

## Increasing Hamilton's biodiversity

At the moment only about 2% of Hamilton has indigenous forest cover. The current aim for the city is to restore 10% of Hamilton to indigenous habitat as part of the conservation and restoration of the indigenous natural environment.

The original forest covering Kirikiriroa included Aotearoa's tallest tree species, the kahikatea, which could reach a height of 60 metres, which is 35 times as tall as the average person. The berries on these trees were an important food source for birds and people. There are stories of hundreds of kererū flying up and down the gullies before the trees were cut down to clear the land for development.



The Silverdale branch of the Mangaonua gully is a branch of the much larger Mangaonua gully system that starts at Pukemoremore and flows all the way in to Hamilton. At the end of 2017 Gerard Kelly, the Hamilton City Council community planting coordinator asked George Lusty to initiate a care group to remove weeds from the gully in order allow native plants to grow back.

George said that several years ago it was proposed to develop an esplanade that could go all the way from Silverdale through to Hammond park in Riverlea and hence to the Waikato river walkways in the city.

“This may seem like an impossible dream, but it would be fun to try” says George.

Hamilton City has an exciting new Local Indigenous Biodiversity Strategy (LIBS) which is currently being finalised and which aims for increased biodiversity of native plants and animals such as skinks, birds and bats.

The Strategy encourages collaboration between various stakeholders to promote strong economic, social, cultural, and environmental values.

The Biodiversity Strategy is important because having more native trees and other native plants will bring more native birds such as tūi and kererū back into the city. George believes that social, cultural and environmental aspects need to be integrated, to make the natural environments look attractive so that local people will enjoy spending more time in a natural environment.

“It is good to do weeding and planting to support what has already been done, because you get to have fun, get some natural exercise and and do good deeds at the same time” says George.

The Mangaonua Esplanade entrance is at the end of Silverdale Road, just before it joins Morrinsville Road. Ngāti Hauā Mahi Trust have already done extensive plantings connected by a very good pathway which they have formed in order to give access for continuing work.

**Currently a small group of people come on Thursday mornings from 9:15am to 12 noon. If you are interested in helping, please contact George Lusty on [georgelusty@outlook.co.nz](mailto:georgelusty@outlook.co.nz) or 027 210 3884**