



Forest & Bird

GIVING NATURE A VOICE

Horowhenua Branch

February 2012 Newsletter



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GOOD NEWS FROM BUSHY PARK

In August 2011 our branch visited Bushy Park at Kai Iwi and were very impressed with the bird-life within the new predator free fence especially those Saddlebacks that we heard just as we approached the homestead. Well here is news of plans to introduce another species the Hihi or Stitchbird.

The Hihi or Stitchbird is an endangered species that was formerly widespread across the North Island, but which declined rapidly following European colonization and the inadvertent introduction of rats and other predators in the 1800s. It eventually became restricted to a single population offshore on Little Barrier Island. Since then it has been introduced to other off shore and some mainland sanctuaries with varying success. If successful, the introduction to Bushy Park will help achieve one of the goals of the species recovery programme, to have a minimum of five self-sustaining populations.

I have seen Hihi on Kapiti Island and in Zealandia and it would be wonderful to be able to eventually see them at Bushy Park as well.

North Island robin and tieke/saddleback have already been successfully introduced to Bushy Park, and Allan is hopeful that the same can be achieved with hihi.

The challenges are somewhat different, however, as among others: hihi are more

specialised feeders on nectar, fruit and insects, for which resources they compete with bellbirds, tui and silvereyes (but which could be alleviated through supplementary feeding).



Unlike other birds the hihi build their nests in tree cavities. The nest is complex with a stick base topped with a nest cup of finer twigs and lined with fern scales, lichen and spider web.

Recent DNA analysis has shown that hihi are in fact the sole representative of another bird family found only in NZ whose closest relatives may be the iconic wattlebirds that include kokako, saddleback and the extinct huia.

Stitchbirds are very active and call frequently. Their most common call, a tzit,tzit sound, is believed to be the source of their common name.

A LOVELY END TO A BUSY YEAR

A large group of our branch members gathered at our chairperson's place North of Levin to celebrate a successful year with a pot luck luncheon.

We sat in the shade on the deck overlooking a wide expanse of lawn with a border of shrubs and just relaxed and chatted prior to eating. Some went over to the nearby fence to meet, feed and pat the milking goats in the next paddock

The weather was perfect, the food delicious and the company convivial. After eating Debbie showed us the milking shed where she milks her goats and then converts some of this milk into her own Feta cheese.

We had already sampled the cheese as part of the luncheon and some of us were able to take some home to enjoy.

Many thanks to Debbie for her wonderful hospitality.
Margarette



Debbie said that these are mostly Saanen and Toggenburg goats which they milk so that they can drink healthy milk and make feta cheese for themselves and their friends! Annie is the goat closest to the camera in the photo.



-Happiness is sharing a bowl of cherries and a book of poetry with a shade tree. He doesn't eat much and doesn't read much, but listens well and is a most gracious host.

~Terri Guillemets

The group of us who enjoyed the Christmas Pot Luck Lunch

Booth's Wetland

If you are travelling North of Otaki look left as you approach Forest Lakes and you will see a rare gem of a privately owned wetland spanning the area between Highway One and the Railway line.

Graham Booth, one of our members, approached Geoff Monk in 2011 to see if the very keen bird watching section of our Horowhenua Branch would like to visit his newly established 12ha wetland with the view to doing regular bird monitoring sessions there --much the same as we do at Te Hakari at Kuku.

When Graham and his wife Pat purchased the land from a neighbour, 12 years previously, the land had been drained for use as pasture and after considerable research he came up with a plan to change what was 'marginal pasture' back to wetland. This involved resource consents, major earthworks a great amount of skill and a considerable investment of money. He was even lucky enough to obtain the services of the digger operator who had drained the wetland for his predecessor.

Once the earthworks were finished in 2002 the water level gradually rose creating a shallow lake with a number of islands, the largest of which is 50m long.



Photo by Mavis Hirini



Photos by Lena Berger

energy, eco-house built by Graham himself. The couple told us about the property which is completely independent of the grid, having 2 wind turbines, 6 solar panels a separate solar hot water system on the roof plus a wetback on the wood burner.

We were all fascinated by the wormerator outside the toilet that collects the human waste directly from the toilet and also acts as a compost bin as all of the kitchen scraps are put out in it. With the help of worms this all composts down and the end product may in the future be spread around trees.

It was then down the track to the wetland and along to the well situated hide to see the abundant birdlife. We spent the next hour or so looking through our binoculars at the birds and many were taking photos as well.

All were keen to return to do some regular bird counting sessions and we will report on these in future newsletters.

Margarette



The Wormerator

DID YOU KNOW?

Earina mucronata Spring orchid

This endemic, epiphytic orchid is the most common of the New Zealand perching orchids.

It is found in many lowland forests, often in huge grassy-looking mats covering branches and trunks. Each stem carries many tiny flowers in drooping clusters in spring. The flowers are creamy yellow, less than a centimetre across, with oval petals and sepals and an orange labellum.

It is mostly insect pollinated and has a very light perfume. Look out for it in open bush alongside tracks.



Photo by Geoff Monk

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Photo by Geoff Monk

We would like to thank the Eastern & Central Community Trust for their grant which is enabling us to produce our newsletter in colour.



A relaxed start to 2012

On a beautiful evening in January a large group of members travelled North of Foxton to Leita Chrystall's home to look around her extensive garden and to share a meal together.

Firstly Ian escorted us around the side of the house to show us the smallest plant in the world called *Wolffia*. It is covering the disused swimming pool and the frogs that also inhabit the pool jump out onto the edge when it's sunny and the plant gradually slides off them. Then Leita led us on a garden tour, in and out of the shrubbery to show us her fantastic collection of plants. The first interesting one was a huge Ombu, a tree-like herb that comes from Africa. Leita grew it from a cutting taken from a tree in Palmerston North 30 years ago.

We continued on to see some rare and some common plants each with their own story about where they came from and Leita remembers the name of them all!

After the walk we sat out on the extensive lawn in the sun, enjoyed a meal together and caught up with

Forest and Bird branch events to come early in the New Year.

Margarette



Brazilian Coral Tree--
Crista-galli, one of
the many trees and
plants in Leita's
garden.