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in your BACKYARD KIWI? is there a

Whangarei Heads Landcare Forum (WHLF), local residents and other partners are working together to improve conditions for the kiwi in the Whangarei Heads area. They are monitoring and tracking kiwi, working with community on predator control, and supporting kiwi recovery – and the kiwi population is thriving. WHLF approached me to help. Over time I have developed the Backyard Kiwi concept and character as a means through which the community at large can learn about and identify with kiwi on this peninsula.

So far, it has taken the form of an illustrated Backyard Kiwi character, a website (www.backyardkiwi.org.nz) and road signs.

According to Helen Moodie of WHLF, community feedback has been enthusiastic with locals approaching WHLF and myself to talk about 'that kiwi'.

HEATHER HUNT, a local illustrator and designer, has conceived, drawn and developed a unique, authentic kiwi character

So many people have asked if they can buy their own Backyard Kiwi illustration that two of our kiwi 'characters' were recently 'released' (pun intended) as art prints for sale, to raise funds and grow the support base.

These prints get displayed in homes and offices. And with each print purchased Whangarei Heads Landcare Forum gains another Backyard Kiwi ambassador!

Guest speaker at the well patronised launch function for the art prints, in late November at the McLeod Bay Hall, was Kennedy Warne, founding editor of *New Zealand Geographic*. Impressed by the turnout, he reminded us that "the only hope for biodiversity in New Zealand is to engage the community".

When WHLF first came to me for some help, what they really wanted was for the people of Whangarei Heads Peninsula (The Nook, Taiharuru and Kauri Mountain) to know that there were kiwi in their backyard. This idea formed the basis of the Backyard Kiwi visual identity and character.

I wanted to develop a kiwi character that everyone would easily relate to, and a kiwi with attitude. Kiwi are feisty creatures. I worked closely with local trapper and kiwi ranger Todd Hamilton, who knows more about kiwi than anyone else in the district.

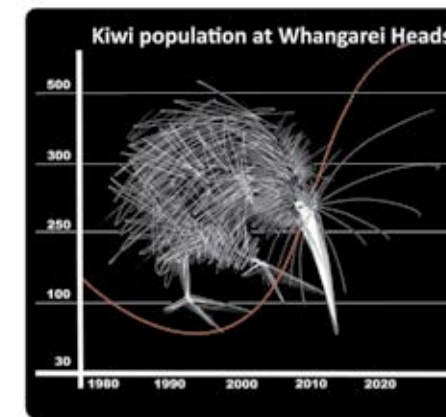
I spent a lot of time following Todd around when he was tracking kiwi. He taught me a tremendous amount about their physiology, characteristics and general psyche. I was lucky enough to observe them in their natural habitat on many occasions.

Working with Todd was fantastic. He has a real gift for communicating his knowledge about kiwi and their habits that allowed me to really develop a credible kiwi character. It was important to him that the character represented the reality of what a kiwi is.

"It has to be true to kiwi," he told me often.

IMAGES

THIS PAGE: The original Backyard Kiwi
FACING PAGE: Top: Graph shows local kiwi numbers growing
Centre: Todd Hamilton and 'Waka'
Right: Kicking Kiwi, one of two kiwi prints 'released'



He became my hardest and most valuable critic. In his 2008 book, *Roads Less Travelled*, Kennedy Warne described Todd as "a cross between David Bellamy, the quintessential botanist, and Barry Crump, the quintessential bloke". He's a gnarly, intelligent, energetic, very down-to-earth person who communicates extraordinarily well with the locals. Todd is the reason the conservation project at Whangarei Heads is working so well.

The time I spent tromping my way through the bush, looking and talking with Todd about kiwi, drawing and redrawing and critiquing my work with him was absolutely worth it.

Todd and I both feel we can stand beside our Backyard Kiwi and know that it's working well as an ambassador for WHLF.

Since the launch of the website and road signs a few months ago, the concept is doing what we wanted it to do: it has gradually permeated the communities of Whangarei Heads Peninsula, advocating for WHLF through a range of media.

The road signs, in particular, have been very effective. With their distinctive black and white graphic style, people enjoy spotting new ones as they come across them.



The success of this project so far shows how an innovative strategy can really benefit community-based conservation programmes. As one local said to me: "It's fantastic to see art and environment coming together."

For Todd Hamilton, kiwi ranger and predator trapper for the WHLF, kiwi are amazing creatures.

"The kiwi is a bird trying to be a mammal," he says, "the only bird with no tail, tiny useless wings, marrow filled bones, large ears, long whiskers and two functioning ovaries. With the ongoing success of predator control on the peninsula, kiwi have a fair chance to survive and thrive. The greater the awareness raised among locals and visitors, about kiwi behaviour and risks to kiwi, the more chance they have to continue to flourish here."

It's satisfying to feel they have a bright future. But there is a long way to go yet.



BACKYARDKIWI PRINTS

- For sale at Burning Issues Gallery
- View at The Deck café, McLeod Bay
- Order online: www.backyardkiwi.org.nz
- All proceeds go to helping keep kiwi in our backyard. Ph: 021 1145 385
- To see more of Heather Hunt's work: www.heatherhunt.co.nz

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