



Welcome to PEN in the Post

Tena koutou. Tena koutou. Tena koutou katoa. Welcome to issue 21 (and first for 2009) of the newsletter of Awhitu Peninsula Landcare Inc.

This month Landcare celebrates 15 years of unstinting persistence in the interests of better biodiversity — more trees, more birds, and fewer pests. That has meant combining locally generated knowledge with best practices from all over New Zealand to

restore balance to the environment, mostly with voluntary effort. This quarterly newsletter is designed to keep Awhitu Landcare group members informed and to share our experience with all of Franklin.

Views and comments expressed in 'Enviro News' are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Post or Awhitu Peninsula Landcare.

Tracking our traps

Awhitu Landcare has loaned-out over 40 species of trap over recent years; only a

handful have been returned. If you have a lazy Timms trap, a black tree trap, smaller

spring trap or cage trap still on loan, please return same to our information office at Matakawau. And if you have others of your own no longer needed, why not donate them to the same cause: other landowners can use them right now. Or call 2351616 and we'll arrange collection.

Popular field trip

Awhitu Landcare's informative 'Dr Dirt' Doug Hicks will lead a field trip on sand erosion and dune restoration on April 19.

Interest is already high and organisers suggest you diary now. More information is available from Kate on 235 1616.



What to do about Wattle?

Both species of this Ozzie invader — Brush Wattle (*Paraserianthes iopatha*) and Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*) — are pests.

Springing-up whenever a gap occurs in undergrowth only to rain their evil-smelling seeds around the immediate vicinity.

But, as the Signal Station's Carol McGregor points out, Brush Wattle serves a purpose other than as a fast growing windbreak: it's flowers feed native birds when other nectar sources are few. Another two points in Wattle's favour, according to Carol: it's a nitrogen fixer and it generally lives only seven years. Makes hot burning firewood too.

Carol, also, first alerted this writer to the fact that Brush Wattle was once encouraged as a bird feeder on Tiritiri Matangi when indigenous nectar sources for birds were being re-established.

This was confirmed during Awhitu Landcare's recent visit. According to guide and supporter of Tiritiri Matangi, Mary Anne, "Brush

Wattle did provide a quicker source of winter nectar, but was relegated to one area, since called Wattle Track. Now that nectar givers like Puriri, Harekeke and others have proliferated — boosted by a system of regular feeding stations, Brush Wattle is only tolerated in one area while seedlings appearing elsewhere are eliminated".

Indeed, we saw very few Wattle seedlings and almost all the mature specimens in the Wattle track bush area appear to be on their last legs.

So: tolerating some Brush Wattle (distinguished by its brush like yellow flowers) for the benefit of nectar feeders, like Tui and Waxeye, in winter does make sense value, especially while other indigenous species like Kowhai become established. But restricting their spread is essential until such time as they become swamped by natives, as they will be.

Above image shows Brush Wattle (brown pods) struggling to compete with natives on Tiritiri Matangi.

New device helps prevent bird suicide

Several contributors to the Kereru News Website report on methods to prevent Ti, Ti Kouka or Wood Pigeons from slamming into windows. Tuis and (locally) Rosellas do the same. Hanging old

computer discs (reflector side out) inside or outside can help. But a more permanent, less makeshift, solution is offered by translucent film only birds can see available from: www.windowalert.com

Birthday dream comes true

15 years ago the thought that Awhitu residents would be celebrating changes in land use awareness and practice was certainly just a dream. But on Saturday night (21 March) the unbelievable happened and Awhitu Landcare celebrated 15 years of success.

The cake decoration put it best "A Fruitful 15 Years". On hand at the Awhitu Central Club (once the school) were 60 regular Landcare volunteers and a healthy smattering of invited guests — Mayor Mark Ball, ARC Councillor Dianne Glen, Andrew and Louise from Whakauopo Landcare group, ARC's Shona Myers, plus keynote speaker Helen Moodie — Landcare Trust Northern Regional Coordinator. Helen was among old friends being one of the local group's founders.

Helen began by reminding all present that APL (Awhitu Landcare Group) was her's and New Zealand's first Landcare Group and is still regarded as a model for others, certainly in its ability to work with the interests of others like local iwi.

Helen covered a few forgotten facts, like: APL had sprung from a local suggestion that "farmers should fence off waterways and plant the banks!" And that, back then, it was realized

"...only the people who open and shut the gates everyday can really make a difference to land management."

Helen went further in applauding APL's continuing forest health monitoring, it's possum control programme and it's high rate of native plantings. All achieved without suffering the 'burnout' organizations dependent on a handful of regulars often suffer.

Her address concluded with her naming the work of Charmaine Pountney as worthy of special mention, which was universally applauded. At which point current APL Convenor Anna McNaughton rose to present Charmaine with a special award and a native tree sapling. Past convenors too received a tree each in recognition for their effort. Local nibbles (including rabbit and venison) prepared by Liz La Sorsa were then consumed with relish as the memory-fest began.

It was a night to remember 15 years from now.

Below left: Landcare stalwarts listening to Helen Moodie. Below right: Charmaine Pountney (right) receiving a special recognition award from Helen Moodie, NZ Landcare Trust Northern Regional Coordinator.



Return to Tiritiri Matangi

The 'return' in the title of this piece is in reference to the experience of stepping on shore of the Waitemata's Tiritiri Matangi Island — like going back to the New Zealand bush of 500 years ago. For all 25 Awhitu Landcarers (plus a few ring-ins) present, it was a magical revelation.

Of course it could not have happened without careful planning on the part of Kate Fegan — still a bit miffed at missing out due to prior commitments. But after just over an hour by comfy ferry from downtown Auckland, we found ourselves almost surrounded by scores of familiar and unfamiliar avian fauna. While Tieke (Saddlebacks), Tui, Korimako (Bellbirds), Hihi (Stitchbirds), Kakariki (Parakeet) and Mohoua (Whiteheads) hopped, scrapped and screamed overhead - no sight of the Kokako (Blue Wattle Crow) — Takahe calmly strode out of our path. Toutouwai (North Island Robin) was glimpsed too, while Maataka (Fern Bird) were heard twittering nearby.

All the result of total pest eradication and planting (over 280,000 trees) since 1984. Mostly by volunteers like ourselves. Volunteers continue to act as guides (three accompanied our group) on the island while others do much of the ongoing

work in cooperation with DOC. Nor is the project complete: while we unpacked our picnic lunches at the foot of the 20 metres tall Tiritiri Lighthouse (first ensuring no Takahe were present to snatch a snack) 22 tiny Rifleman (Titipounamu) flew in by helicopter.

Getting around was easy on the well-formed tracks and boardwalks leading in almost every direction.

Of course the views back toward the mainland were stunning. Plenty of photo-ops too were offered to by the frequency of bird feeding stations throughout the island. Beside the plethora of feathered species, equally astonishing was the height and density of native regrowth, as was the discovery our dreaded Brush Wattle is officially 'tolerated' over there. Which led to an interesting discussion (see story 'What to do about Wattle').

With so much to view and do (swimming included) it was almost a relief reboarding the ferry home. In short: highly recommended.

Below left to right, a Takahe pair, a Tui, and a North Island Robin — Tiritiri inhabitants captured by the quick camera of Awhitu's Raewyn McConnell.





Mako Point ramble

Our preliminary walk for the year started mid-morning, Sunday 25 January, at the Ritchie homestead in Orua Bay (built 1860's and now owned by Jock and Julia Patterson.)

The purpose was to take advantage of David Jamison's offer to allow us to walk across his Orua Views Farms property to Big Bay via the base of Mako Point.

David and family have owned this large spread (now comprising several previous dairy farms) since the 1980's and have put a lot of time, cash and effort into turning into one of Peninsula's largest.

The inimitable David Craig (who

else?) led the charge of the 30 Landcarer's and ring-ins in attendance. Our first couple of kilometres largely followed the farm's ridge-top race, but on reaching Big Bay stream (Ranaki creek) we descended beside Alex Rae's macadamias to the beach. Another 2 kilometers return around Mako Point bought us back to Patterson's and the sizzle of BBQ and 'clink' of cold refreshments.

All agreed, it was perfect weather in which to get up close with a rarely seen slice of the Peninsula.

Many thanks to David and Felicity Jamison, Julia, Jane and Jock Patterson.

Birds no longer flights of fancy

From Hamilton Rd, sighting of both Kakariki (possibly the second or third Parakeet sighting in same location) and a Kookaburra on Feb 23 (could have been escaping the Aussie bush fires, although several small shipments were liberated in New Zealand between 1866 and 1880).

From Matakawau, a Bellbird (Korimako) visited the Hall/School area in late December '08.

One of the last records of a Bellbird here was at Orua Bay over two weeks in December 2000.

On Frances Reid's wetland — Bittern (Waimatuku). Other wetland owners are reporting similar sightings, including Ron Peake at Waipipi Bird Park.

Such occurrences indicate a possible resurgence of that secretive species thanks to the proliferation of wetland restoration projects.

Ron further reports on a lone female Kaka, which took up residence to at his bird park for five months last year.

It nested and laid a single egg which failed to hatch.

Read your name here too by reporting usual bird sightings to Kate on 235 1616. We are particularly interested in Kaka nesting activity. Photos most welcome.

Meeting on managing mangroves

Recent visitors to Awhitu's Featon Avenue boat ramp and the mouth of the Kauritutahi stream will have noticed that a strip of mangroves has been cut down alongside the path between the boat ramp and the beach, leaving sharp stumps sticking out of the mud.

Apparently those responsible said "they were improving visibility for parents of children swimming in the stream."

Whatever their motive, what they did is illegal — they could be liable for fines of up to \$20,000.

The felling of mature mangroves in this way creates the following problems:

•First, cutting mangroves down and leaving stumps sticking up creates a major hazard for swimmers and

boaties when the stumps are covered by water

•Secondly, mangroves are an important part of estuary ecosystems.

They provide breeding and feeding areas for several native fish and bird species. They also protect stream margins from erosion.

•Thirdly, mangroves filter pollution leaching from surrounding land. If they are removed chemical and silt run-off goes straight into the streams and harbour.

•Fourth, cutting coastal mangroves down will not prevent regrowth.

Many local residents are concerned about the excessive growth of mangroves in this estuary (as are people all around the Manukau).

Many are also

concerned about individuals making random attacks on mangroves in an unplanned and illegal way.

While others have decided to consult the ARC about how best to deal with the situation.

ARC will provide a community liaison person to help local residents plan useful ways of managing mangroves in the estuary in future.

Should the community decide it wants a more extensive removal plan, members will need to work together to present a good case to the Auckland regional Council.

The next step would be to ask organizations like Awhitu Peninsula Landcare to help with funding applications.

Local experience is that cooperative com-

munity action is very effective — hence the 15-year success of the Awhitu Peninsula Landcare group.

A meeting for those interested will be held shortly.

Watch Peninsularama and local press for details.

Rabbits rise again

Our cute but corrupt pasture invaders took full advantage of our excellent spring summer breeding conditions to do what they are better at than most. Little wonder Jeff Brownlee has personally shot over 300 (plus a pair of stoats) in Wattle Bay and Roger Jones has put paid to another 100 more at least. Others among us are attempting to match these excellent tallies with trap, poison and gun. Rabbits make excellent dinner guests, especially when treated in the following manner:

Bunny Kirini

- 2 rabbits jointed
- Half-cup pesto
- seasoned flour (optional)
- juice of 1 or 2 lemons
- zest of one lemon
- dry white wine
- 1 onion chopped
- 3 rashers bacon
- 5 cloves garlic
- oil
- spuds chopped
- Squirt lemon juice over bunny bits.

Mix pesto with oil to make thikquid (thick liquid) and immerse/coat bun bits therewith. Stick back in fridge for a couple of hours.

Chop onion and bacon to about same size chunks. Add oil to large lidded skillet or casserole and sweat/fry both. Either remove or move to sides of dish.

Roll bun bits in flour if you prefer a thickish sauce at end otherwise...begin browning bare joints in same dish - perhaps adding oil as required. Don't use fierce heat and scrape off the bottom to avoid burning. Return buns, onions and bacon to dish and add remaining pesto/oil mix, lemon zest and crushed garlic cloves. Pour in white wine until you can see it under first layer of bun bits. Cover with layer of chopped spud and bring all to easy boil. Then, replace lid and reduce to simmer for about one hour or until spud is cooked but not mushy. When ready the meat should be firm but not falling off bone. Alternatively, cook until spud is mushy, when it will help thicken the sauce. (By then, too, meat should start flaking from bone.)

Or, for a firmer spud texture add-in half an hour after simmer has started.

What's on the Possum Menu Right Now?

March: Kohekohe, Pate (Five Finger), Mahoe (Whitey wood), Insects, Grasses, Fungi & Mushrooms.

April:Kohekohe, Insects, Grass, Tutu.

May: Pines, Tutu, Macrocapa, Grasses, Clover, Fungi, Insects, lizards & frogs.



Awhitu Landcare's Possum control programme has proved its worth in the RD4 area north of you. Now, our Pest Professional, Peter Nichols, is ready to extend the programme into RD3. Awhitu Landcare supplies bait stations or sets them up for you. Call Landcare helpers today to continue eradicating possums and rats. The result - more birds, blossoms and fruit and fewer TB carriers.

**FREE ADVICE! FREE BAIT STATIONS!
FREE TRAPS! FREE POISON BAIT!**

RING NOW! Kate: 2351616 kate@awhitu.org.nz
Ian: 2350851 kohekohestud@xtra.co.nz

A Community-wide Initiative - Your Call Gets Action!

Possum project reports good progress to date

The ECO FX team contracted to the Animal Health Board to clear possums in the TB zone from Karioitahi Road south to the Waikato River is progressing well.

2548 traps/nights yielded 2064 possums killed with a by-catch of 58 another proven bird predator and TB carrier — ferrets.

The follow-up with poison baits is currently underway, something dog owners in this area need to be aware of.

North of Karioitahi, pest control contractor Peter Nichol and team are clearing the RD3 coastal zone using green PESTOFF bait in preparation for a Residual Trapcatch Test (RTC) in April.

Awhitu Peninsula Landcare's Ian McNaughton

and Chris Hull have been delighted to recruit new 'bait station feeders' on the long established southern bait line.

The last RTC recording of only 4 possums caught per 100-trap/night set is reward for all the hard work to date.

New bait stations have also been installed on several properties and landowners filling their stations through early autumn are also able to report a great reduction in rats.

These rodents are usually packing their bags in anticipation of taking-up winter quarters in roofs, cupboards, barns and, even, bedrooms.

Anyone needing bait need only call Kate at the Awhitu Information Centre on 235 1616.