



Welcome to Issue 34 of EnviroNews, the newsletter of Awhitu Peninsula Landcare.

We have been eagerly awaiting 2013, now only a few days away. This will be a landmark year in the group's 19-year history, with a move to our purpose-built community plant nursery facilities at Matakawau.

Do come and visit us in our new home. As we enjoy the outdoors during the long summer days, please be

kind to the precious environment that surrounds us and gives us life. After all, as Marcus Aurelius observed in 164 A.D.: "That which is not good for the beehive cannot be good for the bees". We humans just seem to be taking a very long time learning that lesson!

Best wishes for the holiday season from all at Landcare, and grateful thanks to all who have fostered environmental care this year.

Oystercatchers on harbour beaches

The remote Manukau Heads bays are home to a pair of Variable Oystercatchers, who have lived here for many years. This year they are incubating two eggs - in the past three years their eggs have been destroyed, so let's hope they have more success this year. Variable Oystercatchers mate for life, and can live nearly 30 years.

Two species of Oystercatcher are seen on the Awhitu Peninsula - the Pied Oystercatcher or South Island Pied Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*); and the Variable (*Haematopus unicolor*) - which, as its common name suggests, varies in colour from black to black and white.

The Pied Oystercatcher is by far the more common of the two. About 46cm long, with a black back, head and chest and white underparts. A characteristic white kidney-shaped "tab" of white extends upwards in front of the folded wing. The bill is long, bright red-orange, the legs dull pink. In flight, a white wing bar can be seen; the border between black chest and belly is sharply defined. Breeding is mainly in the South Island. Most migrate north after breeding, with up to 30,000 birds

inhabiting the Manukau Harbour between April and September.

The Variable Oystercatcher, classified as rare, is 2cm longer than the Pied, and heavier; the colouring is more black, with no white tab. Markings are not as "clean cut" as the Pied; more "smudgy". Interestingly, the percentage of black increases with latitude. In the north of the North Island, about 43% of Variable Oystercatchers are all black; the remainder have some white markings. In the south of the South Island, 94% are all black. These birds do not migrate, and appear to inhabit the same territory all year. Both parents incubate 2 or 3 eggs in a 'scrape on the beach' for about 4 weeks.

Chicks leave the nest two days after hatching - they are difficult to see, being adept at hiding under rocks or driftwood. Parents feed the chicks for three weeks, and protect them as much as they are able to, luring predators away by pretending to have a broken wing.

Below: Long time Manukau Heads Residents - the pair of Variable Oystercatchers



Keeping our birds alive

If you are on a beach this summer which has nesting birds, you can help keep them alive, and the next generation thriving.

- Please stay out of roped-off areas and keep dogs and vehicles away
- Please move away from the area quickly - birds will not return to incubate until you have gone and eggs can overheat or become chilled quickly
- If you are a dog owner, please keep your dogs on a leash
- If you are a cat owner near a nesting site, keep your cat well-fed and inside at night

Right: Tyre marks criss-cross endangered dotterel site at Wattle Bay



Pest control pays off!



For the first time we know of, endangered NZ dotterel are nesting on the Awhitu Peninsula - at Wattle Bay. A great cause for celebration.

This small shorebird is greatly threatened by predation and habitat loss. Only 1700 birds remain in the wild, and unless we actively help dotterel to breed, survival of the species is in danger. Community involvement is an important part of their recovery.

Unfortunately, people, their pets and vehicles also pose a major danger to these little birds. As dotterel lay well-camouflaged eggs just above high tide mark in a mere scrape in the sand, they can be extremely difficult to spot.

Dotterel will not go near their eggs while people are present - meaning that unincubated eggs can overheat or

become chilled quickly. To make survival even more of a challenge, chicks (looking like 'bumble bees on legs') have to find all their own food as soon as they hatch.

Young chicks can die from exhaustion or starvation when disturbed, as they cannot reach their feeding grounds at the water's edge.

Quick action by Wattle Bay residents has seen the Awhitu nesting area identified - initially two eggs laid, now three. However, the birds and their eggs are far from safe - eggs take up to a month to hatch, with chicks taking another 6-7 weeks to fly. In the meantime they have to cope with all the perils summertime on a public beach brings. Anxious times!

Above: Dotterel parents and eggs

The benefits of a quiet rural walk at Awhitu

Please go Walking! The Matakawau Scenic Reserve walk (entrance 150m down Matakawau Road, behind Awhitu school) has been given a tidy-up by Waiuku College students at the Year 10 Camp as their Community Service for

you to enjoy. This is a very pleasant shady walk amongst native trees; especially welcoming on a hot, sunny day. Even though the walk is not far from the road, it's amazingly peaceful. Just the place for some quiet reflection.

Recycle, recycle!

For visitors to the Peninsula, a reminder about the Awhitu Recycling Centre, 500m down Matakawau Road - takes paper and cardboard, glass bottles, aluminium and steel cans, but no plastics, no window or windscreen glass.