

Welcome to Issue 30 of the newsletter of Awhitu Peninsula Landcare Inc. After a few bitingly cold days this morning carries with it a sunny warmth and the first kowhai flowers are glinting gold in the garden. Magic. We've not let winter slow us down and here we report on what we've been up to recently. A very special public thanks to Fred Lichtwark who generously gave his valuable time and knowledge to visit us last month. Fred's achievements are truly inspiring and it was a real pleasure to see so many people come along to hear his story.

AGM recaps good year

Our AGM formalities were brief and to the point. We reported on a successful year of planting, weeding, shadehouse work, public walks - and noted our appreciation for the bonds of friendship which are formed as we work together towards communal goals. As Convenor David Craig remarked: "the past year has been a year of consolidation of activities that we do best."

Your membership helps keep our work going

Landcare's membership fee remains at an affordable \$10. Your membership really does assist our efforts - the more members the Society has the more favourably our funding applications are viewed - so if you wish to support us in this practical way, please contact landcare@awhitu.org.nz.

What a difference a year makes!



This time last year, 40 or so Landcare volunteers were assembled at Waimatuku/Hamiltons Gap. The weather gods smiled and a couple of hours later, 4000 plants were in the ground and the process of repairing the huge sand blow was begun. A wet summer would give the Spinifex and Pingao plants the best possible start in such a harsh environment and by autumn the growth they had put on was impressive. More importantly they would be developing root systems that would anchor them strongly into the shifting sands - this is the West Coast after all.

Like expectant parents, we are all waiting with baited breath to see how they make it through the coming weeks until the huge seas and storms of winter have passed. Recent visitors to the coast will have been awed by the power of the westerly winds - making it difficult to even stand up at times.

Many birds have been dashed against the cliffs and their piti-

ful bodies strewn along the coastline. No doubt there will be losses amongst our planting too, (survival rates for dune plantings run between 50-80%) but it's not long till spring will be upon us and calmer times will prevail.

In addition to stabilising the sand blow, numerous comments have been made as to how much better "the Gap" looks these days. The new toilet block, signage and planting add greatly to this area and we can only hope these improvements continue. The next issue on the agenda must be a tidy up of the huge quantities of plastics and refuse that washes up on the beach. To this end we plan to have a beach clean up this spring when we hope you can join us and continue the great community effort to enhance this magical area. Details will be published closer to the time.
Above: Dune Plantings in Autumn . . . and, below, in Winter; root systems have established - they're hanging in there!



Keen interest in local harbour restoration

It was grand to be able to welcome 50 guests to the Awhitu School Pavilion on the last Sunday in June. We don't for a moment think they were there to listen to the formalities of our AGM, rather to hear our inspirational speaker, Fred Lichtwark from Whaingaroa (Raglan) Harbour Care. Fred didn't disappoint - he held the close attention of the audience for nearly an hour, with many questions following his presentation.

Fred described how our close neighbour, Raglan Harbour, has been transformed in a surprisingly short space of time (15 years) from a polluted waterway into the vibrant fishery and recreational area it is today. No miracles involved here, just a local community making its own decisions about what is good for their area.... followed with years of on-the-ground work by a dedicated core group which has proven beyond all doubt the worth of their approach.

Fred, a third generation farmer and fisherman, has led the project from the front - establishing trial plantings which dramatically demonstrated what an improvement they made to water quality. Local farmers, initially suspicious, gradually signed up to the initiative, and were amazed by the average 20% improvement it made to their bottom line - reduced stock losses in swamps and streams, savings made by not having to drain swamps or clean drains, improved pasture management, better animal health, less fertiliser usage. All this apart from the improved look of their land and the increase in biodiversity.

Fred and his team now grow 100,000 native plants a year at their community nursery and up until now have not been able to satisfy the demand from landowners. Plants, all grown from local seed, are supplied at \$3.50 per plant 'in the ground' and at this cost, the nursery is nearly self-funding - a perfect cycle.

The increase in numbers and types of aquatic species in the Harbour in recent years has been awesome. Whitebait are returning to protected streams and the fishing catch has increased from 1 fish every 18 hours to 1 in less than

2 hours.

Fred had some fascinating facts to share - such as one cockle can filter 200 litres of water over a 24-hour period - imagine that! And that there are more seahorses now in Raglan Harbour than anywhere else globally. And the fact that he has seen evidence to suggest that cabbage trees have an exceptional ability to remove leached heavy metals from the soil. (The capacity of some plants to metabolise contaminants in this way - phytoremediation - has been known about for centuries, but only studied scientifically in recent years.)

There is much we can learn from the Raglan successes, although the Manukau Harbour covers a significantly larger area and is greatly impacted by urban development. It has been heartening to learn of Franklin Local Board plans to provide programmes to improve the quality of the Harbour, and to establish a Manukau Harbour forum. Local Board members Jill Naysmith and Dan Lynch attended Fred's presentation and were keen to chat with him afterwards.

With the recent release (June 2011) of a major scientific review which concluded that the Kaipara Harbour is 'in significant environment decline', and 'facing an ecological crisis' - it is obvious that we Kiwis need to be proactive in managing our precious water environments much better than we have done in the recent past.

Awhitu Landcare is taking up the challenge to assist our local waterways with plans to establish a community shadehouse facility on the edge of the Matakawau Local Purpose Reserve. The aim is to be able to eco-source and grow on plants in much greater numbers than has been possible in the past, working from an easily accessible central site.

Below: Jill Naysmith was keen to seek Fred's advice

Bottom left: There are more seahorses in Raglan Harbour than anywhere else in the World!

Bottom right: Amazing aquatic variety in Raglan Harbour. Thanks to Fred for letting us use of his Raglan photos

