



Red Admiral | Kahukura Reintroduction Project Albany 2025

Introduction

In August 2024, UWEN (Upper Waitematā Ecology Network) received an email from Jacqui at Moths & Butterflies of NZ Trust asking for details of any groups willing to plant natives to support butterflies in the Oteha Valley / Landing area. This email has set into motion a chain of events over the last year that we wanted to share as an example of how UWEN as an umbrella organisation has been able to weave together a collaborative project with positive biodiversity outcomes.

Now, in September 2025 we can celebrate the success of this project with a newly established “butterfly garden” planted in a public reserve 300m (as the butterfly flies) from the original butterfly house that sparked this project.



Wet but happy volunteers at the planting day on site – July 2025

Connections

The initial conversations were about making connections. Jacqui connected UWEN to residents at The Settlers, a retirement village that backs onto The Landing reserve. The residents there have established a successful butterfly house and had been providing a predator free environment for monarch caterpillars and had a bumper summer over 2023- 2024 with hundreds of monarch successfully raised. Residents were keen to expand the range of butterflies they supported and had approached Jacqui at MBNZT to enquire about Red Admirals.

Unfortunately, due to health and safety concerns, the residents were not allowed to grow the native nettles that Red Admiral caterpillars require as a food source on site. They were therefore looking to partner with other groups who might be able to navigate the health and safety issues of growing stinging nettles. This led Jacqui to reach out to UWEN.

That initial contact and connection with UWEN led to the following groups being involved in this project to establish a patch of nettles being planted in nearby public reserve.



Excerpt from map showing the location of the key sites, produced from Auckland Council Geo Maps (full copy as Annex)

Restore The Landing – a local conservation group that has been working on trapping, pest plant control and native planting in The Landing Reserve, Albany. Lead volunteers at this group were very supportive of the project and undertook a site visit with Jacqui to scope out possible locations for nettles. The group are part of UWEN and are supported by the wider organisation. The local connections that this group have and the knowledge of the area (and the habitat of nettles in the wild) has meant that we have been able to identify a suitable site. Volunteers have supported the project by attending working bees, planting events and helping promote the events on social media.

Community Park Ranger – the person responsible for supporting local conservation projects in public reserves. Theo has been incredibly supportive of this project since it's inception and has enabled the health and safety aspects of planting nettles in a reserve and also sourcing nectar rich plants at short notice. We have been reliant on Theo as a contact at Auckland Council to be our “champion” for this project and to ensure all internal requirements have been met for this project to go ahead. Theo has been able to fund signage and plants for the site which has removed the need for UWEN or other groups to find money, or seek donations for these resources.

Albany Senior High School – local school that also backs onto The Landing Reserve and is a neighbour to Settlers village. A pair of students have been supporting this project through their Term 1 and 2 Impact Project including research, joining a site preparation event and producing information materials and signs. The students were informed about the project and have decided how they were best placed to be able to assist using the skills and time they had available. Their involvement has also raised the profile of the project at school and drove them to take other positive actions for the environment including a litter collection day. Recognition must also be given to key staff at the school as well who have supported the students in this project.

Settlers Village residents – the local residents who kick started the project. The butterfly project volunteers have shared their knowledge, allowed us to visit their butterfly house and are supporting the project on an ongoing basis by continuing their work to plant species for pollinators at the village. The residents themselves have been advocating for butterflies and designing and sharing resources for raising caterpillars within the village and more widely through talks to local Early Childhood Centres and schools.

Moths & Butterflies of NZ Trust – the lead organisation campaigning for Lepidoptera in NZ. The support and advice of Jacqui has enabled us to rapidly gain knowledge in this area and to keep connections open to local experts. Jacqui very kindly donated her time to deliver a public presentation at Albany Community Hub which we promoted widely and had great turn out for. By continually being a voice for these important species, the Trust is able to support local projects by being in the background and able to assist as required.

Albany Activator (UWEN) – a short term funded position thanks to Upper Harbour Local Board supporting UWEN's work. Sarah spearheaded this programme and turned ideas into action, liaising with groups, individuals and events. It is her energy and passion that has moved this project along and enabled these outcomes to be achieved within such a short time. The leadership and focus that she has brought to the project has ensured that others around her kept things moving as well.

We are also very grateful to a number of other organisations and individuals who have joined us on this journey and contributed to the success of the project who have not been listed here specifically. Their help has been critical and their input is valued.



Volunteers at the planting event – this lovely family attended after being involved in another UWEN initiative which delivered conservation skills to residents in Mandarin

Learnings

This project has been a fantastic example of collaboration being used to deliver a shared goal and has involved people of all ages coming together with the objective of supporting the restoration of valuable native habitats for our native butterflies. As an organisation, we know that UWEN has learned some valuable lessons and we wanted to share this with others and to record our project for replication elsewhere across the rohe.

It takes time – we were incredibly lucky to be able to source plants at short notice, to have a Community Park Ranger that was supportive and adaptable to the quickly evolving desire to get plants in the ground and to have a contractor work tirelessly to support site clearance. Typically, planting plans are submitted in October of the year before the planned planting in winter and preparation of sites needs a number of sessions by volunteers or contractors (depending on the current state of the site).

You need a leader – the energy and enthusiasm of the Albany Activator spearheaded this project and made things happen, brought people together and kept the project on track. In a short, 4 month project based role, Sarah delivered outstanding results and pulled everything together that resulted in a very successful planting event in early July.

There will be unexpected outcomes – as a result of this project, we have “fast tracked” the removal of invasive weed species from this area of the reserve. The work would have been too tough for volunteers to tackle and the species on site were not suitable for volunteers to take on. This has resulted in a beautiful glade area being opened up for the benefit of not only our target species but also many others as well.



The cleared and planted glade that had previously been infested with bramble and privet

Fact finding – as this has been a new focus area, we have had to search out support from those more knowledgeable than us. This is where great relationships with MBNZT and Settlers has been invaluable, to be able to reach out and ask questions as we needed. Bringing in expertise has enabled us all to learn together, take local knowledge and pivot as required.

Raise the profile of the project – we have been championing this as a concept, showing the need from a biodiversity lens but also from a community engagement perspective and talking to a number of people about it. You never know where your keenest volunteers will find you. As well as the onsite focus we also delivered a public talk, delivered by Jacqui at MBNZT which attracted over 30 people along. We used this opportunity to talk about the Albany site and also gave away native plants to attendees. Since mentioning this project in a recent newsletter, UWEN has since been approached about establishing a butterfly garden and shade house in Hobsonville as well and that project is now underway in conjunction with Habitat Hobsonville, another member of the UWEN network.



Posters that were created and shared locally and on social media about this project

Summary

This has been an engaging project, it has offered both us as individuals and as an organisation to stretch ourselves, see the benefit of focusing on a specific outcome (butterfly habitat creation) rather than just a broader goal of increasing biodiversity. UWEN has strengthened community connections and raised its profile as a result. We recognise that the release, rearing and breeding of butterflies is still to come and that is the next step in this journey once the nettles have had time to establish themselves and we further our connections with other members of the community who are rearing Red Admirals.

Annex A – site map of the planting

Auckland Council

Map



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The Landing "Butterfly garden" project

0 30 60 90
Meters
Scale @ A4
= 1:5,000
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