

# Contemplation and Conservation at CUE Haven

By Lynnette Third

Conservation Week was originally initiated by the New Zealand Scout Association back in 1969 when conservation was less of an imperative for many people. Nationally awareness has increased over the last 45 years and now a string of events country wide are organised, especially encouraging more families to try a taste of the outdoors. At the suggestion of friends, who told me I was missing a treat, I

attended one of the events, the open day at CUE Haven, and discovered the vision and work in progress of Thomas and Mahrukh Stazyk at their 24 ha property on the Kaipara Coast Highway north of Kaukapakapa. Nestled between two well-known landmarks on this scenic stretch of road CUE Haven lies a little North of Gibbs Farm and Sculpture Park and almost opposite Mataia, the family farm of Gill and Kevin Adshead who have set aside 400 ha of coastal native forest, salt



The mural behind me depicting native birds was designed by artist Doug Ford and painted in one weekend with the help of 124 volunteers.



Seen here kiwi monitoring are Dayna Grant and Julie Alach. 40 Northland Kiwi have been released on the Mataia property nearby.

marsh and mangrove swamp as conservation land. Together these properties make a trilogy of exciting, forward thinking and unique destinations, all within a few kms of each other.

Thomas and Mahrukh originally planned to create a corporate retreat to encourage "Cultivating Understanding and Enlightenment (CUE) but have changed their focus somewhat since they purchased the property in 2003. Back then it was an old dairy farm grazing drystock and comprising 24% bush and wetland, with a stream flowing through the hilly property on its way down to the Kaipara

Harbour. The rest of the land was covered in a thick mat of kikuyu.

The Stazyks left their corporate jobs and went to university - Mahrukh to study psychology and Thomas to study literature - intending to reinvent themselves and rebalance their busy corporate lifestyles. Remembering when Albany was still a rich production area and seeing that the region's rapid urbanisation was leaving little remaining native vegetation they began proactively working to preserve the environment. They were however starting from ground zero knowledge on how to

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The boardwalk allows visitors to traverse some of the wetland areas.



Though the property is hilly the walk is quite suitable for most people to enjoy the rapidly rejuvenating native bush and wildlife.

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convert their plan for the property into a practical proposition and were pleased to discover that local districts, regional councils and government organisations all have programmes to help encourage landowners to protect and enhance native biodiversity.

The Department of Conservation initially provided a grant (through what is now the Community Conservation Partnership Fund) for a consultant ecologist to make an assessment of the ecological characteristics of the property and prepare a detailed re-vegetation plan. This was undertaken by local consultant ecologist, Rodney Straka, who produced a comprehensive Restoration Plan for CUE Haven.

But all good plans take the co-operation of many to develop and the couple have always been eager to embrace the community, to which they are preparing to leave their legacy, by encouraging visitors to be a part of the project. The old cowshed has been converted into a plant nursery and volunteer groups have planted literally thousands of seedlings. Auckland Council's Trees for Survival programme (TFS), encourages school children to grow and plant native trees while learning about native flora and the environment. Regular visitors to CUE Haven who belong to this programme are St Kentigern School and Avondale College whose students come out to the Kaipara site not only for nursery work and nature walks but also to learn Waicare and how to check on the health of the waterways. Thomas hopes that more local schools and clubs such as scouts will get involved and feel connected to this property as

time goes on.

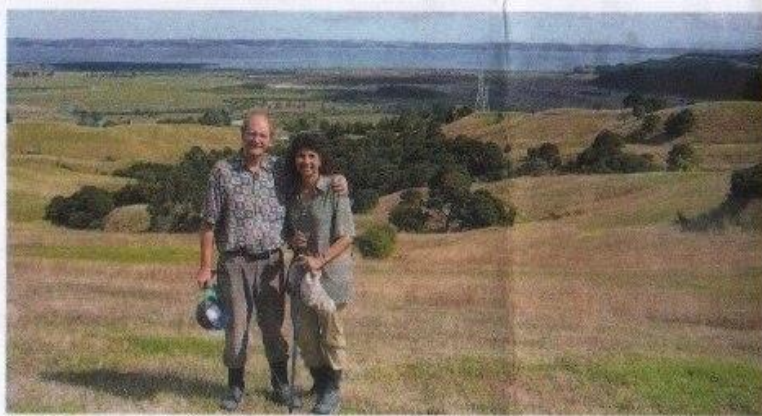
CUE Haven is also a Memorial Park where a native canopy tree can be purchased and planted in memory of a loved one or even to recall special events such as the birth of a child. Each tree is tagged with the name and picture of the person for whom it was planted and recorded more permanently on the register of Memorial Plantings. Thomas and Mahrukh know this is a very special undertaking for many people and will encourage family and friends to keep visiting the land and take an interest in its development and preservation.

Since 2012 CUE Haven has also hosted participants doing their Duke of Edinburgh Hillary Award, Gold residential. During their stay they build walking tracks, plant trees, even create outdoor artworks to enhance the property.

Unitec graphic arts students have also made their mark on the property having made the fabulous information signs dotted along the walkways.

This collective commitment to the land has already seen the revegetation of most of the acreage, 4 km of walking tracks plus a boardwalk over the wetlands. Since 2008 129,000 native trees have been planted and they hope to have the entire property planted with pioneer trees such as manuka, kanuka and karamu complete by 2017, with the establishment of the canopy trees - kauri, rimu, and Kahikatea continuing.

Pest control is ongoing however recognising that eradication is virtually impossible, their objective is to maintain low animal pest numbers to enable a healthy forest, bird, lizard and invertebrate community to develop and persist. Only two



Top of the property in April 2010.

peripheral sections are yet to be sprayed to kill the Kikuyu and begin initial planting. I asked how they had managed to eradicate the kikuyu, gorse and other hard to beat weeds and find they have high praise for local contractor Don Rhodes who has taken enormous care to see that no native bush is poisoned, even when it is necessary to spot spray stubborn weeds such as blackberry and gorse that repeatedly burst back to life.

CUE Haven is the fruit of many hours of hard work by hundreds of volunteers but has only been possible thanks to the original generosity of Thomas and Mahrukh, who remain as focused and enthusiastic about the project as ever and are always open to advice on the block's development. Their ideas, says Thomas, remain fluid so they don't lose sight of their prime motivation of providing an unspoilt place for the use of the community. "We hope to create a sustainable forest eco system by restoring connectivity between the forest remnants, particularly with their

neighbour Mataia, to enhance biodiversity, protect endangered native species and provide headwater protection of the stream tributary." To protect the forest in perpetuity, they intend to protect the property with a QEII Covenant and ultimately gift it to the community.

\* The Community Conservation Partnership Fund is directed at practical on-the-ground-projects and has approximately \$26 million dollars to distribute to community groups for priority conservation work over the next four years. In the first year \$8.5 million is being allocated across more than 100 community organisations.

\* The Nature Heritage Fund helps meet the cost of protecting areas of high ecological value on private land. This land is often covenanted to the crown to ensure its future protection. Since 1990 the fund has protected over 340,449 hectares of indigenous ecosystem through legal and physical protection. ■

(source www.doc.govt.nz)



Top of the property in November 2014.

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