



Great news as nesters sighted

A pair of variable oystercatchers AND a pair of dotterels have been sighted this month nesting on a Peninsula beach, well south of their recent reported nesting areas (on northernmost Awhitu beaches).

Both dotterels and variable oystercatchers lay their eggs in a scrape in the sand, commonly among shells and driftwood just above the high tide mark. Because these are so hard to see, nests are often crushed by people, vehicles, horses or stock. Although both species of birds are feisty parents — leading ground predators, including humans, away with various tactics including faking a broken wing, they can't overcome careless humans or animal predators

such as loose dogs or wild cats.

Variable oystercatchers in particular are real characters which live in the same territory year round, rarely divorce and can live an impressive 27 years.

Please, please take care as you enjoy your beaches this summer.

Below: Caption needed!

We have a \$25 book token (kindly donated) for the writer of the BEST CAPTION for this photo of a pair of variable oystercatchers.

Answers emailed or mailed to Landcare — address details bottom of page. Entries judged during January 2011, winner advised by the end of the month. Don't forget to give us your contact details!



Please lend a hand to help young plants

Summer releasing / weeding dates are:

Sunday 13th February 10.00am at Craig Reserve

Sunday 27th February 10.00am at Awhitu Central Reserve

Pampas or toetoe?



For many months of the year huge numbers of fluffy flower spikes rising out of tall grasses are a feature along our roadsides. Unfortunately, most of the plants we see are pampas — South American intruders which are pests in NZ, banned from propagation or sale but spread easily by wind blown seed.

One plant can produce over a million seeds so it is a serious threat to our sensitive sand dunes, stream-banks, coastal cliffs and bush.

There is much confusion between the pest pampas and our four species of native toetoe, a close relative (all Cortaderia species). Many people have told us

that they have avoided using herbicides on plants for fear of killing the wrong plant.

Main flowering times are Sep-Jan for native toetoe, and late Jan-late May for pest pampas.

Flower spikes can remain long after flowering time, and change colour as they age, so probably the easiest year-round method of identifying the pest pampas when plants are young is that the leaves on the pest will snap readily when pulled (wear gloves to do this test!), unlike those of the native toetoe.

As plants get older, a giveaway for identifying the pest pampas is that the dead leaves around the

base of the plant form tight curls like wood shavings; dead native toetoe leaves droop but do not spiral.

Pampas grass can be dug up when small or sprayed with herbicide such as glyphosate plus a penetrant or Haloxypop (Grazon). It should not be burnt as it can pose a serious fire risk.

One native species — Cortaderia splendens — is particularly well suited to our dry coastal conditions, and folk who have room on their land (plants can grow up to 6 metres tall) are encouraged to plant these stunning grasses.

Above: Flowering native toetoe makes an impressive showing

The year that was...

Celebration and reflection are the watchwords at this time of year as 2010 draws to a close and we look out to 2011. For Landcare, the year has been marked by both success and struggle.

Possum control — the combined efforts of our community in controlling possums has been fruitful and the reduction in pest numbers has been widely praised. Hot spots still exist however and we need to remain very vigilant to prevent a 'breakout' of the remaining critters.

Nature abhors a vacuum and our newly flourishing bush is just ripe for the picking by any hangers-on. The battle continues....

Revegetation — our regular gang of volunteers has manned the shadehouse potting benches throughout the year, providing a steady stream of healthy plants for revegetation work.

Community planting — three new projects began this year. The first is the dune planting of 5,000 spinifex / pingao at Hamiltons Gap/Waimatuku.

With fencing erected to reduce foot/vehicle damage, we are all interested to see how this progresses in such a difficult site. Awhitu Central Reserve and the Craig Reserve were the other two larger plantings that began and will continue with more planting in the forthcoming years. These sites will be wonderful assets on the Peninsula in years to come.

Dune Stabilisation — the marram plantings have done well despite the dry summer and the additional establishment of native species has begun in established

blocks.

It is satisfying to know that we have this weapon in the fight against the sand blows that threaten our landscape and livelihoods.

Field Trips — we held two very well attended walks this year at either ends of the Peninsula — at Easter to the Erickson/Brackmont properties and on Labour Day to the Rutherford/ Atchinson properties in Irwins Gap.

Landcare office — is still running! The office is our 'front window' to many

residents and visitors and is a resource many take advantage of. It is the stopping point for people who seek information not only about Awhitu Peninsula Landcare, but also about the services and businesses on the Peninsula.

We have managed to run on the smell of

an oily rag for many years but with the economy faltering it seems that the smell is getting fainter by the month.

Next year will be challenging for our organisation — many grants that enable us to function are either shrinking or disappearing altogether.

Conversely, the work that we are involved in is actually increasing as awareness of the problems that our environment faces continue to grow.

As a group we can only plan for this increased workload and hope that you as a community will continue to provide the support that we cherish so much.

Inset: Successful dune stabilisation with marram and native plantings.



Tactics in the Possum War

Some 'on the ground' tips to aid those of us faithfully siting / refilling bait stations:

- Possum numbers are highest near bush edges as they like having easy access to good quality pasture
- Possums only smell bait once they are within five metres of it
- Possums remember if they have visited a station which has old / mouldy bait, and unless they are very hungry they will

not visit again.... UNLESS

• We do something extra to attract them — such as a flour blaze up the trunk of the tree as a visual lure after fresh bait has been added to the station

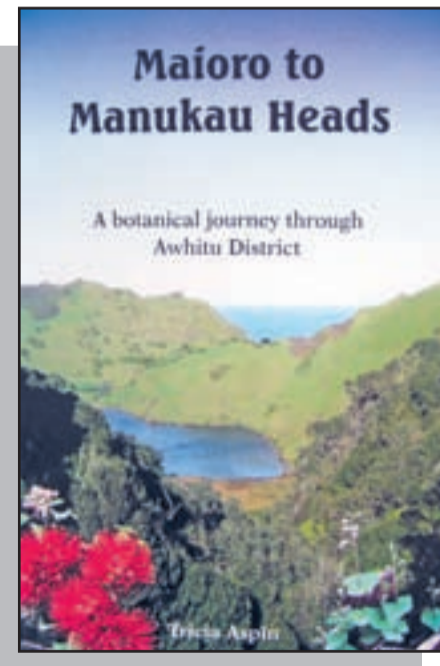
Flour blaze recipe: 10 parts flour / 1 part icing sugar / sufficient oil to mix (cinnamon oil from chemist works well)

For possum bait enquiries, please phone lan on 09 235 0851.

Maioro to Manukau Heads

A worthwhile book for anyone with an interest in the Awhitu environment.

Tricia Aspin, environmental award winner, has produced this account of biological life in the Awhitu ecological district. Includes geology and history, noteworthy trees and a catalogue of native plants. Photographs are supplemented with sketches and watercolours by local artist, Stella Christoffersen. Available from Awhitu Peninsula Landcare, email landcare@awhиту.org.nz, or email Tricia direct on aspin@ps.gen.nz.



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Office location: Immediately north of to Bhana's Petrol station at Matakawau

Membership: Only \$10 for the year to 31 May

Our office will close at 2pm on Wed 22 December, reopening Mon 10 January 2011