

Summary of Activities 2022-2023

Overview

Key achievements during the 2022-2023 year for the Coleridge Habitat Enhancement Trust (CHET) have been:

- **Willow control** – found a solution for willow control at Lake Selfe with ECan’s assistance.
- **Other weeds** – provided \$5,000 and in-kind support for a weed survey of the Coleridge-Acheron area (part of the Rakaia Weed Control Strategy 2023-2033).
- **Predator control** – purchased 5 DOC250 traps and established a new trapping area; contributed \$10,000 again to the Rakaia Trapping Project.
- **New CHET Grants process** – created a framework to help promote CHET funding.
- **Appointment of a new CHET Coordinator.**

More information about these activities and other work follows.

Relationships with stakeholders

The CHET Coordinator has continued to liaise on projects with the following key stakeholders:

- Landowners/Managers (particularly of Lake Coleridge Station, Glenthorne Station, Algidus Station, and the Murchison family) – especially in relation to trapping activities, signage, and willow control.
- Braided River Aid (BRaid) – several Trustees and the Coordinator attended BRaid’s annual braided river seminar.
- Land Information NZ (LINZ) and Department of Conservation (DOC) staff – particularly in relation to predator trapping/river bird breeding success on the Rakaia River.
- Environment Canterbury (ECan) – particularly in relation to the braided river weed control programme and CHET’s willow control plans.
- Selwyn District Council (SDC) biodiversity officers – particularly in relation to speargrass protection and willow control plans.

Visitor Signage

CHET has decided to invest in higher-quality versions of signs warning the public to be aware of nesting river birds. The new signs should withstand UV exposure and wind much better so should last several years at minimum. They will be installed in Spring 2023 at all points where the public can easily access major rivers (ie. Rakaia, Wilberforce, Harper Rivers).



At the same time, CHET is also replacing lower-quality versions of a sign warning the public that predator traps are set in particular areas with a more durable version.

Predator Control

CHET has added 5 DOC250 traps to the trapping network around Lake Coleridge this year. A decision was made to invest in these larger traps because they are more suitable for ferrets, which are caught from time-to-time.

These new traps have been used to help set up a new trapping area at the eastern end of Lake Coleridge.

One of CHET's trapping volunteers set up a trail camera at Lake Selfe in late 2022, which recorded over a two-week period, and showed the presence of cats, possums, rats and mice in the area. CHET has 12 traps around Lake Selfe, managed by two volunteers, to help protect the nationally vulnerable Australasian Crested Grebe.

Catch statistics

Five volunteers, with occasional assistance from the CHET Coordinator, have continued to monitor traps in areas where predators are a particular risk to ground nesting birds (either river birds or grebes).

The traps are ones purchased by CHET, BRaid and Manawa Energy. The CHET Coordinator maintains an inventory of all the traps. All volunteers record their trapping results on the Trap.NZ app giving a full picture of trapping results.

Trapping results reported during the year were:

- **Harper Village area** - 24 traps (12 DOC200; 12 Timms) monitored by Manawa Energy's Brian Lancaster
 - Brian started using the Trap.NZ app to record his catches from May 2022.
 - During the 2022-2023 year, the following catches were recorded: 1 bird, 11 cats, 9 ferrets, 11 hedgehogs, 3 possums, 3 rats = **Total 38 catches**
- **Lakes Selfe, Evelyn, Georgina** – 19 traps (18 DOC200 traps; 1 DOC250 trap at Selfe from Jan 2022) monitored by Rosalie Snoyink and David Anderson
 - Rosalie and David started using the Trap.NZ app from April 2022.
 - During the 2022-2023 year, the following catches were recorded: At Selfe - 6 hedgehogs, 3 mice, 1 rat, 3 stoats; At Evelyn - 3 hedgehogs; At Georgina - 2 cats, 2 hedgehogs, 1 mouse, 3 stoats, 1 weasel = **Total 25 catches**
- **Lake Hill's Boat Harbour, Lake Coleridge** – 5 traps (5 DOC200 traps) monitored by David Murchison
 - David started using the Trap.NZ app from early December 2021.
 - During the 2022-2023 year, the following catches were recorded: 3 stoats, 1 rat, 2 hedgehogs = **Total 6 catches**



- **Homestead Road Lagoon** - 4 traps (4 DOC250) monitored by Rebecca Rose
 - Rebecca started using the Trap.NZ app from January 2023.
 - In the six months from Jan-June 2023, there were no catches.
- **Landowners** continue each year to do significant trapping operations on their land, in particular to control numbers of possums, pigs and deer. Vespex is also used to control wasps.

\$10k towards Rakaia River Predator Trapping managed by LINZ

CHET again contributed \$10,000 to the Rakaia River Trapping programme. This was the third consecutive year CHET has contributed. This was the final year of the 6-year funding allocated to the programme so a summary report and recommendations for the future was produced by LINZ.

In this final year, the project had 603 traps (various types), located on the true right of the Rakaia River spread over approximately 2 kilometres opposite Lake Coleridge Village.

The programme's summary report concluded that there had been too many changes in trapping and monitoring practices over the 6-year period to make meaningful statistical conclusions. It also noted the significant impact of floods on results. But successes have been the very effective collaboration among multiple public and private partners, and the excellent health and safety record despite the project involving high-risk activities.

The recommendation for the future was to continue with a modified predator control programme in the 2023-2024 season, including:

- Focus on reducing predator abundance and expanding the trapping network to include the true left of the Rakaia River.
- Continue with monthly trap checks (including a 'maintenance check' for the traps) and undertaking a leg-hold trapping operation.
- Install additional tracking tunnels outside the trapping network to monitor predator dynamics.
- Undertake a Southern black-backed gull control operation and continue with rabbit control.
- Undertake a trap stocktake prior to the 2023-2024 control season commencing.

CHET believes partnering with others to contribute to landscape-scale issues like predator and weed control is effective. CHET will be investing \$10,000 again towards the 2023-2024 season of this programme.

Willow control

Crack willow infestation is becoming an increasing problem in the Lake Coleridge catchment. Over the past couple of years CHET has investigated potential ways to find time and cost savings being conscious of the significant number of areas where control is needed.

Specifically, CHET has investigated options for drone spraying, and then whether it might be possible to get a Global Consent that would cover work throughout the catchment. However, the uniqueness of the various areas where willow is growing means a Global Consent isn't an option; and concern about by-kill from drone spraying has eliminated this option for sensitive habitats.



CHET's ongoing work in this area has however resulted in an ECan staff member regularly attending meetings and ECan is now actively helping to find solutions for willow control.

In terms of CHET's priority area - Lake Selfe - ECan has produced a 'Restoration Plan' which enables ground-based willow control to start.

CHET anticipates needing to be the primary funder initially, but hopes that other stakeholders (government agencies and landowners) will contribute in future years once there is evidence of what can be achieved for a certain amount of money.

General weed control

Over the year, the Rakaia Weed Control Programme (managed by LINZ, ECan and DOC) asked Boffa Miskell to draft a new 10-year weed strategy for 2023-2033.

As part of this, CHET contributed \$5,000, and Fish & Game provided use of a boat, which enabled inclusion of what has been called the Coleridge-Acheron Operational Area. Up until now, the programme has focused its efforts on weeds in the major riverbeds, rather than those growing inland. However, good success in controlling weeds in the upper reaches of the major rivers means it is now relevant to start looking at inland weeds.

The draft strategy highlights weed species and locations of concern in the Coleridge-Acheron Area. It excludes pines because there is a separate high country pine control programme. Lake Coleridge Village was noted as a 'weed hot-spot' that would need a tailored approach. Areas of native vegetation around the edge of Lake Coleridge, particularly where Southern Rata is present, were highlighted as jewels to protect. The island in the middle of Lake Coleridge was noted for its potential for vulnerable plants.

The full strategy is still being finalised in consultation with stakeholders. No funding for any work in the Coleridge-Acheron Operational Area has been identified yet.

Australasian Crested Grebe nesting platform

Floating platforms for Crested Grebes have been successful in Wanaka by providing safer nesting sites. The platforms could offer the same benefits in our catchment – particularly better protection from mammalian predators and from changing lake levels. However, so far Coleridge grebes have not shown interest, instead choosing nesting sites on land nearby. Experiments in Wanaka have shown design changes to platforms seem to increase their attractiveness, so CHET is interested in experimenting more.

The CHET Coordinator has refurbished the platform in preparation for relaunch in Spring 2023. It will be put in the same location in the sheltered harbour outside the Murchison baches at the south-east end of Lake Coleridge. Signs informing people who see it what it is for will be erected nearby. It is easily seen from Te Araroa's Lake Hill Track.

Canterbury Knobbled Weevil survey

The nationally endangered Canterbury Knobbled Weevil's only known habitat is at Burkes Pass (between Fairlie and Lake Tekapo), but the Coleridge high country is still considered a potential habitat given Canterbury Museum holds a specimen believed collected from near Mt Oakden homestead in 1873. The weevil lives on *Aciphylla aurea* (Golden Spaniard/speargrass), which is an important plant for many native insect and lizard species.

In 2020-2021, CHET commissioned Lincoln University entomologist Mike Bowie to look for the weevil and record other species living in the same habitat. While Mike didn't find the weevil, CHET has this year pursued his recommendations for protecting speargrass, sharing information with SDC on plants threatened with shading from pine trees along Algidus Road and highlighting the risk of roadside spraying (eg. of lupins growing near speargrass). Damage from wild pigs digging around the plants is the other major risk to speargrass. Landowners regularly undertake pig control, but this issue needs ongoing attention.

Eel protection

CHET has continued to ask for information on research commissioned around 2014 into eel populations in the Coleridge catchment, but our requests to the Eel Management Trust have gone unanswered. Manawa Energy has confirmed this year that the Eel Management Trust is disbanding and remaining funds from it will be dedicated to changes Manawa Energy needs to make to better cater for eel passage before applying for another Resource Consent (due in 2030) to operate the Coleridge Hydro-Electric Power Scheme. With Manawa Energy represented on CHET, it's hoped that CHET will become better informed in eel protection needs and opportunities.

New CHET Grants process

CHET Trustees have established a new process for issuing grants this year. CHET's Trust Deed already clearly guides funding decisions and allows for bulk sums to be awarded to outside bids. But CHET now has a very clear framework for applicants who are interested in applying for grants. It will also enable easier promotion by CHET of its funding for environmental protection work in the catchment.

Events attended

- BRaid's annual braided rivers seminar (July)
- Lake Coleridge Tourism Group AGM

CHET Trustee Representatives

Below are the people who represented Trustee organisations during the 2022-23 year:

- Selwyn District Council - Councillor Bob Mugford (Chairperson)
- Manawa Energy – Holly Simperingham and Ryan Kane
- Department of Conservation – Vacant



- Landowners – Rebecca Rose
- Fish & Game – Lyndon Slater
- Forest & Bird – Donna Field
- CHET Coordinator – Toni Barlow
- CHET Secretary – Judith Pascoe

Thank you to farm managers and volunteers

Along with generous ongoing support from landowners and farm managers, several individuals voluntarily help with trapping and have done so for many years. Special thanks for this ongoing voluntary work goes to Rosalie Snoyink, David Anderson, Brian Lancaster and David Murchison.

Appointment of new Coordinator

In mid-2023, CHET appointed a new Coordinator to replace Toni Barlow. Andrew Welsh is a resident in Lake Coleridge Village who has previously worked for DOC. Both Toni and the CHET Trustees are extremely pleased to have found a local person with plenty of relevant experience and a real interest in the role. Toni leaves after seven years developing the position, which she has found very rewarding. She has allowed for a gradual transition while Andrew comes to grips with the projects and meets stakeholders.

For more information:

Coleridge Habitat Enhancement Trust webpage:
www.lakecoleridge.co.nz/habitat-enhancement.html

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