

Everything is connected: might communities be capable of leading a biodiversity turn-around in their landscape?

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Increasingly biodiversity professionals and community groups are looking beyond site or ecosystem based projects toward larger landscape-scale outcomes. Auckland's North-West Wildlink, pest free NZ, and Hamilton's gully programme are examples. Technologies of practical implementation are becoming more available, but, how can these be truly successfully implemented unless wider community engagement and social licence is achieved? Whole-of-community engagement is the objective. This requires community groups, NGO's and agencies to frame projects differently. This discussion will explore questions of: the causal relationships behind ongoing biodiversity decline; engaging with 'communities' in addition to 'community groups'; and some case study material including Auckland's North-West Wildlink and GeckoNZ Trust's Living Neighbourhoods programme. The latter is reaching greater than 80% household participation in some neighbourhoods, and effectively enabling communities to plan weed and pest control programmes, regeneration of bush and riparian ecosystems, and undertake the journey of improving the ecological health and ecosystem service provision within their human-occupied landscapes. The Trust uses the SER ethos of assisting the systems to operate at the nexus of localised ecological and social systems and partner with communities to build mutually beneficial capacity. We observe that people achieve much more toward the care and retention of biodiversity within their environment when communities-of-place take ownership of initiatives, build capacity, and develop networks. They become more empowered, connected, resourceful and self-sustaining. The developing knowledge and love of their local biodiversity, and aggregated activities of care generate added sense of purpose and place. This gives major benefits for the resilience of community health and well-being of the local ecology – hence Gecko's by-line "People Healing Nature Healing People". A local neighbourhood leader recently described GeckoNZ as the "wind under our wings". We strive to ensure our partnering and mentoring methodology supports neighbourhood visioning and connectivity, and enriches local motivation and technical expertise.