

Welcome to Issue 26 of the newsletter of Awhitu Peninsula Landcare Inc., in which we reflect on Landcare's 16-year history on the Peninsula, and look to the future. We celebrate planting successes on both coasts, and the best possum monitoring results we have ever had on the

Peninsula. Landcare is very grateful to those who can lend a hand on planting days, or support our efforts by becoming a member of the organisation.

A subscription form is included in this newsletter if you would like to be kept informed about our activities.

Landcare on the Peninsula — absolute champions?

In many respects the Awhitu Peninsula Landcare group (APL) punches above its weight. Indeed, an internet search shows just what an identity on the Peninsula this Landcare organisation is. Dianne Glenn commented at the recent AGM that the ARC hold this Landcare group in the highest regard, and consider them to be 'absolute champions'.

APL is one of the oldest landcare groups in NZ. The work of many diverse and talented individuals during its 16-year life has given the group its profile. Individuals who have won environmental awards, organised events, written books and articles, and — just as importantly — worn out spades digging out weeds and preparing planting holes, or burnt the midnight oil doing yet another funding application to help achieve an environmental dream.

Today Awhitu Peninsula Landcare Inc. is a registered charity, and its volunteer work throughout the 22,000 hectare Peninsula includes maintaining a native plant nursery, revegetation programmes, pest control, erosion control and community recycling initiatives.

It would be easy to assume that there are many people running the APL organisation. In actual fact, there are a just a small number of individuals, often varying from year to year, who commit to being the 'face' of Landcare and doing the behind the scenes work. As is always the case with voluntary groups, people are its most valuable — and rare — asset.

The success of the organisation lies in staying true to its founding objective "to help people work together in sustainable management of the land and other resources in the area".

The vital ingredient here being the many members of the Awhitu community who are prepared to get their gumboots on and actually do the hard work on their land, or their neighbour's land, or their community's land.

Awhitu Peninsula Landcare pays tribute to them. This is a small com-

munity of diverse folk, but together it has achieved much.

Many people know Awhitu Peninsula Landcare for their work on possum control. Indeed this has — of necessity — been a focus.

In 1989 the founder of Project Crimson, Dr Gordon Hosking, conducted research which showed that a frightening 90% of coastal pohutukawa stands were dead or dying due to damage from possums and humans. Given that the Awhitu Peninsula is a narrow sand dune surrounded by nearly 100km of coastline...significant damage was evident here.

Anyone who has been familiar with the Awhitu Peninsula over time will know that it looks very, very different now to how it was just 20 years ago.

Many areas of native bush are vibrant again, flowering and fruiting freely. Birdlife is becoming abundant. A significant number of streams are fenced and planted. Public land is being weeded and replanted and walkways developed.

Work done at a community level has contributed towards creating an environment that not only enhances the coastline and restores bush, but attracts native fauna.

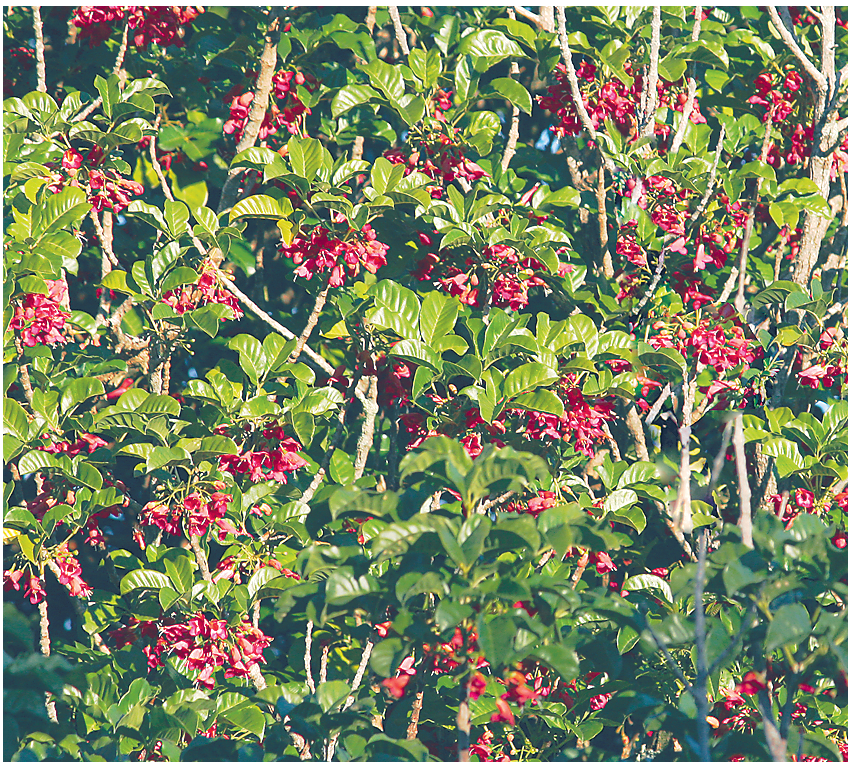
Over time and with care this will be self-generating — the hope is that the balance has already tipped in favour of the flora and fauna. As long as those possum numbers can be kept down!

Awhitu Peninsula Landcare would like to broaden its focus even wider in future years. Much recent press has been devoted to the success of environmental initiatives on the eastern side of the North Island — with bird translocations including bellbirds, kakariki, kiwi and kaka.

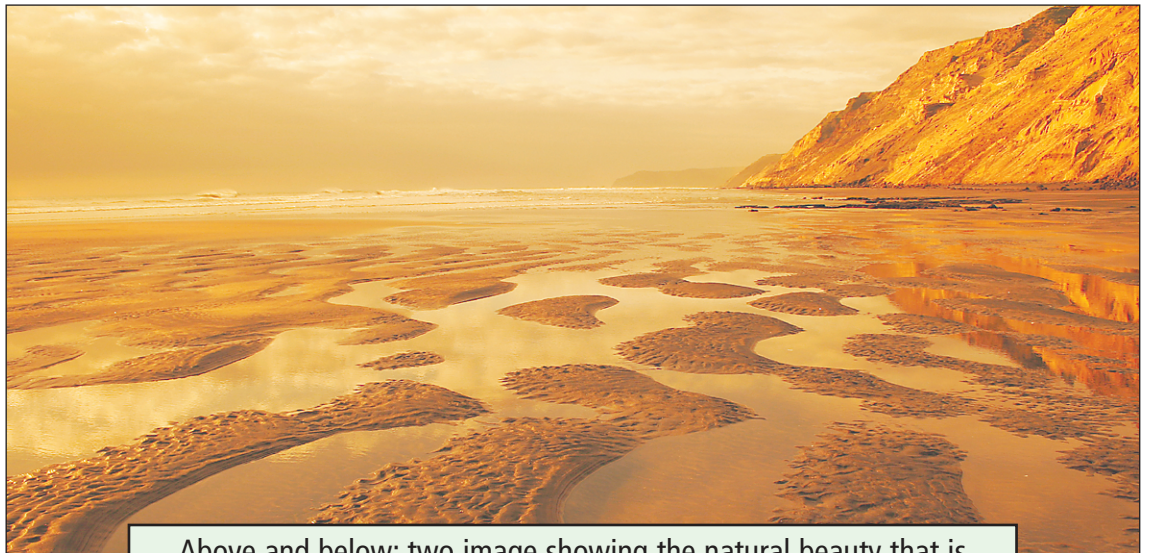
Wouldn't it be wonderful, for a change, to read about this happening on the Awhitu Peninsula.

A long term dream perhaps, but with the assistance of the Awhitu community, Landcare will continue to work towards creating the environment for this to one day become a reality.

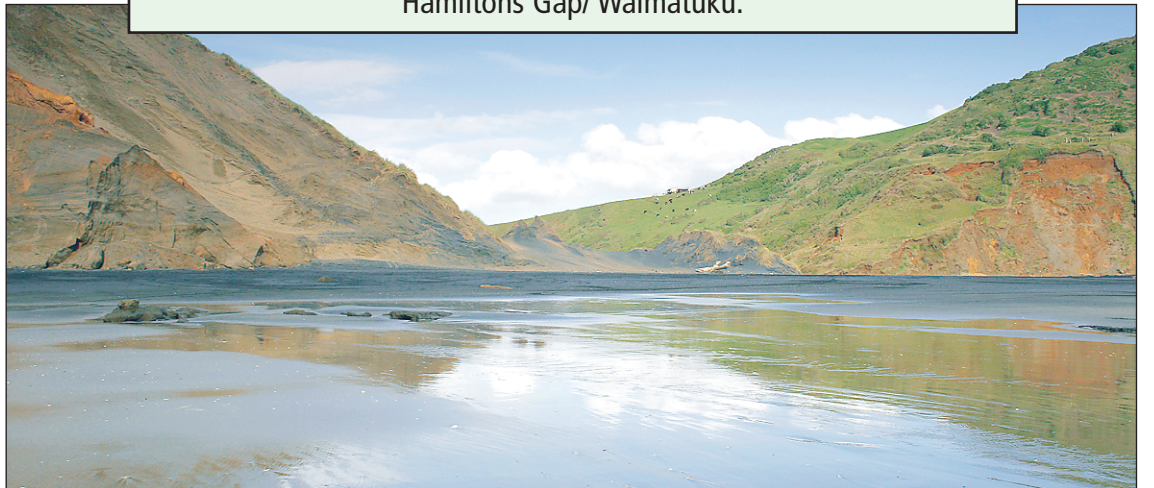
Below: Native bush is now flowering and fruiting freely.



Very special place needs some help



Above and below; two image showing the natural beauty that is Hamiltons Gap/ Waimatuku.



Hamiltons Gap/Waimatuku is a popular destination on the Awhitu Peninsula for locals and visitors alike.

Many will have noticed the sand blow on the northern bank of the Waimatuku stream which has grown substantially — a quick look at Google Earth shows the damage that has occurred over the six years since the satellite photos were taken.

Damage from foot traffic and illegal vehicle use on the dune has destroyed existing plants and is allowing the sand blow to spread.

Why restore the foredune?

Well the primary reason is that dune vegetation is our best form of shore protection.

The plants of a foredune actually cause a dune to grow — their leaves slow down the wind-blown sand and trap it around themselves and over time the dune gets bigger.

The roots of the plants bind the sand and hold it in place, preventing a sand blow from spreading.

Man-made structures on the foreshore are static and under constant threat from the action of the wind and sea.

They get buried or washed away following storms and require ongoing attention often at great expense to the community.

In contrast to this, a natural dune is dynamic — plants like Spinifex and Pingao can react to heal any damage from the elements — they can grow even when partially buried and if washed out can often regrow once the storm has passed.

These are the plants which will be used in the restoration.

Kiwi As

Pingao is a NZ native plant that is not found anywhere else in the world.

It binds the sand and shapes the dune in a way that no other plant would and our dunes owe their unique appearance to it.

It is also regarded as a Taonga by Maori for its weaving and medicinal uses and is commonly seen in tukutuku panels in the wharehenui.

Many native birds, reptiles and invertebrates live in the coastal zone and restoration of these areas will increase the

biodiversity of the region.

Fighting Back

With the help of Auckland Regional Council, Franklin District Council, local landowners and Awhitu Peninsula Landcare, a major foredune planting will be taking place at Hamiltons Gap / Waimatuku on Saturday 24th July.

Landcare volunteers will be fencing an area in order to protect the initial planting of 4000 Spinifex and Pingao plants. Signage will be erected to educate visitors on how to protect the plants that in turn protect us from the ravages of the West Coast waves and wind.

Anyone who would like to come along on that day and spend a few hours in a superbly invigorating environment helping to get those 4000 plants in the ground — you would be very welcome indeed.

Below: Pingao on sand dune.



Best result so far — but no time to relax!

At the recent Landcare AGM, Ian McNaughton reported on the APL-managed possum control programme which this year has resulted in wonderfully low residual trap catches — under 1% (3% is deemed very low.)

ARC Biosecurity are very happy with results — the best yet — and will continue to support with bait supply, stations, and technical advice.

Nearly 200 bags of Pestoff bait have been distributed this year, with APL having problems

keeping up with demand at times.

Although Pestoff is very effective against this major pest, Landcare will continue to investigate potentially improved methodology and is currently awaiting trial results on gas traps.

Funding continues via the possum control area targeted rate and ARC Biosecurity contributions — which, APL fervently hopes, will be continued under the Super City structure.

Regular possum sightings in some areas are proof we cannot relax our possum vigilance on the Peninsula.

APL is currently investigating ways to improve the southern baitline, and we need to maintain vigilance on the West Coast, and large bush/forested areas on the peninsula.

"I would like to thank all the landcarers, landowners and residents who keep up the good work filling those bait stations" Ian concluded.