

Restoring Hamilton's Gully Systems

While I do not live on the edge of a gully, I applaud this initiative and provide plants through the nursery I volunteer at.

Hamilton City sits astride the Waikato River, the longest river in New Zealand. It runs from Lake Taupo in the Central North Island to Port Waikato south of Auckland. For many years Hamilton turned its back on the river but that is changing as politicians see its potential.

Feeding into the Waikato River are 750 hectares of gully systems. Once again, until recently, these have been largely ignored, except as repositories of old cars, garden waste etc. However, with the ever-increasing interest in restoring biodiversity and bringing the birds back into Hamilton, these gully systems are now being seen for what they really are ie biodiversity corridors.

Dozens of Gully Care groups now operate in Hamilton and the Hamilton City Council (HCC) has at last got in behind the hard-working volunteers. One set of Councillors try to dump the Gully Restoration system (to balance the books) but there was such a public outcry from their constituents that they realised that decision was quite inappropriate. In fact the Council has published a guide on how to restore gullies and has a 'plants for gullies' programme that allows people to apply for free locally sourced plants.

HCC staff work with community groups, school groups and individuals to improve natural habitats and increase the city's biodiversity. Associated with the scheme is bat monitoring, stream restoration and pest and weed removal.

The result of all this work is that the city is seeing the return of such birds as kereru (wood pigeons) and tui and we are all feeling the effort is worthwhile.



