



Welcome to Issue 25 of the newsletter of Awhitu Peninsula Landcare Inc. We are delighted to report some very good news — heartening results from recent ARC possum monitoring, and an environmental award which recognises our dedication to possum

control on our Peninsula. Unfortunately there is also some bad news — laboratory testing reveals the water mould (PTA) which causes kauri dieback has been positively confirmed at two separate locations on the Peninsula.

Farmsafe short courses bite the dust

Many Awhitu Peninsula residents have learnt valuable new skills, and met new friends, by attending the Farmsafe training courses organised locally through Awhitu Peninsula Landcare. Vital skills such as safe chainsaw, atv and tractor handling. Unfortunately we have just been advised that: "Government have made changes around funding. Funding is no longer available for short awards. To continue to receive government funded training participants need to enrol in a qualification."

Landcare will continue to make enquiries about this, as we know many people have benefited from these short courses and we believe it is a great shame that we are no longer able to offer this service. For most of us, it is completely impractical to 'enrol in a qualification'. We just want to learn how to safely operate and service a chainsaw in the weekends.

Landcare AGM coming soon

Our Landcare annual general meeting will be held as usual in June. We are hoping to arrange an informative speaker to talk about our Harbour and coastline.

It would be wonderful to welcome you along on the night, whether or not

you are a Landcare member. Our 2009 AGM speaker — Tim Lovegrove — gave a fascinating presentation about the risks and rewards of 'translocation' — the reintroduction of a species from one area to another.

Rats make an unwelcome return

Yes this is the time of the year *rattus rattus* (et al) really comes to the fore. We may not see these nocturnal creatures very often but they have a major impact on New Zealand's wildlife because they eat birds, lizards, and invertebrates.

They also eat a wide range of native fruits and other plant material, which puts them in competition with native wildlife for food.

Luckily rats don't usually travel far from their nest, usually only 40-100 metres. In winter the nest is often

close to man, who kindly provides warmth and shelter. Use traps and poison bait outside now to avoid them becoming a problem as winter gets colder and they move even closer to your living quarters! You can buy waxed bait for use outdoors or a fixable bait (or possum bait that has been outside and become unpalatable to possums) in a container. It is important to keep it inaccessible to pets.

Compost bins are a prime place for rat-catching.

No permission — no access

Recently there have been some rumours circulating about unauthorised access / shooting on Peninsula farms — perhaps targeting turkeys and deer. Awhitu Peninsula Landcare would like to make it absolutely clear that we would never access anyone's property without prior permission from the owner. So if anyone tries to argue that they are doing 'Landcare' work on a property without the owner's knowledge, you can be sure that person is not telling the truth, and we suggest you contact the police.

Pest control shows good results

In early March the ARC conducted a possum monitor on the Awhitu Peninsula. This is done to check the effectiveness of the possum control program run by Awhitu Peninsula Landcare.

The monitored area runs from Karioitahi Road up to Wattle Bay, and through this area trap lines were set by contractors at strategic points. There were 40 trap lines, set and checked over three nights.

Each trap line consisted of 10 traps set 10 metres apart. All catches were recorded on data sheets, including non-target species, and then the Residual Trap Catch (RTC) is worked out.

Each trap line is numbered and this is printed on to a map of the area. This shows up any 'hot spots' where possum catches are higher, and is used for targeting future operations.

Here is how it panned out for the latest monitor — there were 400 traps set in total and checked over three nights in the first week of March. This is a total number of 1200 trap nights.

The weather over this period was very stable with little wind and no

rain, ensuring active possums and ideal monitoring conditions. There were 11 possums caught over that period, so if you take the number of possums caught as a percentage of the total trap nights, you get 0.9% residual trap catch (RTC).

The maximum acceptable RTC for our APL work is 3% and so this was a very good result indeed.

Other species caught included eight rats, one magpie and a couple of hedgehogs.

In conjunction with the possum control project, bush monitoring is carried out twice a year using FOR-MAK (Forest Monitoring Assessment Kit). This measures mouse, rat and possum activity at five bush sites along the Awhitu Peninsula, as well as bird life, tree health and seedling growth.

The latest report showed some mouse and rat presence but no possums. Unsurprisingly, bush areas are very dry, with drooping seedlings and understorey.

The Animal Health Board has recently carried out possum control in the Otua area and it is hoped that the area will stay possum-free for a longer period this time.

Enviro heroes announced and saluted

Winners of the ARC's 2009 Sustainable Environment Awards were recently announced. Awhitu Peninsula Landcare was honoured to receive a Highly Commended award for their years of work, in partnership with many supportive landowners and dedicated volunteers, towards reducing Peninsula possum numbers. Our own Jack Harper was the 2007 Supreme Winner of this biennial Award, which recognizes commitment, partnerships and practical action to improve the environment.

The 2009 Supreme Award went to a group of residents from Waitakere Retirement Village who have transformed their surroundings into a self sufficient eco-garden. Bet they had fun doing it too.

And we celebrate the successes of another Awhitu Environmental Hero — Rob T, pioneer of foredune protection

Rob Thwaites — known on the Awhitu Peninsula as "Rob T" — recently revisited thriving restoration plantings of the native sandbinders, pingao (*Desmoschoenus spiralis*) and kowhangatara (*Spinifex sericeus*) at Orua Bay. Rob is truly a pioneer of re-establishing these species on the northern Manukau harbour beaches of the peninsula.

In 1994 Rob, assisted by the Shoreline Kids,

their parents, and Greg Lowe of Franklin District Council, began to propagate coastal species and remove invasive weeds such as boneseed (*Chrysanthemoides monilifera*). Restoration plantings of coastal species were established at Wattle Bay, Orua Bay and Big Bay.

Despite the many challenges of establishing restoration plantings on foredunes — stormy weather, king tides, the use of recreational vehicles on fragile shorelines, and uninformed beach visitors — today there exist some very healthy plantings, demonstrating clearly the wonderful ability of these plants to "hold" the sand, and prevent coastal erosion. Once established the plants are able to survive storm scouring, and can rapidly colonise incoming sands.

Over the years, Rob T has been awarded APL Ecohero and Enviro Awards for his valuable restoration work.

As Awhitu Peninsula Landcare prepare for their first foredune protection project - on the west coast at Waimatuku, Hamilton's Gap - we salute the work of Rob T. and the Shoreline Kids.

Below: Rob T surveys revegetating sand binders at Orua Bay



Kauri dying on Awhitu Peninsula PTA positively confirmed by laboratory testing

Even though Kauri Dieback in Awhitu was suspected from the appearance of some trees, the government-funded research programme has now isolated PTA from three different dying trees at Wattle Bay and Kemp Rd Reserve areas.

PTA is a very aggressive water mould pathogen (disease organism), which can easily be transferred from infected area to healthy area in soil, especially damp soil.

Dirt on your shoes, tyres and dog paws could be causing significant damage to our magnificent kauri.

Please, it is most important to thoroughly clean your shoes and wipe your dog's paws before and after visiting any area which contains kauri.

The good news is that lab

tests have cleared the Brooks kauri on the Regional Park of PTA.

Some of these trees had "possible" signs of early stage infection.

However it is not PTA, and the trees are remaining healthy. Visitors to this Park will be aware of the hygiene spray kits provided for treating shoes.

We will be organising these spray kits for other danger areas around the Peninsula.

If you see them, please do use them. We are sure no-one wants to inadvertently kill a kauri and at the moment this simple procedure is the only thing we can do to counteract the spread of this aggressive disease.

Symptoms to watch for include yellowing of foliage,

loss of leaves, canopy thinning and dead branches.

Affected trees can also develop lesions that bleed resin, extending to the major roots and sometimes girdling the trunk as a 'collar rot'. PTA can kill trees and seedlings of all ages. At the moment there is no known treatment for this killer disease, only prevention.

Educational seminars and field workshops will be run over the next few months in a number of locations by the kauri dieback response team.

We will publish dates in case anyone wishes to attend.

If you suspect kauri dieback in your area, you can call 0800 NZ KAURI (695 2874). For more information check out www.arc.govt.nz/environment/biosecurity/kauri-dieback

What bird is this?

Enjoying ngaio berries at Wattle Bay, this little fellow was extremely fast moving and so tiny it made a nearby fantail look big....

Send your answers to landcare@awhitu.org.nz



**NOW is the possum's main breeding season
— don't delay — bait, bait, bait.**

Contact Kate 235 1616, email : landcare@awhitu.org.nz
or Ian 235 0851, email : kohekohestud@xtra.co.nz



Autumn ramble views historic local properties

There were enough people in the farming community praying for rain to guarantee that we had yet another hot dry day for our field trip.

Our Landcare group met at the farm of Rex and Parvati Erikson to view their valley and wetland restoration and then walked along the ridge to the head of the valley. This took us through two more properties — Ros and Murray McNaughten's farm and then on to the historic property known as Brackmont.

Our group of 50 people, led by Rex and Parvati Erikson, descended through the baking afternoon sun into the lush watered valley which has been the heart of their restoration project over the past eight years.

A remnant bush of mature native trees on part of the hillside served as inspiration for the re-vegetation of the valley which was originally grazed as part of a dairy farm.

First priority in this project was keeping the cattle out, and a fence was strung along the top edges each side of the valley.

The kikuyu was left to act as weed mat and erosion control until trees could be established.

We viewed the planting

which has been done in stages over the years, starting with the stream banks which are now clothed in broad-leaved flax and cabbage trees.

The visual effect is very beautiful and worthwhile from that standpoint alone.

The stream winds down to a shaded pool which is home to native fish and crayfish (koura).

The plantings on the sides of the valley are a work in progress and have had a helping hand from the local Trees for Survival team who came and planted large sections of hillside.

As long as the trees to be planted are of a reasonable size, they are able to cope with the kikuyu and eventually shade it.

This project is a great example of what can be achieved from a start point of grazed paddock and is inspirational to those of us who may have put it into the 'too hard' basket.

From the Erikson's, we walked along the top edge of the now bush-filled valley as it winds through the McNaughten's farm and reaches Brackmont, the historic property settled by the Makgill family in the 19th century and currently owned by Roger and

Frances Evans.

On hand were nine Makgill relatives (some of whom had lived on the property) who had come along to see the old exotic trees and revisit childhood moments (climbing and falling out of trees and trying not to fall into the old well which is still there).

Many of the trees date from the original plantings by Captain Makgill and his family such as Tulip trees (Liriodendron) and a stand of European beech trees.

Two original buildings also remain — the old chook house and the cow shed, testament to building practices of a past era — no kiln dried radiata framing then.

The house site overlooks the bush-filled valley with views across to the estuary and steel mill.

Our return walk took us via the McNaughten's cattle race back to our start point and a much welcomed afternoon tea.

Many thanks to the Eriksons, McNaughtens and Evans for their generosity in allowing us access to their farms for this most enjoyable and informative field trip.

Right: Landowners were presented with gifts of native trees at the end of the walk.



Heroes and villains in our backyards

Hero: Horokaka (New Zealand iceplant), *Disphyma australe*.

A fast growing, coastal creeping succulent found throughout New Zealand. It has white to mauve flowers in summer that open and close with sunlight. The flowers are smaller and more delicate than the South African iceplant but like it, they turn to follow the sun as it moves across the sky.

Maori squeezed juice from the fleshy leaves and applied it to boils and to soothe insect bites. Early settlers pickled the leaves and also ate the sour and slimy fruit. It is used for coastal revegetation planting and is an effective sand catcher. It can also tolerate high concentrations of sea bird droppings unlike most plants.

The School of Engineering, University of Auckland and Waitakere Civic Centre have both used this plant on their 'green roofs' — a testament to its hardy and low maintenance character.

This is not a commonly grown plant but it is very attractive and can grow in quite dry conditions as long as it gets full sun. It can be grown easily from cuttings as well as seed. It is an ideal bach plant as it requires very little water and will flower throughout the summer.



Villain: Ice Plant from South Africa. *Carpobrotus edulis*

Like the Agapanthus, this is another brute of a plant from South Africa.

Sometimes called the Sour Fig due to its edible but sour fruit, it is a mat-forming succulent which is invasive primarily in coastal habitats in many parts of the world. It was often introduced as an ornamental plant or used for planting along roadsides, from which it has spread to become invasive. It forms mats over sand dunes and open areas. Its main impacts are smothering, reduced regeneration of native flora. It also hybridises with and replaces the much smaller pink-flowered native iceplant.

This iceplant is a low-growing perennial with fleshy succulent leaves 7-12 cm long. Large (up to 10 cm diameter) many-petalled yellow flowers that turn pink as they age can be produced year-round but are most common from October to February. South African Ice Plants grow year round, with individual shoot segments growing more than one metre per year. Ice Plants can grow to at least 50 metres in diameter.

Hand-pull individual plants and remove any buried stems. Mulch to prevent re-establishment. Large mats can be removed by rolling them up like a carpet. It is important to remove any fragments during eradication, as any remains left in place become a focus of regeneration, due to the large number of seeds which survive in the fruit for a long time.

Summer may be over but we hope that bach dwellers will keep an eye on this one and take the necessary action to help protect our natural environment.

Uncovering another hidden gem



Visitor numbers to the Awhitu Peninsula continue to increase. The Manukau Heads Lighthouse, the Sunday Markets, our stunning scenery and inspiring beaches are proving irresistible to day trippers from far and wide.

Recent work and future plans will bring to the fore another, little known gem that has been waiting in the wings.

The Matakawau Scenic Reserve is located less than 200 metres from Bhanas' general store, just next to the Awhitu school entrance. Between '97 and '99, walkways were constructed by Awhitu Landcare volunteers giving access to over 10 acres of lush bush which contain over 100 species of native trees, shrubs, ferns, orchids and grasses. As an accessible, compact example of the flora of the area it is unbeatable — bring a guide book and see how many you can spot.

Sadly, the original entrance sign has seen better days and the internal track markers have mostly disappeared (some say due to elves but more likely adolescents) so navigation has become tricky for the new visitor.

Fortunately this will all be updated shortly, with both a new road sign and entrance sign with a clear map of the loop track. The tracks them-

selves are to have new markers so we don't lose any of our valued guests.

Landcare volunteers recently attacked an invasion of weeds at the entrance which were threatening to rampage into the bush. Although the hand weeding was time consuming, it has proved very effective with very little regrowth.

We are also very lucky to have our own volunteer guardians in Tricia and Wayne Aspin, the originators of the reserve walkway dream, who keep a watchful eye on the area and tend the track regularly.

Many fine kauri are present in the tracked areas, so we are also implementing measures to help reduce the spread of PTA (Phytophthora taxon Agathis) which is the cause of kauri dieback. Signage warning of the danger posed by soil contamination and a footwear spraying station will soon be in place.

Co-operation will help preserve these giants for future generations who will, hopefully, still be taking a 35 minute wander though this little gem, just across the road from the general store.

Inset: From the archives — Volunteers building the Matakawau walkway in 1997

Above: After filling 20 rubbish bags with weeds, the Weeding Team at Matakawau walkway have reason to smile.



When will the rains come? We want to start planting!
Like everyone else around the Auckland region, we are hanging out for a good drenching. The Landcare shadehouse is bursting with plants ready to go - but of course we cannot commence our community planting programme until the ground is good and ready. That still seems a long way off. Planting date announcements for our wonderful team of volunteer planters will be announced soon (we hope). Keep an eye out in Peninsularama and on our website www.awhitu.org.nz