Introduction to the special issue on Tiritiri Matangi Island

The importance of New Zealand's offshore islands for the conservation of much of our unique biodiversity is well recognised and documented. But what of the more accessible inshore islands? Many of these have suffered considerable environmental degradation, and continue to be at risk from ongoing anthropogenic impacts. The ease of access to some inshore islands, however, offers an opportunity to generate a range of benefits for biodiversity conservation.

The principal theme of the 2008 New Zealand Ecological Society conference, *Ecology on our doorstep*, acknowledged that iconic ecological systems – refugia for biodiversity – can be close to the doorsteps of New Zealand's urban centres. It is these accessible systems that will play the biggest role in conservation education for the future, and these include inshore islands. Tiritiri Matangi Island is one such system, located in the Hauraki Gulf 3 km from the Whangaparaoa Peninsula, and only 28 km from downtown Auckland. Tiritiri Matangi is typical of a degraded Hauraki Gulf island, with a long history of human occupation, culminating in a farming regime that burned the island annually. An ecological restoration project was launched in 1984, with goals to provide a habitat for a range of threatened fauna and flora, and to allow public access to view such threatened species (Department of Lands and Survey 1982; Craig et al. 1995).

The whole restoration project was borne out of scientific research. Early research on the island by University of Auckland staff (JC and NM) and students led to the island to be reclassified as a Scientific Reserve. The earliest research on tui (Stewart & Craig 1985) and bellbird (Craig & Douglas1986) populations, and seed dispersal and germination (West 1980; Myers 1984) led to the plan for restoration (Department of Lands and Survey 1982). Other early research on kiore (Pacific rat) influenced the layout of plantings and, through its demonstration of this rat's effects on invertebrates and seedlings, helped lead to their eventual eradication. Not only does this collection of papers demonstrate the outcome of the restoration plans for the island, it also helps document subsequent issues not considered in the early planning.

Wide exposure of conservation activities on the island by both local and national media has created a high public profile. That, in turn, has generated substantial interest from the general public to visit and assist with the activities on the island. Through their involvement with the project, volunteers from across the community have gained an appreciation of conservation principles and many have developed a strong sense of personal identification with the island. Thus, the island has contributed to public education as well as the formal education of tertiary students and a high number of school groups. Public participation in the island's restoration, and now management, has been formalised through the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi (Inc.).

The popularity of the island with the wider public has also markedly enhanced access to the island for scientists. As a result, research has grown over the years, as have the participating organizations – Tiritiri has proved to be an ideal field research station for many institutions and their students. Longitudinal research of biodiversity (Armstrong, Mitchell & Kirkpatrick unpubl. data) has been a clear winner from this ease of access. The long-standing commitment by the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi to support research financially has reinforced the importance of science as the basis for management decisions, and allowed this approach to continue.

A symposium at the 2008 NZES conference, *Tiritiri Matangi – 25 years of ecological restoration*, offered an opportunity to reflect on the successes and issues, and research outcomes of the restoration process. This collection of papers, a special edition of the *NZ Journal of Ecology* focusing on Tiritiri Matangi Island, is an outcome of that symposium, and a fitting commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the project.

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