

Enviro News



Awhitu Peninsula
Landcare Inc

Welcome to Issue 37 of Enviro News, our Awhitu Peninsula Landcare newsletter. As we enjoy the outdoors this summer, please be kind to the precious environment that surrounds us and gives us life. Our country is blessed with incredible natural values, but much is under

threat - especially our waterways - and every action we take, however small, is important. Many hands really do make a difference. Warm wishes for your holiday season from Awhitu Landcare, and grateful thanks to all who have fostered environmental care this year.

Gentle giant needs our protection

Our native wood pigeon or Kereru is one of our most loved birds, appearing so gentle and trusting.

The Kereru has an important job helping the spread of native trees. Since the moa became extinct the native pigeon is the only seed disperser with a beak big enough to swallow large fruit, such as those of karama, tawa and taraira.

Long-lived birds, Kereru breed slowly. Key breeding signals are spectacular flight displays performed mainly by territorial males in early summer. Nest-making is not one of this bird's greatest skills! They throw together a flimsy nest of twigs and lay a single egg, which takes 28 days to hatch. Both parents take turns to sit on the egg.

The chick grows rapidly, leaving the nest when about 40 days old. It is fed a protein-rich milky secretion from the walls of

the parents' crops, mixed with fruit pulp. When much fruit is available, some pairs of Kereru will have a large chick in one nest and be incubating an egg in another nearby. Fledglings spend at least two weeks with their parents before becoming independent.

Unfortunately, due to slow breeding, predators and accidents, Kereru numbers are not increasing as much as we would like. Possums and rats love eggs and chicks, and many Kereru are injured or killed each year by flying into windows.

You can help these lovely birds by vigilant pest control, using cat collars, and by putting reflective decals on your windows (available from: <http://www.projectkereru.org.nz>).

Below: Kereru feeding its chick a 'fruit smoothie.' *Courtesy Nga Manu Images.*



Possum Control project extends



It has been a full-on year for the Awhitu Peninsula possum control team as they work to keep pest numbers low.

Our possum control project started in 2007, with contractors setting up bait stations over much of the peninsula, working to clear out possum populations from top to bottom. This concentrated effort resulted in an ideal - below 3% - population count (down from 20%!). Inevitably, over the years, numbers have crept up, particularly in rugged, difficult-to-access areas.

Research proves that possum numbers need to be at or below 3%, with accompanying rodent control, to allow successful breeding for our native birds such as tui and kereru. (The brodifacoum bait used to fill stations has the useful side effect of keeping rat numbers down.)

Our aim is to clear out possum population 'hotspots', keeping our peninsula full of tui song and swooping kereru. It takes concentrated, and ongoing, effort. We have been able to enlist local contractors for both ends of the peninsula, with Neil Bray of Summit Pest Control taking over the southern

barrier baitline, after Peter Nichol's retirement. In rugged country at the top end of the Peninsula, where 'hotspots' have been identified, Peter Shepherd has been busy improving baitlines, filling bait stations and running the feratox (cyanide) drops which pick up any bait-shy pest stragglers. The feratox operations are run with great precision and care - all residents in treatment zones are contacted and the considerable accompanying paperwork completed and approved by necessary authorities prior to commencement.

An independent contractor runs regular tests to establish the success of the programme. As always, the many locals who set Timms traps, fill bait stations, and notify us of pest sightings are vital to ongoing success. If there is an area where possums are allowed to flourish, they soon spread out, infecting 'clean' areas.

We endeavour to keep good supplies of free bait, bait stations, and traps available - contact us if you need any or all of these.

Pictured above: a possum devours a kereru egg. *Courtesy Nga Manu Images.*

Sand Dunes are life savers

Sand dunes protect coastal communities from coastal erosion and flooding, and nurture both plant and animal life. Dunes are formed when dry sand is blown up the beach and trapped by native sand binding plants. The plants then grow through the trapped sand, increasing the height of the dune and becoming a natural barrier between land and sea.

The greater the width of the dunes, the greater the reservoir of sand available to provide protection from storm waves. Any activity that damages these important sand binding plants can stop dunes from rebuilding and can lead to increased erosion.

Unfortunately, vehicles are causing increasing damage to coastal dunes, endangering nesting shore birds, and creating safety concerns for other beach users.

This vehicular destruction can happen in just a few hours compared to the many years dunes take to build up naturally.

Vehicles also compact the sand, changing the conditions needed for sand binding grasses to grow. The loss of plant cover, as well as the physical changes to the sands, makes dunes more

vulnerable to wind erosion and 'blow-outs' - where the dune gives way and sand is blown inland. We urge visitors over summer to respect the beach, the fragile dune environment, the animals living there, and other beachgoers.

Below: Protective dunes are easily destroyed by vehicles



Unitary Plan to Stop Tree Harvesting?

Approximately one third of the Awhitu Peninsula has been designated an area of Outstanding Natural Landscape (ONL) - and we can all agree it is a pretty special place with ruggedly scenic hills and amazing views to the wild coastlines. As an area of ONL however, landowners are subject to many restrictions on their permitted activities that could have serious implications for farming their land. One restriction is on the amount of forestry planting for harvesting that is allowed - limited to only 2 hectares per property before a resource consent is required. This provision limits even the planting of 'timber' trees - without defining the species involved - does it include Kauri? Rimu? Totara?

The steep hills of the peninsula may be scenic but they are also erosion prone and many would consider them to be prime can-

didates for retirement from grazing. Some forestry may be the best solution for this land and this could then provide an income that enables farmers to carry out more environmental work. It also provides for massive amounts of carbon sequestration - something essential for future climate change mitigation.

Whilst no-one wants to see our neighbourhood become another Woodhill forest, maybe the Council should consider this repressive restriction more closely? If you have an opinion on these matters make your voice heard - it will be many years before change is possible once proposals become final.

The Auckland Council Unitary Plan is open for submissions to 28 February so if you want to have a say on the rules we will soon have to abide by - get your skates on! Go to www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz to find out more.