – it provides shelter for the native seedlings until they get established. Once the native trees grow above the gorse they block the sunlight, take up the water and nutrients in the soil, and the gorse dies. Gorse has an important role to play and when it’s done it dies. That’s why we don’t spray it or dig it out. Nature will use it and discard it.’

Tiromoana Bush is owned and funded by Transwaste Canterbury, who own and operate the adjacent Kate Valley Landfill in Waipara. Transwaste Chairman Gill Cox says field days are a key part of growing the awareness and understanding of the restoration project and the importance of biodiversity in Hurunui.

‘Field days allow people with an interest in restoring biodiversity to learn more about how it’s done, by seeing an actual restoration project in progress and learning from the people who’ve planned and implemented the restoration’, says Gill Cox. ‘Nature takes time, a lot of time, and for the first few years it was hard to see progress. Now, seventeen years after we began the restoration project the resulting regeneration is abundantly clear. We hope it’s an inspiration for people throughout the district to restore and enhance their biodiversity.’