

LTP Submission re Employment of a Biodiversity Officer:

- I am a member of Ashburton Forest and Bird, ADBAG, Ashburton Community Conservation Trust (manages Harris Reserve) and the Wakanui Project Committee.
- I have had an interest in the ecosystems of this district for many years and help propagate native plants for the Harris Reserve, and for other conservation projects. My experience and interest allows me to notice the degradation of the environment around the district, such as the weed infestations in the braided rivers, the loss of habitat as shelter belts (and even gorse hedges) are removed, the disappearance of remnant native plants off the roadsides as they are 'tidied up' and at times, large herds of cows are moved between farms. There was very little native biodiversity to start with, there is even less now.
- I support the employment by ADC of a Biodiversity Officer, a person qualified in Environmental Science and Ecology. Such a position was first proposed by Forest and Bird over 10 years ago.
- With Central Government changing regulations around water services, proposed legislative changes to the RMA and the release of the National Policy Statement on Biodiversity, there will be issues for the council to deal with which would benefit from the input of a qualified ecologist.
- The general public is becoming better informed and more interested in our native biodiversity than ever before. Schools are becoming involved, eg Wakanui School at the Wakanui Beach Project. Community involvement highlights the regard held for such efforts to value and enhance our endemic ecosystems.
- I have made a rough calculation that native vegetation covers less than 0.0002% of the land area of the plains of the Ashburton District. This equates to 55ha (an optimistic guess) and is much less than the Canterbury average of 1%. Many remaining native plants are single specimens with little or no chance of regeneration. The significance of any original native plants on the plains of the district cannot be underestimated, so the support and expertise of a suitably qualified person is needed to ensure there are no further losses.
- The Ashburton District Biodiversity Advisory Group (ADBAG) has been successful in providing a forum for community groups, DOC, ECAN, NGOs and others involved in the field, to provide information and updates. Projects at Lake Camp and Wakanui are progressing.
- On page 4 the ADBAG Action Plan states: "*Meaningful progress towards the objectives of this plan requires: Accurate and comprehensive knowledge about our local biodiversity.*" And "*Continued sustainable growth and prosperity in our community requires significant action to protect our unique local biological wealth, and the Biodiversity Action Plan provides the blueprint for progress.*"
- The time is right for ADC to appoint a BDO as we see farming organisations, milk companies, schools and rural communities become more interested in the unique, natural character of our district, and an increasing understanding of the benefits of native species in pest control, shelter and food production.
- Bert Hofmans, Open Spaces planner, does a great job but is limited by the time restraints imposed on his position as ADBAG coordinator. His organisational skills have meant projects such as at Wakanui, have achieved great success and the school children have come to love going to work at the beach. They are very proud of the 'their project.'
- I appreciate support from Bert, Michael Power (ADC nursery manager) and previously from David Askin as Open Spaces Manager. They have achieved significant wins for the environment but to ensure the survival of species that give Ashburton a large part of its unique character, more input from ADC is needed.
- Realisation is growing throughout the world that we cannot continue to use resources from the natural world without consequences. A large part of that is pollution and degradation of the environment and the loss of species from the land, from rivers and the sea. As council becomes required to take account of such consequences, staff will need reliable and knowledgeable advice. Having staff qualified to provide such advice and familiar with the district, is far preferable to employing consultants from elsewhere.

- I'm sure there are many tasks within ADC that need input from a Biodiversity Officer, such as input into native vegetation removal issues, and I urge the Council to consider such a position. Other councils have made such appointments; Selwyn District Council has two BDOs.
- On Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> April, Denise Ford, BDO at Selwyn DC, will speak at a Forest and Bird meeting at the Sinclair Centre at 7.30pm. ADC staff and councillors are very welcome to attend.

Val Clemens,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Val Clemens', written in dark ink.