

Haven on Earth

A former dairy farm is being restored to native forest to create a haven for flora, fauna and people.

WORDS & PHOTOS GRETCHEN CARROLL

“

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In late 2003, Tom and Mahrukh Stazyk bought a 24ha former dairy farm about an hour north-west of central Auckland overlooking the Kaipara Harbour at Araparera. They named it CUE Haven – that's CUE for Cultivating Understanding and Enlightenment. Five years later, they began restoration work to turn the grazing pastures into a native forest. Since then, more than 170,000 native trees have been planted with the help of volunteers to further the aim of creating a haven for plant and bird life, and a nature reserve for future generations to enjoy. The pioneer planting focused on fast-growing trees such as mānuka, kānuka, karamū, pittosporums, māhoe and tī kōuka. After establishing this initial canopy, for the past five years they have focused on infill planting of tall canopy trees (kauri, rimu, tōtara) where needed, giving nature a helping hand. They say it's been wonderful seeing how after the initial efforts, nature has taken over.

“There is so much natural regeneration. We haven't planted any ferns, but they're growing from self-seeding. And because of the large number of birds that've come back, we're also getting self-seeding nīkau and tōtara,” says Mahrukh.

Kererū, ruru, tūi, pīwakawaka (fantail), miromiro (tomtit), pipiwharauroa (shining cuckoo) and riroriro (grey warbler) have all returned to the bush, along with tuna (eels), kōkopu (cockabully fish) and kōura (crayfish) to the stream, following improved water quality.

CUE Haven's neighbours include a large farm, lifestyle blocks and a commercial pine forest, none of whom are doing pest control, so Tom and Mahrukh have an ongoing battle against possums, stoats, weasels and hedgehogs. Tom says initially they caught many because no pest control had been ever done, but now it's steady maintenance with bait boxes and Timms traps for possums, and the entire boundary fence is electrified to keep stock out.

This didn't keep out some unwanted visitors when the commercial pine forest did a harvest recently – five wild pigs with tusks turned up in CUE Haven, so they called the pig hunters out.

Tom says, despite the challenges, the pest control is working and there's evidence of trees such as hangehange bush and pūriri flourishing without possums eating them.

Tom and Mahrukh turned CUE Haven into a charitable trust in 2017, as the couple feel that they are kaitiaki, looking after this place for the

BELOW FROM LEFT The wetland planting has improved the stream's water quality; Ferns have self-seeded under the pioneer canopy.

OPPOSITE The bush as it looks today.





Sunset at CUE Haven's viewing platform, which opened late 2020.

Visit CUE Haven

CUE Haven is part of the Open Farms event on Sunday March 12. This national event sees past and present farms open their gates to the public so urban people can connect with rural life. As well as going for a walk and taking a picnic lunch to enjoy at one of CUE Haven's track benches or the viewing platform, you can also buy their fundraising raw honey. This honey is collected from on-site beehives. Registrations open early February – to sign up to visit CUE Haven plus other sites, go to openfarms.co.nz/visit-a-farm/. For more information, visit cuehaven.com



The vista from CUE Haven's viewing platform, with the native forest in the foreground.

community, and there are other Board trustees. CUE Haven has no staff and much of the work is done by volunteers.

“The purpose of CUE Haven is quiet enjoyment and education. We couldn’t have done it without 4500-plus people helping us over the years – that is the satisfaction, seeing how the community has come together to help,” says Mahrukh.

The trust states that as a community-owned and developed nature reserve, there should be no entry fee for people to come and explore. So, CUE Haven relies on the generosity of donors, sponsors and grants to develop and maintain it.

One recent collaborative effort of community, business and education groups has been the building of a viewing platform. This gives panoramic views of the bush and out to Kaipara Harbour and was opened in December 2020, with a blessing ceremony led by the hāpu.

Kaumātua (elders) from the local hāpu, Ngāti Rango of Ngāti Whātua, were pivotal from the start; Unitec Master of Architecture student Gemma Campbell designed the platform; and engineering, landscaping and construction firms gave their expertise and resources pro bono. CUE Haven received a funding grant and individual donations towards the platform, and many volunteers put in hours of hard work.

Visits to CUE Haven are generally by prior appointment only. The Stazyks host school and university students, plus corporate and community groups. The corporate volunteer groups often come out and help with track maintenance, as the reserve has 3.5km of walking tracks and boardwalks, along with 3km of roads. All need constant maintenance as the trees’ roots spread and the ground shifts, as does the roads’ metal after wet weather. They hope in the next four to five years, as infrastructure such as handrails are completed, that Cue Haven will be open to the public at all times.

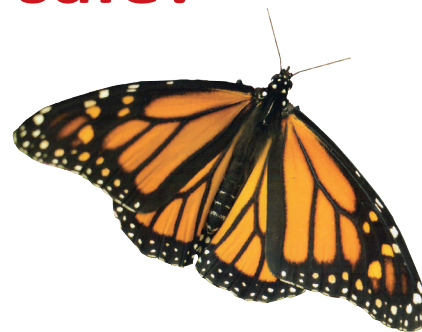


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safe?



Don't buy swan plants with pesticide on them!

Growers may use pesticides to ensure their plants are leafy and luscious when they arrive at the garden centre.

They look great - but they should be fit for purpose, (safe for butterflies) when they are sold. The pesticide should now be inert.

If you buy from a retailer displaying the ‘approved by butterflies’ seal you can be confident that the plants are fit for purpose and pesticide-free.



For further information and tips for raising butterflies, check out our website,

www.nzbutterflies.org.nz