



Welcome to issue 33 of EnviroNews, the newsletter of Awhitu Peninsula Landcare. It's Spring! Time to put away the woollies, head outside and feel the inevitable lift of spirits the warming sunshine brings...

Right: kowhai blossom in bloom.



## Labour Weekend walk



It's almost time for the Labour Weekend Walk over McNaughten's Sandhills at Kelland Rd, Waipipi. Our thanks to Murray for writing this preview...

Kelland Road is an extension of Creamery Road, which after passing the Waipipi Hall, Bowling Club and School commences the climb into the hills past mature stands of native bush. Kelland Road continues to climb, crosses Kohekohe-Karioitahi Road, becomes a narrow lane for a further kilometre, and ends just below where the old Rutherford Homestead (recently relocated to Awhitu) used to stand.

Murray and Ros McNaughten's property is just a little further on and cars will be directed up the hill for parking. The walk will start by taking in the views across the Manukau and Auckland while noting the recently covenanted wetland below us: first stop will be the highest point on the farm, only about 800 metres from the start and reached via an easy climb. Here we will give due respect to the nearby Urupa. If we are lucky we should be able to look across to Moehau at the northern end of Coromandel. We should see Karioi at Raglan and of course the Waitakeres and Hunuas. If we are really lucky we may see Mt Egmont (Taranaki).

We will then head toward the coastal cliffs taking in views of the variety of landforms shaped by the wind. Along the cliff tops going from North to South we'll see where several different methods have been successfully used to heal sand blows, including plantings done by Awhitu Landcare teams.

About 40 hectares (100 acres) of the most fragile land and extensive areas of native plants have been retired from

farming. Tricia Aspin and botanists from Auckland University have identified the species. And copies of that list will be available for those who want to examine the flora closely.

A kilometre of coastal cliff tops will be traversed, all of which have been fenced off, offering opportunities to look back to Pukeroa (mussel) rock and the Manukau bar. Karioitahi is 7 kilometres to the South. Before turning back inland toward the start point keen botanists may want to descent into a hidden canyon. Others may elect to just peer over the edge.

14 years ago the property was in a rundown state with no fences, water supply or yards. An extensive fencing programme continues as management becomes more intensive, contract grazing dairy calves and heifers as well as beef. Fencing is the key to both stock management and conservation.

In a rapidly changing world environment, farm management will need to be increasingly flexible. Other income streams have to be considered. Carbon sequestration in sandy soils could enhance their stability and productivity. As most farmers would say, "If we can generate income, the possibilities for good conservation work are much greater".

Starting at 2pm on Sunday 28th October the planned walk is about 4 kilometres with opportunities to short cut back to cars. There will also be opportunities for fit, keen participants to go further.... Participants should wear sturdy footwear and clothing capable of protecting against strong wind. Bring sunblock, drink and a willingness to crawl under two wire fences.

## An eye-catching visitor

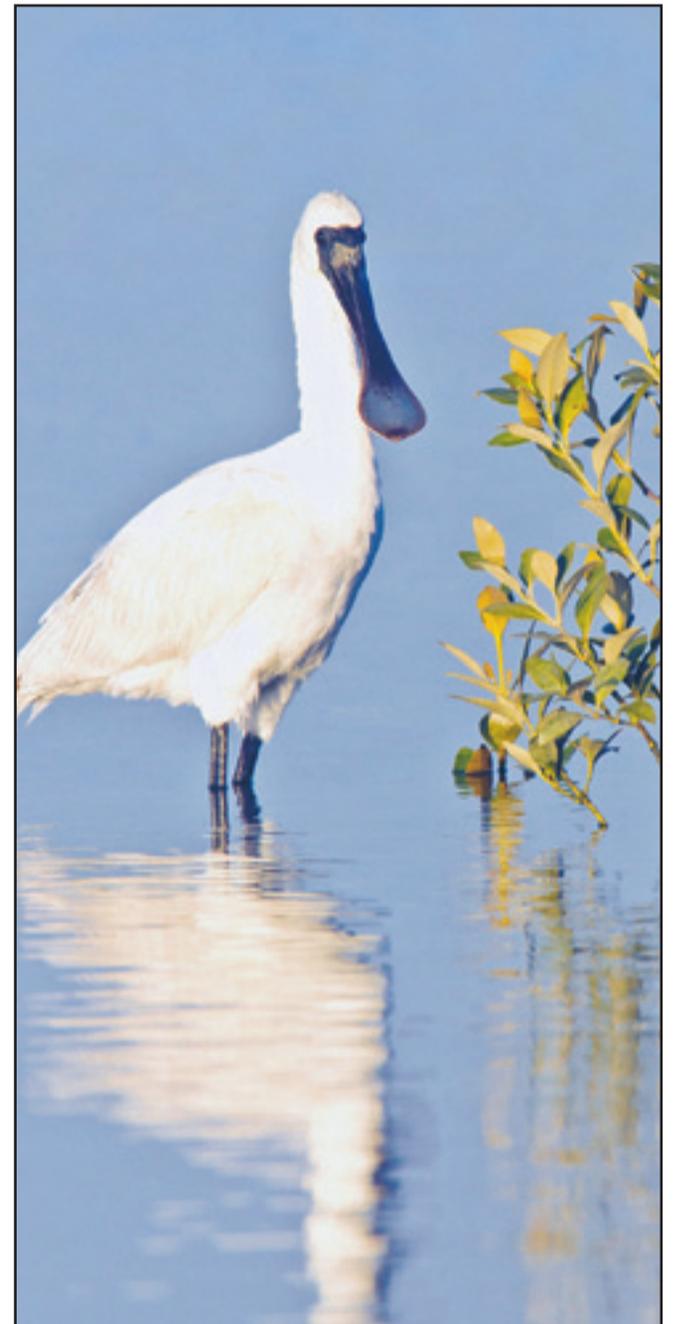
The Royal Spoonbill (*Platalea regia*), known as the kotuku-ngutupapa to Maori, is a tall (77cm) bird with white plumage and long black legs and a black, spoon-shaped bill. Over each eye is a small yellow patch and in the centre of its forehead is a small red spot.

It introduced itself from Australia in 1861 and since then has prospered in both islands of NZ from Invercargill to Parengarenga.

Breeding was first observed at Okarito in 1949 and since then it has bred at Vernon Lagoons in Marlborough ('78), islands off Otago ('84 & '88), Invercargill Estuary ('93) Parengarenga ('93) and Kapiti ('94). Nesting at Puketutu Island on the Manukau has been expected, but has not yet, I think, taken place. Nesting sites vary from tall trees to on-the-ground to on low scrub. 2-4 eggs are laid and both sexes incubate for 20-25 days. The spoonbills are highly sensitive to any disturbance during this time and in Australia whole colonies have been known to desert their eggs after a minor upset.

After breeding, in the autumn, birds disperse, most migrating northwards, those which visit the Manukau Harbour arriving in April and leaving for the breeding sites again in September.

On the Manukau Harbour, most birds are seen around Puketutu Island, Mangere, but they also are seen on the east side of the Awhitu Peninsula. There is usually a flock of about 24 birds roosting on the reef on Tokaroa Point, opposite Clark's Beach.



These birds feed in the Ohiku Creek - Rangiriri Creek area.

They were there on 10 August. Also on that date a flock of 9 birds were feeding off Kauritutahi Creek. Feeding is in shallow water, by walking slowly forward, sweeping the slightly open bill from side to side. Food is fish, invertebrates and, in fresh water wetlands,

frogs. On 25 September 2009, I watched a flock of 53 birds feeding along Waiuku Sandspit just before high water (3.6m) catching a good feed of yellow-eyed mullet up to 100mm long.

Article thanks to Ted Kitching, retired mariner, ornithologist... and hardworking Mudlark! Pic: the magnificent Royal Spoonbill.

## The continuation of the battle against possums...

Control of these Aussie invaders continues to be our single biggest activity, and the majority of landowners are very supportive, having witnessed the huge improvements in plant and bird life that our dedicated possum control programme has delivered.

Regular control across the 'southern barrier' baitline at the foot of the Peninsula is proving extremely effective, keeping possum numbers in

the lower third of the Peninsula well down.

We have now set up a similar, regularly-attended baitline in the top third of the Peninsula, as this area has the most difficult to access land - tracts of forests and extremely steep cliffs.

There are a few pockets of land where it is difficult to achieve good control, and regrettably these areas can become entrenched breeding grounds from which possums

spread out into neighbouring properties.

Landcare will never access land without permission.

Continuation of the possum control programme is dependent on monitor results being kept at a low percentage.

This has been creeping up recently and Landcare are most keen to assist any landowners who wish to join the programme, or would like help to achieve good pest control on their land.

The programme is a self help one - we supply free bait and advice, or loan Timms traps on a deposit-paid scheme, (or you can buy at a discounted price). The bait used is not 1080, it is brodifacoum, the active ingredient in both Pestoff and Talon.

At the moment it is the only weapon available to us for widespread possum control, and proper use (always in a bait station out of reach of stock) poses low risk.

Whilst we would all prefer

not to have to use any bait at all, at the moment it is either this method, or watch our precious plant and birdlife increasingly at risk.

This would be heartbreaking after the dramatic improvements made to our environment in the past decade.

Many thanks to all those who take a hand in ridding our environment of possums.

Spring is definitely the time to be taking action out there... so let's do it!