



## Let battle commence!

Great news for those with an oversupply of flannelweed – the Peninsula was selected for a trial release of a recently-imported, thoroughly tested and ERMA approved bug, which should prove a great help in the battle with flannelweed (Solanum mauritianum) – also commonly known as woolly nightshade and tobacco weed.

Thorough testing has been necessary due to the many valuable food-producing members of

the Solanum family (tomatoes, potatoes, tamarillos, etc).

The released bugs – a Brazilian strain of the flannelweed lace bug (Gargaphia decoris) were tested in South Africa, and imported from there.

With a lack of insect competitors here, it is anticipated that the lace bugs will do well.

As is the case with all biocontrol agents, they will not be a magic bullet, but will gradually weaken strands of flannelweed

by munching the leaves, and dramatically reduce flowering and fruiting.

The lace bugs have transparent wings, are 5mm long, with a pale brown body. They were released by biosecurity officer, Don Austin, in a 'flannelweed gully' before the end of March – go well, little bugs!

*Below left: Adult lace bug  
Below right: Attacking flannelweed is a familiar, but unwelcome, pastime.*



## Marram grass - a peninsula success story

Those familiar with the Awhitu Peninsula will be well aware of the problems caused by encroaching sand on farmland – hardly surprising, given the fact that the Peninsula is in reality one 'giant sand dune'.

One of the most successful methods used to address this encroachment has been the planting of marram grass – facilitated by Awhitu Peninsula Landcare in winter.

European marram grass was imported to NZ with early settlers; it was highly valued for thatching in its native lands.

Unfortunately in some areas in NZ it has now become invasive and is being removed by DOC.

However, the vigorous, fast-growing qualities of marram do have special value in some areas – in particular, where sand invades high pasture/coastal vegetation as is happening on

the Peninsula.

Marram is capable of growing in the harshest of habitats – in porous sandy soil, covered in salt, berated by wind.

The ARC gave Awhitu Landcare and farmers on the west coast of the Peninsula permission to use marram in restoring pasture and back-dune native vegetation.

The locally dominant native coastal plants are readily able to gain a foothold in between the marram plants which lose vigour over time, once the sand is stabilised. Coastal flax/harakeke, toetoe, tauhinu and pohuehue are the pioneers, followed over time by mahoe, kawakawa, houpara, hangehange and ti kouka /cabbage

tree.

Underplanting with coastal native plants has commenced on a Landcare-managed marram planting project on a significant peninsula sand blow which had inundated pasture, coastal vegetation and access tracks.

The project has been undertaken over four years and re-establishment of native coastal vegetation is a long term objective.

Pasture restoration is a priority on other properties, and kikuyu grass cuttings or old hay interspersed with established marram has proved successful in this regard.

*Below: Marram planting on dunes with toetoe and flax naturalising in foreground.*

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## Looking after the birds in winter

Over June, July and August there are very few native plants producing food for our birds – kohekohe, mapou, miro, puriri being the main ones.

People wanting to help birds over winter can put out bird feeders. Whilst it's not good practice to make friends with birds, we certainly don't want them to suffer either. Making a bird feeder can be a fun project to work on with the kids, and the birds are a delight to watch.

It is important to remember that bird food containers need cleaning regularly and often, to avoid spreading disease between different bird species.

A bird feeder for seed-loving birds should be on simple, secure and

steady flat platform on a two-metre pole, high enough to be out of reach of cats, and close to trees. Kereru will eat peas and corn off a flat, clear dish. You need something heavy, such as



a solid glass casserole lid so it won't get knocked off. Our nectar-feeding birds such as the tui are simple to please! Half a cup of sugar dissolved in a cup of water, preferably hanging in a tree. Segments of bright orange mandarins will attract them to the location.

Nectar feeders are also available by mail order from the Tiritirimatangi Trust: [http://www.tiritirimatangi.org.nz/\\_product\\_90056/Nectar\\_feeder](http://www.tiritirimatangi.org.nz/_product_90056/Nectar_feeder).

*Inset: Our friendly kereru.*



### Do you Know?

The Puriri, which was once one of the most prevalent trees on the Awhitu Peninsula, is the only tree capable of producing food for birds (fruit, nectar, seeds) all year round

Image: Puriri provide a valuable food source all year round

## Great year for possum control

Awhitu Landcare is delighted to report another successful year of possum control, with two separate trapline tests - one close to the southern baitline in RD3, and another right across RD4 - averaging under 3% once again.

For the tests, lines of ten traps are set; and checked daily for three days; any possums caught are removed, age and sex are recorded. Percentages are worked out with the number of kills per 100 trap nights. Tests are run by independent contractors.

"Hotspots" - any areas where clusters of possums are caught – are duly noted on maps of the traplines – so once we know the results we are able to communi-

cate with landowners and step up coverage with bait stations or Timms traps.

In RD3 the hotspot was Karioitahi beach, in an area which has only recently been added to the baitline.

In RD4, a hotspot was discovered in the Big Bay area. During the year, alert residents dealt to hotspots in Kohekohe, Pollok, and Matakawau Point.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our many regular bait-station fillers and Timms trappers – absolutely vital to maintaining our successful scheme. The AHB have recently completed another sweep of the Otatau/Aka Aka area, and Whakaupoko Landcare

are hard at work in the Baldhill/Mauku area – which all adds up to more birds, insects and invertebrates, healthier native bush, more farm pasture and fruitful gardens...

We are preparing for the annual autumn "pulse" (systematic filling of bait stations) at a time of year when we can expect to catch migrating young possums, and hungry rats.

Don't forget that a "blaze" below the freshly filled bait station will help to attract possums – especially if the station has not been filled for a while.

Blaze recipe – one part icing sugar; ten parts flour, oil to mix, flavoured with cinnamon or aniseed essence.