



Welcome to issue 24 of the newsletter of Awhitu Peninsula Landcare Inc.

Our recent highlighting of the Kauri Dieback syndrome has helped garner support for more research funding from the government to fight this disease. As only 2 percent of the original Kauri population remains nationally, saving these is an important and fragile exercise.

Our next round of pest control on the peninsula is about to start and we report on two recent field trips to view environmental projects that other people are involved in.

In our immediate backyard, the Manukau Heads lighthouse now sits in lush vegetation thanks to the efforts of volunteer planters using plants from the Awhitu Peninsula Landcare nursery.

## Afternoon ramble at Kohekohe

The Sunday of Labour Weekend turned on perfect weather for our field trip to Kohekohe pa on John and Julie McNamara's farm.

This historic pa site is located in the valley by Lake Pokorua, below the Kohekohe church.

George Flavell, local kaumatua, accompanied the large turnout of people and was on hand to point out and explain the landforms.

The pa had six defensive units, each fortified with ditches, banks and steepened

scarp, and had over eighty storage pits for kumara and taro.

From the top we could see old garden layouts on the valley floor, and housing terraces and palisade lines on the hillsides.

Market gardening was a major activity here, supplying produce to the Auckland market.

This is only one pa site of many dotted along the coast the length of the peninsula.

Collectively they supported a much larger population than

today's peninsula.

The Waikato land wars changed all that and during that period many Maori left the area.

The view from the ridge across the valley and lake is spectacular and perfect positioning for a defensible pa — they could see their enemies coming for miles.

The McNamaras have protected the site which encompasses 22 hectares by covenanting through the QEII Trust.

There is a remnant forest on the eastern

side of the pa which has been fenced off to exclude stock.

Thanks to that and also to the reduced possum population, regeneration of the trees is now occurring. John McNamara explained how careful grazing is used to keep the sward at the right density to prevent erosion on the pa site.

Afternoon tea at the lake house was a welcome finishing touch to a fabulous expedition.

*Below: Looking at kumera pits on the Pa ridge.*

## Kauri dieback continuing

The government announcement of a five-year research programme into kauri dieback syndrome with \$9.8 million in funding is welcome news for the embattled trees.

The programme aims to contain the soil-borne disease which is attacking kauri trees in the upper North Island and on Great Barrier Island.

Kauri dieback is caused by a phytophthora which belongs to a distinct group of organisms commonly known as water moulds.

It was discovered in kauri trees in the 1970's on Great Barrier Island and is commonly referred to as kauri collar rot.

It has since started spreading through kauri forests on the mainland and is believed to be spread on people's shoes or by other mammals, particularly including feral pigs.

The disease agent was identified as a new species in April 2008 and named

Phytophthora taxon Agathis (PTA).

It produces motile (swimming) water-borne spores which can move through soil waterfilms, freshwater streams and ponds or lakes.

This disease is specific to the kauri tree.

A response team has been formed to coordinate work on the disease.

The team includes MAF Biosecurity, DOC, ARC, Northland Regional Council, Environment Waikato and Environment BOP.

As well as immediate control treatments for PTA, more research is planned to find longer term management tools for this disease.

Raising trees from resistant seedlines is one possibility — this is a method that has been used successful-

ly overseas against other related Phytophthora tree diseases.

Forest & Bird have noted that many of the afflicted trees are clustered in areas very close to walking tracks.

This suggests that PTA is being spread by human contact.

What can we do to stop it spreading?

Cleaning shoes, tyres, and other equipment after visiting bush areas containing kauri.

Keep to defined park tracks at all times. Keep your dog on a leash at all times, as dogs can inadvertently spread the disease if they disturb the soil around the trees.

For more information check out [www.arc.govt.nz/environment/biosecurity/kauri-dieback](http://www.arc.govt.nz/environment/biosecurity/kauri-dieback)



## More bad news for pests as new contract starts

The pest control contract for 2009/2010 is about to get underway on the peninsula.

The ARC possum monitor that was done back in June of this year has identified three main hotspots that will be dealt with first.

These are spread along a 10km portion of the western coastline in quite difficult terrain and the Landcare team have contracted a specialist to deal with this area.

The type of monitoring done on the peninsula is an effective means of control in itself.

The June monitoring had 50

trap lines (each line is 200m long) spread from Kariotahi Road at the southern end up to the Manukau heads.

Over a span of 30 nights, there were 58 possums trapped in total.

The ARC hopes that in the future, the monitoring may be the only possum control tool needed on the peninsula.

Landcare are now looking to start monitoring of mustelids

### Did You Know?

Possums were first brought to New Zealand in 1837 from Australia. In one week 20 possums can eat 42 kilos of vegetation.

and rats in some native bush areas with a view to determining whether these pests need controlling.

Stoats, weasels and ferrets do tremendous damage to the bird population, as do rats and feral cats, by eating eggs and

birds. The ground nesting birds — pheasant, quail, skylark — are especially vulnerable to these pests.



*West Coast Bait Station: Pest Control in this difficult terrain will be done by a specialist.*

## Planting programme carries on

Below: Lighthouse planting on a steep bank in poor weather. Bottom: Plants for the lighthouse were grown in the APL shadehouse.





## Inspirational trip to NZ's first open sanctuary

Perhaps you know the magnificent 588 hectare Tawharanui Regional Park, west of Warkworth.

If you haven't visited, you should.

This magnificent area has spectacular beaches and is NZ's first integrated open sanctuary - a mainland island where farming is combined with public recreation and conservation of native species.

Currently, it welcomes 150,000 visitors a year.

A 2.5km predator-proof fence designed to keep pests out of the park has been constructed, and a large-scale pest eradication and monitoring programme undertaken.

Tawharanui officially received open sanctuary status in 2006.

Volunteers check the predator-proof fence on a regular basis. If there are incursions noted, bait stations are set up 'ready to go' and can be rapidly filled.

Enthusiastic supporters from the Tawharanui Open Sanctuary Society Incorporated (TOSSI, which was formed in 2002) raise funds for projects and assist with volunteer labour - pest eradication, species monitoring, public education and restoration of wetlands and forest.

Their vision is to create and maintain an open sanctuary free of plant and animal pests where native plants,

birds and animals can breed successfully.

We think that sounds like a great vision to aim for.

With this in mind, a group of us from APL joined one of the volunteer work days run on the first Sunday of every month. Like APL, they tell us they never know whether to expect four or 40 volunteers on these days - which can be a challenge in organising the projects to be done.

Those of our group who drove from the peninsula had a very early start, while some cheated by staying overnight in the Matakana area.

We were hosted for the day by Matt Maitland, ARC Co-ordinator of Open Sanctuaries, Northern Parks.

Matt played us recorded calls of the kiwi (no answer unfortunately) and showed us the devices which are attached to numerous bird species for monitoring purposes.

We were put to work in three different work groups - weeding sand dunes, clearing drainage channels in native bush and the old 'perennial' - cutting out waist high thistles!

They worked us hard but 'Hunger is the best seasoning' and we were rewarded with a classic kiwi barbeque lunch. (Not the actual birds).

After lunch we watched a Massey sci-

entist release seven Shore skinks back into the sand dunes.

The numerous kids present had great fun being the actual 'releasers' - a day they won't forget in a hurry.

The tiny Shore skinks can live to an amazing 30 or more years.

We learnt a lot about 'translocations' - the reintroduction of a species from one area to another - and the many risks and rewards involved.

There are great risks for the birds as not all new populations settle in easily and have to compete with existing species.

So few communities can 'spare' the birds and demand is high for translocatable birds. Monitoring the new birds is hard work and each species has different challenges.

On the positive side, Tawharanui is so close to Little Barrier Island that birds come and go between them - 80-150 bellbirds arrived en masse.

Birds do like to return to their native territory to breed so some who go away may come back.

A new arrival at Tawharanui is a solitary grey faced petrel nesting on the coast.

It is hoped that more will take up nesting here.

Seabirds have very specific challenges as they don't feed young in a lot of cases, instead disappearing

off to sea for weeks or months at a time. Matt sees this as a huge future project for Tawharanui and he mentioned that Canterbury used to have millions of seabirds before farm development.

So too did the Awhitu peninsula where they were so plentiful that the community dined on such things as Godwit pie.

As a long term vision, APL is continuing to investigate the possibility of reintroducing native birds back onto Awhitu Peninsula.

**Below: Dune weeding party at Tawharanui Beach.**

**Right: Shore skinks are very small.**



## Heroes and villains in our backyard

**Leycesteria formosa (right)** - otherwise known as the Himalayan honeysuckle, this plant is a native to the Himalayan region and south western China.

It was a popular and cosseted garden plant in Victorian Britain and it was from there that it arrived on New Zealand shores in 1878. Like many of those introduced species, it thrived in our welcoming climate and eventually jumped the fence and now has become a pest plant throughout the country. Growing to three metres, this perennial shrub has heart shaped leaves on green, hollow stems that bear white flowers with prominent purple bracts. These are followed by soft purple black berries. Unfortunately these berries are attractive to birds which then spread the plant far and wide.

These develop into fast growing, dense thickets that displace our native species. It can grow in shade as well as full sun and so



competes with many more desirable plants.

To control it, dig out small plants, cut and paint the stumps (1g metsulfuron/1L or 100ml triclopyr or glyphosate/1L).

Spray spring-summer, (5g metsulfuron + 10ml penetrant/10L or 60ml triclopyr/10L).

Stumps resprout so frequent follow-up required to ensure

eradication

**Knightia excelsa (above)** - It was called "New Zealand honeysuckle" by early European settlers but the name has fallen into disuse in preference for the Maori name - Rewarewa.

With its narrowly upright growth and fragrant, conspicuous flowers in late spring the rewarewa is one of our more



useful trees. The nectar from these flowers is enjoyed by tuis and silvereyes and is sought out by bees to make dark and malty rewarewa honey. Maori also enjoyed this nectar which was collected by tapping the flowers on the inside of a gourd vessel. Their easily germinated, winged seeds mature in June in canoe shaped pods and are a welcome

food for all the native parrot species. The inner bark of the tree was used traditionally to bandage wounds but the wood is of no use as a fuel - its other common name was the "bucket of water tree". The delicately flecked, golden timber is highly prized by woodworkers for turning and veneer work. It grows well in our region and is often one of the first trees to establish on newly disturbed ground.

A popular choice for revegetation projects, it can cope even in quite dry ground in light shade but prefers well drained soil in full sun. For the medium sized garden there can be few better trees - tall and narrow, can provide height and structure yet doesn't shade the garden; evergreen glossy leaves; fragrant red flowers in late spring; attracts native birds; it is not fussy about soil type - ideal for new sections - and it is easily available at most garden centres.