

Otago Natural History Trust

Minutes of the 19th Annual General Meeting

7:00 p.m. on 20 October 2021

Hutton Theatre, Otago Museum, Dunedin

Present: Alister Robinson, Amanda Symon, Alison Cunningham, Alison Cree, John Bartlett, Diane Bartlett, Phillipa Wilson, Ian McLennan, Marie Ballagh, Alastair Sime. Jim Glass, Noelene Glass, Ross Smith, Marian Hobbs (Chair), Yolanda van Heezik, Georgina Pickerell, Mike Hazel, Suzanne Middleton, Sue Hensley, Francie Beggs, Pat Dean, Susan Wigma, Korako Edwards, John Williams, Tony Stewart, Deb Wilson (Minutes)

Apologies: John Barkla, Geoff Plunket, Neville Peat, David Keen, Alyth Grant, Josephine Dodd, Heather Hay, Jane Wilson, Cheryl Adams

Welcome: Marian Hobbs welcomed everyone to our 19th AGM.

Moved: that the apologies be accepted. Carried.

Minutes of the AGM of 28 October 2020

Moved Deb Wilson, seconded Alister Robinson: That the minutes be accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting. Carried (subject to correction of errors: Noelene and Jim Glass were present, George Pickerell was not).

Annual Accounts, presented by Alister Robinson on behalf of the Treasurer, Geoff Plunket

Alister began with an overview of the three entities in the Orokonui Group: Otago Natural History Trust (ONHT), Orokonui Ecosanctuary Limited (OEL), and Orokonui Foundation Trust (OFT). The accounts are available on the Orokonui website and cover the 12 month period 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021 for each entity, plus a consolidated set of financials for the Group.

Despite the uncertainties created by Covid-19 and lower visitor numbers, a good financial result has been achieved for the year. The objective at the start of the year was to attain a breakeven cash position. This was achieved, with a final cash surplus of about \$1,000 for ONHT and OEL combined, after payment of \$75,000 on new developments and improvements (such as the jewelled gecko enclosure and replacing assets at the end of their life). The Group has \$12,000 more in cash than it had last year. The year-end cash position is \$499,000 (OEL and ONHT) and \$400,000 OFT; hence we have cash to meet commitments such as staff salaries, if that becomes necessary.

We had hoped to increase the proportion of income that is self generated, but that hasn't been possible under Covid-19 and instead that proportion has declined this year.

Many thanks to members, sponsors and supporters of Orokonui for their ongoing support, and to Amanda Symon and staff at Orokonui for the way they have managed the ecosanctuary. We are also grateful for the Government's financial support during the lockdown periods.

Moved Alister Robinson, seconded Marian Hobbs: That the annual accounts be accepted and that Crowe Audit Partnership (Dunedin) be appointed as auditor for 2021/22. Carried.

Orokonui Ecosanctuary Ltd (OEL) Report, presented by Alister Robinson, Chair of OEL

There is no doubt that Covid-19 had a huge detrimental effect, especially on staff, the café, and volunteers. The position remains one of frustrating unknowns and changing levels, each needing new sets of protocols. As a result, the pressure placed on staff this year has been substantial. We were very fortunate to have so many loyal supporters who have found ways to visit us during the pandemic, or who have decided to make substantial donations to us.

On behalf of the Board of OEL, Alister placed on record the exceptional work done by Amanda Symon (General Manager) and her very loyal team. They have coped wonderfully well with the ever-changing circumstances that Covid has visited on them.

Alister summarised progress on the Fence Mitigation Project, aimed at remediating a part of the fence subject to movement and washouts. We are indebted to John Cocks and Dave Crow for their pro bono work that has brought the project to a stage where we can appoint contractors. Funding of \$100,000 was obtained from ORC (thanks to work by the previous ONHT Chair, Colin Campbell-Hunt), and \$86,000 from the Otago Community Trust, by Amanda. A final amount will be requested from the Lotteries Board in November. The project will place the fence in a good position to provide safety for staff and security for wildlife for many years.

Staff have completed a series of new and improved Health and Safety protocols that will apply to all staff, volunteers, visitors and education participants visiting the sanctuary. Hence, Orokonui is now fully compliant with the terms of the Health & Safety at Work Act 2015.

The OEL Board thanks Marian Hobbs, who retires from ONHT and OEL after this meeting. We are fortunate to have enjoyed her guidance, and wish her well in retirement. During the year the OEL Board welcomed two new directors, Cheryl Adams and Kent Chalmers. OEL directors are appointed by ONHT, and potential new ones are under discussion. Alister personally thanked the present directors for the help and guidance provided during this Covid-affected year. We have achieved a reasonable financial result notwithstanding the year's difficulties.

Moved Ross Smith, seconded Georgina Pickerell: That the OEL report be accepted. Carried. Ross (former OEL and ONHT Treasurer) noted that the financial results are very good given the circumstances.

Chair's report for 2020/21

The Chair, Marian Hobbs, presented her report on achievements at Orokonui in 2020/21, the second year affected by Covid-19. By this time last year, we thought Covid-19 was contained at the border, and in some ways it was. But with the border closed, we missed our on many visitors. Meanwhile, work continued on fence strengthening; issues were raised and resolved about health and safety, with support from DOC and City Forests; the café reopened with new menus and an expanding catering and events business until Covid popped up again this past winter. The café has become an important destination for many Orokonui visitors. Volunteers continue to contribute a great range of skills. Recent milestones key to our kaupapa, our raison d'être, are two new takahe chicks, continued kākā breeding (although we'd like to see even more young kākā), and photos of hatching tuatara. Another is Elton's recent talk at a meeting with the guardians of tieke (saddlebacks) on the southern Tītī Islands, about past and proposed translocations to Orokonui.

Marian thanked volunteers, board members and staff, who have coped and helped to keep our dream sanctuary alive, during all the ups and downs of Covid and its multiple stresses. As members, staff, volunteers and supporters, we are committed to a dream of this eco-sanctuary and its inhabitants – flora as well as fauna – and to using Orokonui as a step towards understanding of our natural world.

Moved Alister Robinson, seconded Deb Wilson: That the Chair's report be received. Carried.

Orokonui Knowledge Group (OKG) Report

This report was delivered by Georgina Pickerell, ONHT trustee and member of OKG. George's report is appended at the end of these minutes (pages 6–7).

Moved Tony Stewart, seconded Al Robinson: That the OKG report be accepted. Carried.

Election of Trustees

The following members were nominated and elected as Trustees:

Moved: Ross Smith, seconded Alister Robinson:

That Alison Cunningham be nominated for position of Trustee.

That Allie Cunninghame be nominated for position of Trustee.

That Deb Wilson be nominated for position of Trustee.

Carried.

Carey Knox offered his retirement as a trustee, but is willing to assist with relevant projects where he can. Carey is now based in Ranfurly with Wildlands Consultants. He and team members have recently discovered several new lizard species in the South Island.

Marian is also retiring from ONHT (see General Business, below).

Subscriptions

Moved Al Robinson, seconded Deb Wilson: That subscriptions be unchanged at \$55 for individuals and \$70 for families. Carried.

General Business

Tony Stewart moved a vote of thanks to Marian Hobbs, who is stepping down after many years of service to Orokonui Eco-Sanctuary. She has served the past year as Chair of ONHT and prior to that as Secretary, trustee and advisor since 2014. Marian also continues to serve Orokonui as a volunteer, and has contributed her broad experience as an educator to Orokonui's education programmes. ONHT has benefited greatly from her extensive governance experience and insights into regional and national government processes.

Carried with acclamation.

Guest Speaker: Emeritus Professor Alison Cree, Department of Zoology, University of Otago

Title: Staying grounded: tales from the establishment of tuatara at Orokonui Ecosanctuary

Alison Cree is a New-Zealand-born zoologist who began working at the University of Otago in 1991. In the early 2000s, she became involved with the Restoration Working Group for Orokonui. She remains a member of its replacement, the Orokonui Knowledge Group. In 2012, she worked with external groups including kaitiaki iwi Ngāti Koata to help reintroduce free-roaming tuatara to Orokonui Ecosanctuary. She and her students have continued to monitor the tuatara there, and have also been involved in research at Orokonui on Otago skinks and jewelled geckos. Alison is the author of a comprehensive book on the biology and conservation of tuatara. She recently retired from employment at the university and continues some research as an emeritus professor.

Some notes from Alison's talk:

Orokonui is the only site in the South Island with free-roaming tuatara. Their reproduction at Orokonui has been of interest lately, but is difficult to study. On Takapourewa (Stephens Island, from where these tuatara were introduced), about 23% of females nest each year, and may migrate a long distance to nest. There are about 9 eggs in a clutch; about 48% hatch; they take 10–16 months to hatch; hatchlings are rarely seen. At Orokonui we know from trail cameras and diggings that nesting has been happening for several years. Eggs have been found, and eggshells with a distinctive split indicating hatching. The first hatchlings were seen in summer 2020; they are about 10 cm long including the tail, with a horny egg 'tooth' that later falls off. Jade Christiansen, a Te Ngaru Paewhenua scholarship summer student, caught a hatching event on video in March 2021. And in February 2021, recent PhD graduate Christian Chukwuka found a small unmarked juvenile that must have hatched a few years ago. Footage of mating tuatara was also obtained this year.

Please take a photo if you ever do see a tuatara at Orokonui, and record its approximate size. Don't handle it, as this requires training and authorisation. The photo can be compared with others and may help to identify the animal.

Tuatara in the population at Orokonui are surviving, growing and reproducing, though it is too early to consider that the population is viable (i.e. unlikely to go extinct), based on criteria for reintroduction success (K. Miller et al. 2014, Conservation Biology). The Orokonui population is of particular significance given climate change. 2020 was NZ's warmest winter, and 2021 was even warmer. We need to reshape our lifestyles to live within ecological limits. A recent study (S. Jarvie et al. 2021, Journal of Biogeography) determined that much of the eastern South Island presently has a suitable climate for tuatara, but predicted that by 2090 suitable habitat that is within the range of recently occupied climates will be diminished in parts of the SI and greatly so in the NI. Orokonui remains suitable under some climate scenarios.

The book, *The Good Ancestor: How to Think Long Term in a Short-Term World*, by Roman Krznaric, proposes that long-term thinking can help us to work towards a sustainable future. Thinking longer term may encourage us to continue our journey of ecological restoration, and to make the lifestyle changes needed to ensure a climate-tolerable future.

The meeting ended about 8:45 p.m.

Orokonui Knowledge Group Report for the ONHT AGM, 20 October 2021

Purpose of OKG

The Orokonui Knowledge Group was established in late 2015/early 2016 as a specialist group to give the Trust advice on research project proposals, and to ensure that the knowledge produced by research is supported, recorded and communicated. The group meets every 3 months and deals with matters arising in between meetings via email.

- To advise the Trust on uses of the sanctuary for research and learning
- To assess the value of research projects proposals to be undertaken in the sanctuary, and to provide feedback on any potential issues or lack of information in these proposals. If needed, to evaluate the results of research done at the sanctuary and provide the Trust with comment on its validity.
- To advise the Trust on the effective management and storage of data produced during research, and of reports on all research undertaken at the sanctuary, and to establish and maintain a repository for these reports and data.
- To maintain a current Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Otago and other relevant research institutions.
- To give broad communication to the knowledge produced at the sanctuary

OKG currently has 14 members from a wide variety of organisations, including Orokonui – scientists, people working in the field, and educators – with expertise covering fauna and flora, conservation management, ecology, social science and education.

2020–2021 events

Colin Campbell-Hunt stood down as Chair of OKG after the 2020 AGM, and Elton Smith took up the challenge. We also acknowledge the very sad and sudden loss of Professor Phil Bishop in January this year. Phil had been an OKG member from its conception until the end of 2020.

Research Database

We are extremely grateful to Rob and Marie Ballagh for creating a searchable database of all research projects proposed and/or undertaken at the sanctuary, past and present: who did them; main topic; resulting reports and data from them. Marie reports: “All known projects have now been entered into the database. The first project began in 2005, and by October 4, 2021 there have been 58 project applications, of which 48 have been accepted, and 3 are in Review by the OKG. Known outputs from the research projects, comprising 21 journal publications and 15 theses (12 MSc, 2 PhD, 1 other), are recorded in the database. A total of 20 reports have been received from 13 projects, and 7 of these are final reports.” Currently approximately 14 projects are in progress.

Active Research Projects

Active Research Projects during the year include: Kiwi, *E. coli* water sampling, monitoring jewelled geckos moved to the enclosure within Orokonui, radiotracking kākā, tuatara monitoring, lizard ACO monitoring, and fungi in takahe dung.

Advice

OKG also advised ONHT on a Proposed Possum Control Programme Paper for West Harbour–Mt Cargill, an AT220 trap trial outside the sanctuary, continuing with captive breeding of kākā, continuation of lizard monitoring using ACOs (Artificial Cover Objects), and ongoing tuatara monitoring. We are also working on suggestions for future research opportunities.