

## Gumboots and clay 'critters' raise awareness of kauri dieback



Kerry Marinkovich/Stuff

Blake Dickens is full of smiles about the project.

Primary students' brightly decorated gumboots now mark kauri rickers along a popular Whangarei walkway.

The gumboots, a kiwi icon, are intended to remind people of the need for clean footwear when walking in native bush as it is known that mud is a transporter of the deadly pathogen that causes kauri dieback .

Since February, Kiwi North educator Shirley Peterson has been working with four Whangarei Schools on the need to protect our biodiversity.



Kerry Marinkovich/Stuff

Honor Hood and Josie Keast with painted critters to go on the track.

She says more and more people are becoming aware of the district's walking tracks which means they are being used more frequently than before.

During discussions with the children they raised concern over the growing number and the effect this could have on kiwi and kauri.



Kerry Marinkovich/Stuff

Jamie Cramer, Shirley Peterson and Adam Langdon marking the walkway with their handpainted gumboots

Their concerns inspired several creative projects aimed at raising awareness of the vulnerability of the flora and fauna, particularly following the release of 12 kiwi into the forest in March.

"We came up with the idea of making clay critters as a way to encourage people to stay on the track. We also made clay foot prints from the children's shoes which in turn led to the idea of painting the cement filled gumboots," Peterson says.

On Thursday the gumboots painted by the children of Kamo, Manua and Maungatapere primary schools and St Xavier will be placed along the track that runs from the Whangarei Quarry Gardens to the Quarry Art Centre. Young two metre high kauri (rickers) line one side of the track and the boots will be placed along the track.



Cement filled boots will be placed along a popular kauri lined walkway to remind people of the importance of clean footwear in the fight against kauri dieback.

"It is equally as important to be aware of transporting mud and dirt by any method, whether it be by feet, tyres or dogs paws," she says. "It's all about looking after our heritage, if we don't do what we can now, we will lose our kauri trees."

The "critters" will be placed on a new, yet to be opened, Pukenui Forest track. "DOC and the Pukenui Forest Trust have been working on this track together. To be known as the Toyota Kiwi Guardian Track it will be opened sometime this summer."