

Old Man's Beard

by Earle Norriss

achieved to date.

To begin with, class groups explored the area. Four main problem plants were identified: old man's beard, banana passionfruit, blackberry and gorse.

Many other weeds were present, but it was decided to focus on the four common ones. The children discovered the fun of finding, collecting, sorting and identifying plants – a very necessary activity as many were totally unfamiliar with plant recognition. Initially, one group of 13-year-olds confused blackberry with black nightshade and a group of parents confused old man's beard with

Opposite: A general view of old man's beard infestation on slopes adjacent to the school project area. Photo: DoC

Right: Tahunanui school children gazing at one of the few remaining mature podocarps in the area, providing them with a glimpse of the nature of the valley's original forest. Photo: Earle Norriss

Below: Children looking at the tangle of vines they are about to clear. Photo: Earle Norriss



kawakawa! The samples of the four problem plants were put in bags supplied and appropriately labelled by the Conservation Department and taken back to school where they were reidentified, studied and then destroyed.

All groups decided that old man's beard was the worst problem plant in the area, with banana passionfruit second. One 11-year-old commented:

"I don't like putting banana passionfruit second, because I like eating passionfruit, but I can see I will have to, because it smothers the trees like old man's beard."

Another activity was to measure the annual growth rate of an old man's beard vine. After some practical mathematics, children found

that vines in the Marsden Valley were growing an average of about 90 cm a month during the growing season.

Classes of children then climbed into the head of the valley to inspect the fringe of infestation. Here a coastal remnant forest is regenerating and slowly spreading. Children were able to observe that gorse, which had covered the slope after early burning, was being choked out by colonising natives such as manuka, kanuka, mahoe and matipo.

The children decided that these would be the appropriate trees to plant in areas cleared of problem plants, as this was the natural and most effective way to encourage the restoration of the original native forest.

Some classes wrote to the Conservation

Department with suggestions on the best ways to solve the problem, and these ideas are being acted on.

Martin Conway, the local Queen Elizabeth II Trust representative, is propagating colonising natives; Eric Eden, in charge of the noxious plant unit attached to the Tasman District Council, has arranged for clearing and spraying of a badly infested area in the reserve, and schools have been given manageable strips in this reserve to clear, plant and look after.

The Nelson City Council (which now owns the reserve) and the Conservation Department, have provided sufficient equipment to enable all children and adults in a group to be actively involved. All 650 children will plant at