

NZ Ecological Restoration Network

How an idea to create a green space in a city suburb grew into a national network, resourcing and encouraging the restoration and recovery of New Zealand's native plants and animals.

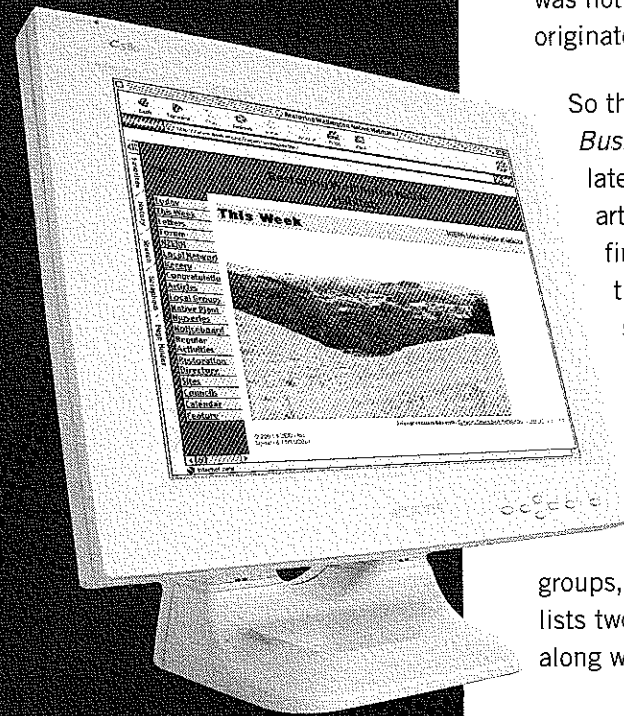
This now nationwide network began with eight families in suburban Christchurch who in 1995 sought to combine the back yards of their adjoining properties into a park for the use of all. The experience of what became the Addington Bush Society generated a desire to share with others of like mind, first in their own city, then South Island groups with similar aims and projects and finally those throughout the country.

Staying local and focused but sharing expertise, support and resources was the aim of the Bush Society. This was not easy, as demand grew enormously and the originators were all volunteers with families and jobs.

So the Ecological Restoration Network was born. *Bush Telegraph*, their print magazine launched in late 1997, spread fast. Soon the need to share articles and information led to an offer by a local firm to host a website. A family member became the technical editor, preparing BT articles for the site, and developing a database of contacts around the country.

The Network now has 162 formal members and holds information on more than 1000 groups involved in ecological restoration.

Regional meetings are organised by local groups, using the contacts in the database. The website lists two hundred nurseries supplying native plants, along with animal recovery groups and a catalogue of



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museum displays and library resources. Updating information on these is done by the groups themselves: each has a password allowing it to modify and expand their own information. Through the Network Nursery Support project, free potting mix and seedlings can be supplied to local schools to encourage native plantings.

The website is now based with Landcare Research, which offers free hosting and free use of their server and database. It contains news, comment, information, listings by region and an events diary. Each issue of the *Bush Telegraph* is placed on the website, past articles are accessible through archives, and the on-line weekly digest *Kereru* is available on subscription.

NZERN is setting up its own server system using a mix of seven recycled PCs and some new hardware. This is used for prototyping new features for the website, plus creating the master copy for the website.

Funding comes from the Department of Conservation, a Community Trust grant and subscriptions of \$10 per participating group per year (paid three-yearly in advance). They are currently seeking a secure source of continuing funding.

What would they do differently?

Not a lot, it seems. They would stay with the current concept of a loose structural framework rather than a formal administration. They would separate the national body from the local one earlier, especially regarding bank accounts and funds management.

The future

The Network continues to gather information and contacts. It expects to have information on 3000 groups involved in ecological restoration – and a similar number of restoration sites – when the project is completed.

Useful tips

“Expect anything like this to take a massive amount of time, far more than you expect. Share the IT development work around: it’s a lot for a group that’s already running a voluntary organisation.”

“In choosing the setup for the computers, we chose one we understand backwards and can maintain ourselves. There are modern ‘servers in a box’ which are probably better but we don’t have the skills to administer them so we didn’t buy one.”

Key success factors:

- Keeping the focus on the original aim: “to provide information about restoring the natural ecosystems of Aotearoa New Zealand”.
- Keeping the structure loose so management takes minimal time and effort.
- Building on existing networks of people and groups to expand the database and information sections.

“It’s the way we went on the computer stuff. Some had to learn to use computers to take part in the project. The IT team is a mix of enthusiastic but semi-skilled volunteers, plus professionals who contribute less time but often critical information on how to do stuff.”