



What to plant in

Maungatautari ecological district

Planting local native trees to preserve our natural heritage and promote our community identity.

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Cover photograph by Louise Dwan
"Dawn breaks over Mount Maungatautari"

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About this guide

The Maungatautari Ecological Island will fill the surrounding district with native birds, many of which have been absent from the area for decades. With the right plants, you can encourage these birds to visit your property.

This guide will help you select and plant local native plants for your gardens, re-vegetation areas, or as specimen or shelter trees for your farm.

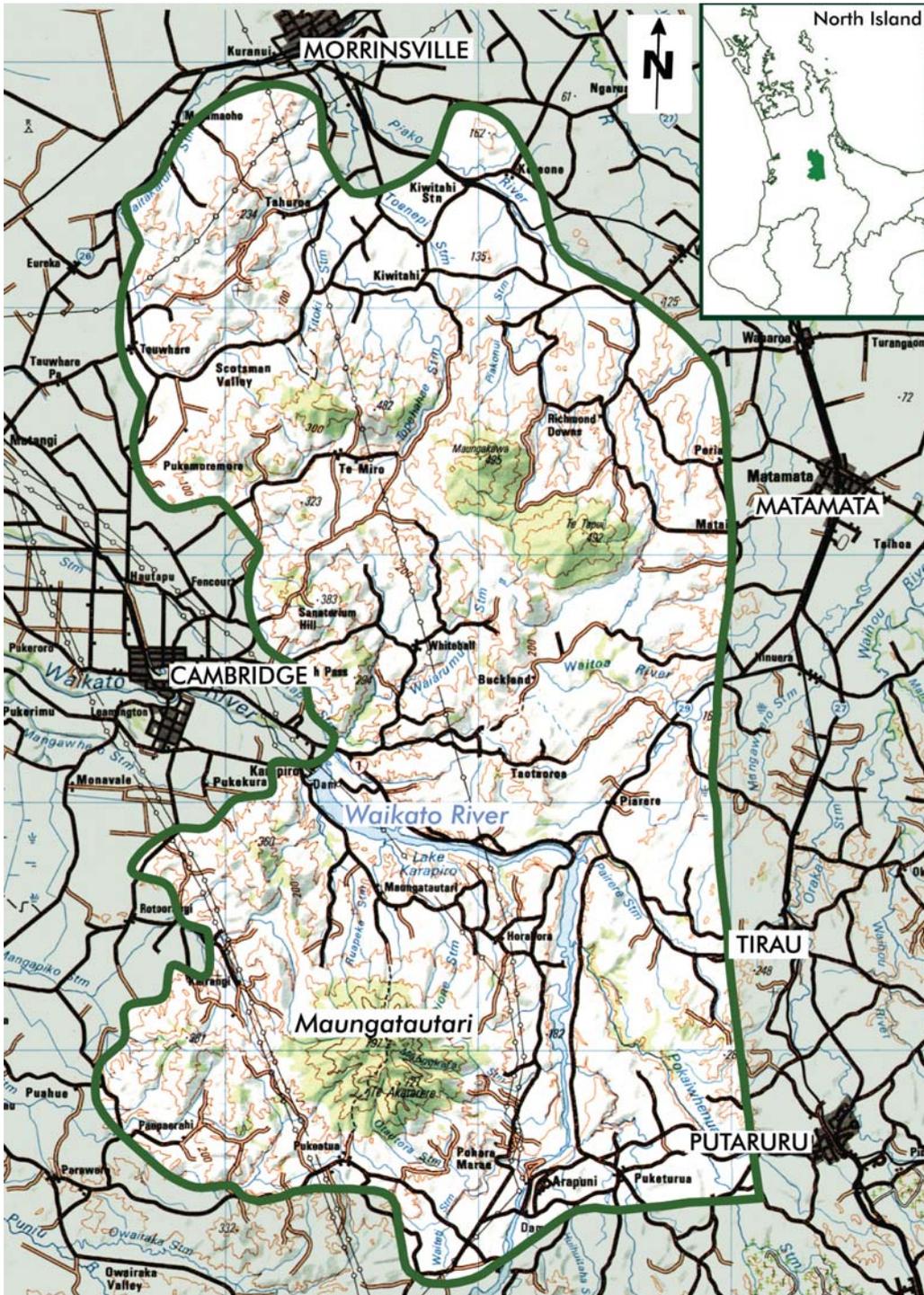
The focus of this planting guide is on forest species. For ideas on what to plant in wetlands contact Environment Waikato for a copy of the "Wetland Management" series of factsheets or see www.ew.govt.nz/water



This guide is for the hilly land of Tahuna, Scottsman's Valley, Richmond Downs, Te Miro, Whitehall, Horahora and Maungatautari, and the lowlands of Piarere, Karapiro, Tauwhare and Kiwitahi.

The lowlands of Cambridge, Morrinsville, Matamata, Tirau and Te Awamutu are outside the Maungatautari ecological district, however the plants will be similar. If you wish to plant in those towns use the plants in the lowland terraces planting zone list.

If you live in Hamilton do not use this guide, use the Hamilton Gully Guide (contact Hamilton City Council for a copy).



Maungatautari ecological district.

The Maungatautari ecological district

What is an ecological district?

New Zealand has been divided into 268 different ecological districts based on geological, topographical, climatic and biological features that together define a characteristic landscape.

Maungatautari ecological district (87,041 hectares), has a particular combination of landform, vegetation and climate we can claim as our own and which brands us differently from the rest of the country.

Description of Maungatautari ecological district

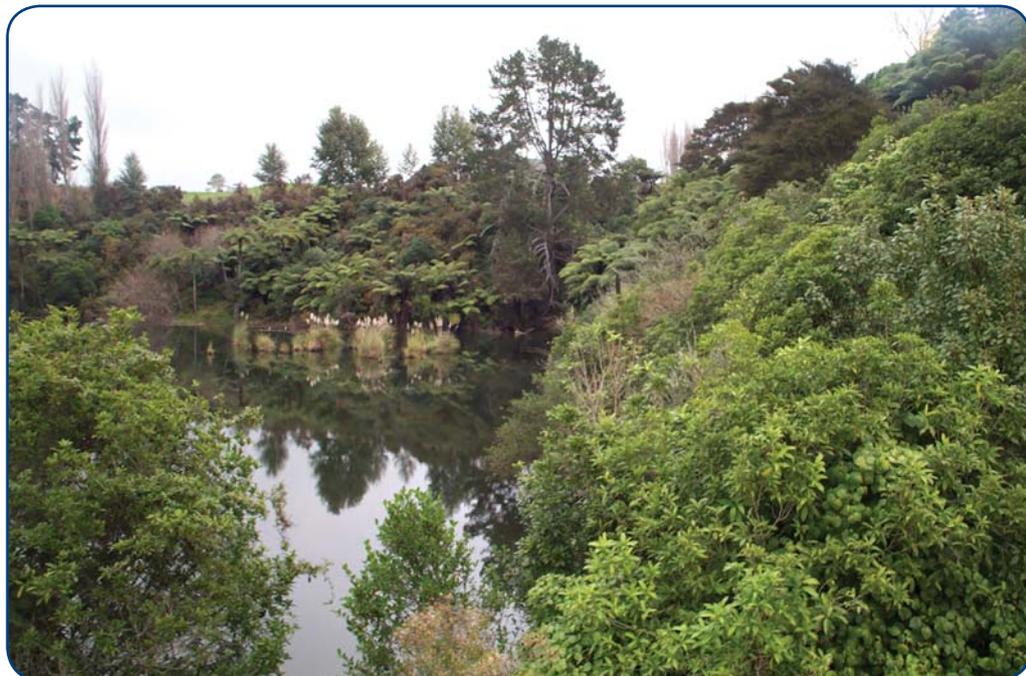
Maungatautari ecological district (MED) is located in the Waikato basin. It is the hilly country surrounded by the lowland townships of Cambridge, Morrinsville, Tirau and Matamata.

The formation of the land and vegetation has been greatly influenced by faulting and historic volcanic activity, and the evolution of the Waikato River system.

The topography of the district is varied. It includes:

- the high, rugged volcanic cone of Maungatautari, (797 m) in the south
- the three smaller (< 500 m) remnant cones, Te Tapui, Maungakawa and Maungatapu in the north
- a block of low rolling hills in the north-west
- the low terrace land and flood plains adjacent to the existing Waikato River channel and its former course through the Piarere Valley at Hinuera.

Each of these areas has different factors that influence the range of plant species and associations that naturally occur - soil type, slope, drainage, rainfall pattern and temperature range all combine to create distinctive vegetation zones from sub-montane to lowland forests, wetlands and riparian areas. Each plant has a different tolerance to these various conditions, whether it is frost, wind or water logging, making some species more suitable than others.



Vegetation in Maungatautari ecological district

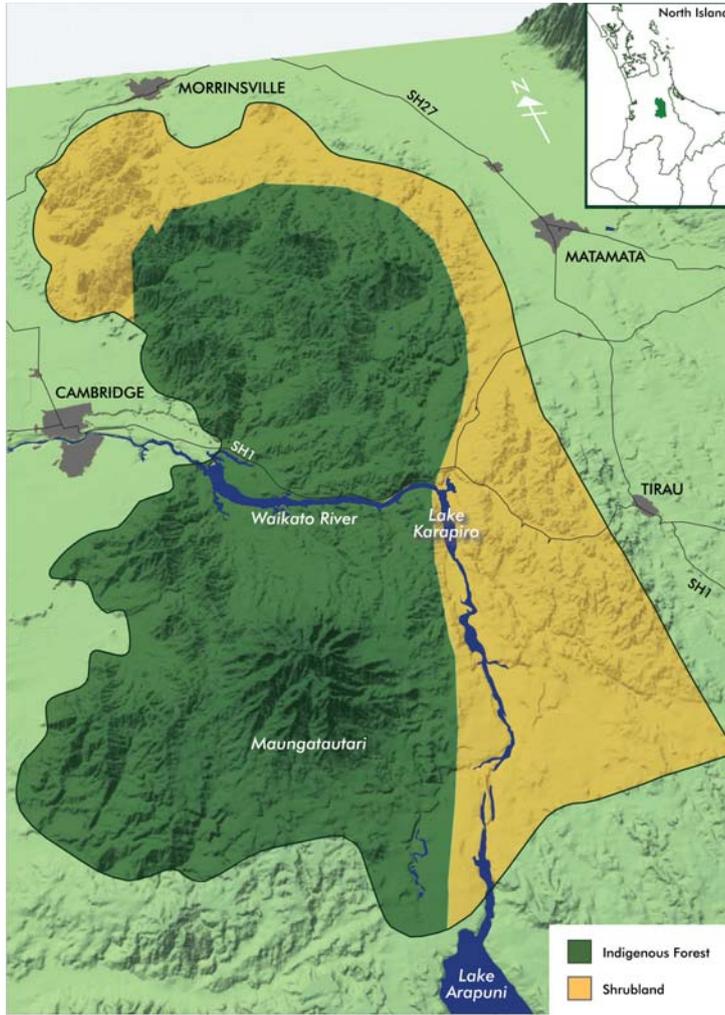
Originally the district was covered in native vegetation, mainly forest of three types:

- Dense conifer (kahikatea or totara) forest on the flat to gently sloping river terraces.
- Rimu-tawa forest on the lower altitude hill country.
- Lowland steepland and montane conifer/broadleaved forest in the higher hill country and mountains.

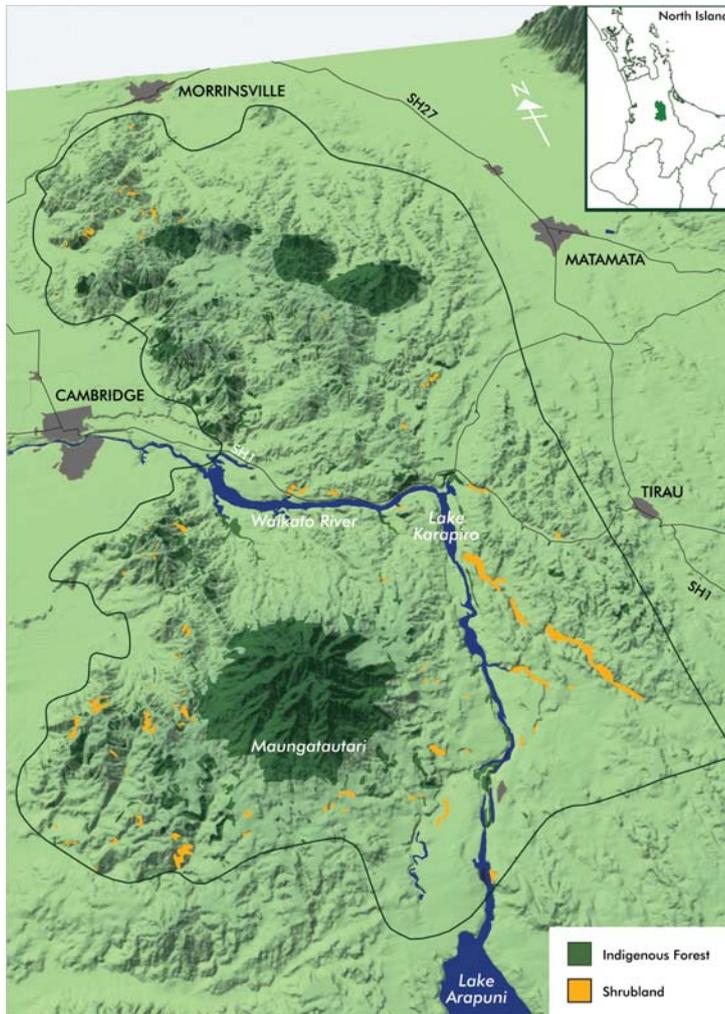


These forests provided habitat for native animals including weka, takahe, kiwi, kakapo, kokako, kaka, saddleback, North Island robin, three species of bat, several species of frog, tuatara and many different geckos and skinks.

Today, the Maungatautari ecological district has less than 10 per cent of the original indigenous vegetation remaining. Half of that is old growth forest and half is regrowth forest (previously cleared). Most of the native forest is in large protected reserves such as Maungatautari and Te Tapui, with a smaller amount in private ownership, including many small patches dotted throughout the district. There are also small areas of wetland in seepages and beside streams. Only a limited range of native animals is now found in the district.



Native vegetation cover in 1840.



Native vegetation cover today.

What is special about our ecological district?

Special community project

Maungatautari is a 1.8 million year old volcano in the southern part of the district. The mountain and surrounding forested landscape once supported a rich native flora with giant northern rata, miro and many other species providing a year-round food source for a variety of wildlife including kiwi, little bush moa, laughing owl and tuatara. Kokako were on Maungatautari as recently as the late 1970s.

The mountain peak is still clothed in 3363 ha of forest vegetation, but is now surrounded by pastoral farmland with small forest fragments scattered through the district. The lowland winter feeding grounds have largely gone, and after decades of attack by ship rats, possums and other predators, so have many of the native birds.

A major project lead by the local community is underway to restore native flora and fauna to the mountain. Two large areas of the mountain's forest have been surrounded by a predator-proof fence, and all the pests within them eradicated. The community is now raising funds to complete the construction of the fence around the whole mountain. They also plan to return threatened species that have been lost from the district, including kiwi, kokako, tuatara, stitchbird, takahe and kakariki.

Without pests, the population of many native bird species like tui, kereru and kakariki will expand to bursting point, and young birds will migrate out into the surrounding countryside in search of food or new homes. These species will also come down from the mountain to feed in the lowlands during the winter.

This is where your native planting is important, whether it be in your garden or a large restoration area. It will assist in providing vital habitat with food source and nesting opportunities for native birds moving down from the mountain into surrounding towns and forest patches. It will help you enjoy, in your own backyard, the efforts to restore Maungatautari.

Special native wildlife

If you live near Maungatautari mountain, you may get all sorts of wildlife visiting your garden, especially if you help the wildlife move safely by planting 'corridors' and/or by controlling pests. Any flighted forest bird will be likely to cross the predator proof fence occasionally and follow a bushy gully down to a house. But of course they may not do it for long if that area is riddled with rats and possums.



What can you expect over the next few years?

- More visits from **kereru, tui** and **bellbirds** as their population grows. Tui already regularly fly 10-20 km from nearby native forest patches on Maungatautari and Maungakawa into Cambridge and other urban areas for winter food. If you wish to provide extra food use sugar water, never honey, in your bird feeders.
- Possible nesting of these birds in local bush areas if good pest control is provided.

What can you expect over the long term?

- If good vegetation corridors are provided species such as **whiteheads, robins, tomtits, riflemen** and **kokako** may be drawn down from the mountain to visit, some of these may even breed if suitable habitat is there for them.
- The cheeky native parrots, **kaka** and **kakariki** won't need continuous bushy corridors, but will need patches of bush with plentiful food trees which they can visit. They may nest in the holes of large old trees, even exotic species like macrocarpa. If you notice a nest in an isolated tree, put a 50 cm deep metal band around the trunk (2 m off the ground) to keep rats and stoats away from the nest hole.
- Small populations of other species will establish on the mountain and may be seen or heard through the district:
 - **brown teal** will feed on invertebrates in surrounding farmland at night
 - **long tailed cuckoos** and **Cook's petrels** will be heard and may be seen flying overhead
 - **bush falcon** and **long tailed bats** may become more common
 - **spotless crakes** and/or **banded rails** and perhaps **fernbirds** may become established in the forest with the control of pest mammals.
- Pacific, forest and green **geckos** will probably become more common in surrounding areas with pest control, as well as an increase in the number of **copper skinks** which are already present in surrounding farmland.



Pest mammals, especially ship rats are major predators of our native birds and are a real threat. Pest control is the best thing everyone can do to assist in providing a safe habitat for native birds. See www.ew.govt.nz for more information.

Special plants

About 130 plant species native to the Waikato region are at risk of extinction. Planting threatened species will help ensure their survival.

Some threatened species that you may like to try establishing include:

Marattia salicina (kingfern)

Microsorium novae-zelandiae

Mida salicifolia

Pimelea tomentosa

Pseudopanax laetus

Raukawa edgerleyi

Some of these plants may be difficult to source, but nurseries may be able to provide them if given prior notice. It is important that these species are eco-sourced (seed collected from naturally occurring plants) from the local district.

Do not remove threatened plants from the wild.