

April 2011

## Chairman's message

I was impressed with our President Barry Wards' editorial "*Making a difference*" in the February magazine. He asked what



difference we were making to the protection and preservation of New Zealand's indigenous flora and fauna and natural places, as individuals, as a branch, and as Forest & Bird as a whole. The degradation of the natural world he saw on his train trips into Wellington prompted his reflection.

Certainly our Society is "giving nature a voice" nationally, by, among other things, supporting children's education through Kiwi Conservation Club, by lobbying central and local government on important issues, and by raising awareness of our wonderful natural heritage through campaigns and through publication of our high-class magazine.

Many of you as members are doing your bit, perhaps by controlling pests in an area of land you have, by volunteering in a conservation project, or by sponsoring a grandchild's membership of KCC. Simply by being a member you have made a difference.

I believe Waitakere as a Branch is making a positive difference. It supports the Society's premier restoration project 'Ark in the Park' chaired by John Sumich and carried out by enthusiastic bands of

volunteers. We are maintaining and improving the natural values of Matuku Reserve, one of the Society's largest. Kent Xie together with committee members Michael and Raewyn have successfully begun a long term project protecting Traherne Island from predators. Jointly with Central Auckland branch on behalf of the Society we have made major submissions to the Board of Enquiry on the environmental effects of the future widening of the North-western motorway and have advocated mitigation measures.

We are active in environmental education. Children learn through KCC activities organised by Glenys Mather and her helpers, older members enjoy the very informative speakers at evening meetings, and the general public are made aware of conservation issues by Chris Bindon at the many stalls he and his helpers run. Our recent Waitangi Day Wetland Walk attracted nearly 300 people, young and old, to enjoy and learn about the importance of preserving wild wetlands.

I'm sure we can do even better, especially with members' help. We are grateful for all the support you can offer.

I particularly liked another statement by the President: "We are inextricably linked to wilderness and protecting its remnants defines who we are as a nation. If we take away wilderness and take away the voice of nature, we diminish the opportunity to be New Zealanders."

*John Staniland, Branch Chair*

# World Wetlands Day 2011

The 2nd of February 2011 marked the fortieth Anniversary of the signing of the Ramsar Convention for the Protection of Wetlands. This international treaty was signed by 160 countries, including New Zealand, to facilitate the protection of wetlands around the world. Since 1971, New Zealand has designated seven sites as Wetlands of International Importance.



The anniversary of the signing of the Ramsar Convention is celebrated as World Wetlands Day. In Auckland, Wetlands Day 2011 was held at Matuku Reserve, Te Henga on Waitangi Day. The event was hosted by Forest and Bird Waitakere Branch who own Matuku Reserve, a 120 hectare property which includes part of the Te Henga Wetland. The event was supported by the National Wetland Trust of New Zealand, Auckland Council, Ducks Unlimited and Waitakere Rivercare.



The generosity of a local landowner allowed access to the south-eastern portion of Matuku Reserve through private land. A newly formed walkway following an historic tramway allowed people to explore the edge of the wetland, mostly keeping their feet dry! A highlight of the walk was the many informative signs that had been erected by Forest and Bird stalwart John Staniland. These gems of knowledge provided information about native trees, weeds, and the history of the tramway. The walk led to the only remaining piece of railway iron along the route, and an old log chute (now largely overgrown and filled in) where kauri were once slid down to the wagons for transport to the mill.

An estimated 300 people enjoyed the event. People of all ages and nationalities participated, from pre-

## How can you help to protect wetlands?

- Fence off ponds, lakes, and boggy areas from stock and allow native plants to flourish.
- Plant tall native trees to shade the water of ponds and lakes.
- Conduct pest control around the perimeter to improve the condition of existing wetlands.
- Provide stock with a trough for drinking water rather than allowing access to streams and ponds.
- Never move plants, fish or other organisms between water bodies. This is how pests are spread.
- Join a local care group that looks after streams and wetlands.
- Support organisations that protect wetlands such as Forest and Bird, National Wetland Trust of New Zealand, and Ducks Unlimited.

schoolers to international travellers. After the walk, they enjoyed the opportunity to learn more about wetlands and how to protect them, with hands-on displays and activities provided by the supporting organisations. The Waitakere Rivercare photo display attracted much interest as it showed the transformation of some parts of the wetland edge through the native plantings it had carried out

which were now maturing. Many of the children present enjoyed viewing the stuffed stoat and ferret, the aquarium with pest fish *Gambusia*, and the operation of a stoat trap, set up by the Auckland Council Biosecurity section, which was (safely) set off accompanied by many squeals of fright/delight.

Kristy Hall

## Plant focus: Kohekohe

By John Staniland

Kohekohe (*Dysoxylum spectabile*) is one of New Zealand's most beautiful and lush trees, growing best in warmer coastal areas of the North Island and the north of the South Island. It is a member of the *Meliaceae*, a family of eighty genera and about 800 species of trees and shrubs, found mainly in tropical America and tropical Asia. This family includes the various species of mahogany. There are about 150 species of its genus *Dysoxylum*, with our one endemic to New Zealand, that is, found nowhere else.

Some say the generic name alludes to the bitter substance in the leaves, but in Greek *Dysoxylum* means "Bad wood". Its Latin specific name *spectabile* means "worth seeing, remarkable", and it surely is, growing up to 15m tall with a broad spreading canopy, and with large tropical-looking pinnate leaves made up of 5 to 9 leaflets along a stalk with one large leaflet at the tip.

The white waxy tubular flowers appear during autumn to early winter (March to June in Auckland) on long streamers, called panicles, which can be up to 60 cm in some cases, springing directly from the branches and the trunk. This is a tropical feature quite unlike other NZ trees which have flowers near the leaves. The flowers are slightly scented and contain a reasonable amount of nectar attractive to birds, but insects including nocturnal moths could also be pollinators.



The fruit takes nearly a year to develop and is also very interesting. It is ripe during April and May (in Auckland) and consists of round green seed capsules, like small figs, about 3 cm in diameter, that split open to reveal up to four bright orange fleshy fruits. Each of these fruits can have one, two or sometimes three seeds in it. The orange fruits are very popular with birds and tend to be eaten as soon as the seed capsule opens. Kohekohe is important in our coastally influenced forests because it provides nectar and fruits at a leaner time of year.



*Photo montage showing leaves, flowers and fruit*

It is curious that it was only recently, in the 1990s, that kohekohe was found to be dioecious, which means male and female flowers are on separate trees (from the Greek meaning “two houses”). It is understandable though, because the differences in

the flowers can only be seen with a powerful hand lens. Very rarely a tree can be hermaphrodite. I have the impression that male trees are much more abundant than female, but enough seeds germinate in damp places to ensure the survival of the species. This lovely tree will not thrive however where possums and rats are in high numbers. Possums strip the flowers and leaves, often killing it, and rats devour the fruits. It can be seen as an indicator species of forest health: reasonable numbers of seedlings in suitable sites indicate good pest control. After the major possum knock-down by Operation ForestSave in the Waitakeres in the late 90s, many people commented on the extensive flowering not seen before.

In our Matuku Reserve there are old trees with trunks more than one metre in diameter, and there is a notable grove around a boardwalk on Tiritiri Matangi Island. Pukekohe means the hill where this tree grows, but is there much kohekohe left growing on the puke?

## **Bird focus: Tomtit or Miromiro** *Petroica macrocephala*

The third in our series on birds is the North Island tomtit or miromiro. The tomtit belongs to the Australasian robin family and the species name *macrocephala* means large-headed. They are found only in New Zealand and are widespread and locally common.

Adult male tomtits have a black head, upper chest, back and wings with a white belly, wing-bar and tail-bar. They often ‘flash’ the small white spot above the bill in encounters with humans and other species. Females and juveniles have a brownish head and upperparts.

Tomtits feed mainly on invertebrates, finding their food in the forest understorey. They are a common bird in the Ark in the Park where they are found both deep in the bush and around the forest edges.

The males have a very characteristic song which is written as ‘ti oly oly oly oh’ or ‘diddely, diddely, diddely’.



*Male tomtit*



*Juvenile tomtit*

Tomtit pairs tend to remain in their territories all year round. They nest between September and February and can raise up to three broods. They usually lay four eggs which are then incubated by

the female for 16 days. The young stay in the nest for a further 18 days.



*Male tomtit showing white wing-bar*

The tomtit photographs were taken on Little Barrier Island by Kay Milton and John Stewart.

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## News from Ark in the Park

### *Take a bow, Karen!*

Recently Karen Colgan retired after years as the Volunteer Coordinator for Ark in the Park, itself a voluntary position. Shortly after the restoration project commenced, Karen took up the post with enthusiasm and dedication. Karen is a very focussed and hard working person, and has admirably made best use of her people-skills when organising volunteers into many various tasks. These have included stoat trapping lines, Saturday or Sunday morning rat baiting rosters (a very big task), rat monitoring lines, weed control teams, hihi feeder rosters, and the list goes on and on. This has demanded many hours of her time each week, not only turning up early to set up groups to do the tasks, but also in computer time, sending out details of the next day's mission and liaising with so many people to make sure the jobs are done. Such was her and her husband Maurice's commitment that they were jointly honoured a few years ago with Forest & Bird's prestigious "Old Blue" award.

As well as this, Karen has shown great personal interest in, and dedication to, the robin

translocation programme and particularly in nest finding and monitoring in the early years, which has led to this species becoming stable and more common in the Ark. Many think of the robin as "Karen's bird".

The Ark triumphs the importance of volunteer effort, and all volunteers have contributed to the progress of the project. But all would agree that the Ark in the Park would not be the success it is without Karen's dedication and positive attitude. When she started, the Ark was much smaller than it is today. It has grown to such a size and complexity that it is time for a break, and to hand over the role to Phil Lodge who has recently been employed as the Coordinator, and whom we welcome to the position. We are pleased that Karen will continue to support the Ark as a "foot soldier".

All Ark volunteers, together with the robins, thank you, Karen!

### *Long standing Ark volunteers honoured*

Last year the Branch awarded Certificates of Appreciation to long standing and hard working Ark volunteers Cheryl Tapp and Grant Capill. This

year at an awards ceremony at a Branch evening meeting it was the turn of the following stalwarts:

**Adnan Demir**, extremely faithful volunteer, present at almost all workdays, epitomising all that is good about volunteering. Active in baiting, monitoring of rats, invertebrates, frogs.

**Heidrun Schinke**, superb work on and detailed analysis of robins around the Auckland City Walk.

**Dee & David Lloyd**, Dee for the important task of feeding volunteers at work days, David for construction of hardware for the Ark: stoat boxes, hihi feeding cages, cat trap boxes.

**Eric Wilson**, for his dedication to bird monitoring using his electronic expertise: infra-red triggered cameras for monitoring hihi, extensive recording and analysis of kokako calls, and superb photos of translocated species.

## ***‘Concert for the Birds’ — A date for your diary***

Our fifth annual **“Concert for the Birds”** is to be presented at the traditional comfortable venue, Glen Eden Playhouse Theatre, on **Friday 17 June** at 7.30 pm. For the last two years this variety concert has enjoyed a packed house, and this year promises the same, as the guest artist is well known successful singer and actor **Jennifer Ward-Lealand**. Ever-popular **“Show West”** will perform, and the show will begin with bird calls played by **Riki Bennett** on exquisite traditional Maori instruments.

Together with supporting artists.

All proceeds to the Ark in the Park.

**Tickets:** \$25 adult, \$20 unwaged, \$10 child.

**Bookings:** [www.iticket.co.nz](http://www.iticket.co.nz) or phone 361 1000. Book early to be sure of a seat.

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## **Obituaries**

### **Bill Beveridge**

In January this year the most famous of all the Waitakere Rangers died at the age of 86. Bill Beveridge was renowned for his amazingly detailed knowledge of the Ranges and his ability to recall historic spots in remote places. In his time as Head Ranger he was responsible for the development of the Arataki Nature Trail and the Information Centre. He was such a practical man, helping found the Friends of Arataki, raising funds, designing and building seats and tables which were erected on tracks throughout the Ranges.

He organised many tree plantings in the park and was involved in creating some features of the Bush Camp at Arataki. It was Bill's idea to have an educational and fun Kid's Day there each year. Among other awards, Bill was awarded the QSM in 2002 for his services to the public. This year the "Beveridge Track" will be opened, connecting Exhibition Drive with the Arataki Visitor Centre.

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### **Professor John Morton**

A great scientist and friend of the environment died in early March at the age of 87. John Morton was the first professor of Zoology at the University of Auckland and helped establish the Leigh Marine Laboratory. He co-wrote with Miller the standard and enduring textbook on the NZ coast and followed it with other volumes. He was a brilliant teacher, illustrating his lectures by unforgettable drawings and zany demonstrations, becoming one of the University's best known personalities. He believed in humanising complex scientific issues, making them understandable in plain laymen's language. With wide interests, he involved himself in everything from molluscs to the shortcomings of Auckland's public transport which he used every day going to the university.

He was a leading figure in the conservation battles of the 1970s and 1980s. He wrote on the need to save the remaining few percent of kauri left of the original extent. He played a key part in the national and high profile campaign to stop the logging of Whirinaki Forest, the best remaining piece of

lowland podocarp forest in NZ, being also a contributor to the book “To Save a Forest”.

Forest & Bird has reason to be grateful to him also. When the Society was in the doldrums in the late 1970s, going nowhere and held back by a timid attitude, we elected John, together with Dr Alan Mark, onto the Executive. Both of them gave us heart to challenge the government of the day and gave further scientific basis to the fight to preserve untouched natural places.

John Morton had strong Christian beliefs and was involved in theological debate in the Church. He wrote “Man, Science and God” and other theological books. He said when retiring in 1988: “I find that my scientific work has confirmed my Christian convictions. To me biology and theology complement each other.”

A few years ago Peter Maddison and I visited John at his home to award him a Certificate of Appreciation from this branch for the work he had done advocating for protection of our part of the wild west coast. He had written with typical eloquence of our west coast as being a place of “Odyssean surge and thunder”. We will miss an environmental battler, but are grateful for his legacy.

John Staniland.

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## Field trips

For field trips please wear strong, non-slip shoes or boots and bring rainwear, jersey, lunch (for full day trips) and a drink. Trips are usually held wet or fine, but if in doubt phone Glenys for confirmation.

**Please note bookings are essential for all trips.**

Book with Glenys on 832-6238 or [glenys.mather@gmail.com](mailto:glenys.mather@gmail.com)

***Saturday 14 May 2011***

### **Lake Wainamu**

Another short, but fascinating walk to this dune lake where the margins support spinifex, pingao, marram, pampas and coastal toetoe and pipits are

commonly seen. There is a pleasant walk around the side of the lake to a picnic spot by the Waitohi Falls at the head of the lake where wetland plants and birds abound.

Time: 10am – 2pm

Meet: at the car park beside the bridge 1 km from Bethells Beach.

**There will be no trips in June or July.**

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## Evening meetings

These are held at the Kelston Community Centre on the corner of Great North Road and Awaroa Road, starting at 7:30 pm and feature illustrated talks. Refreshments are provided and donations towards the cost of hiring the hall are appreciated. Please note that the June meeting will be held at Te Atatu and the July meeting is not on our usual Thursday evening slot.

***Thursday, 21st April 2011***

John Sumich will give a talk entitled ‘When the red heart has gangrene’.



Australia’s arid zone is sere and desiccated, right? Our trip in spring 2010 though, led to an understanding of how this ecosystem works and can support a wealth of flora and fauna.

***Thursday, 19th May 2011***

Our brief AGM will be at 7pm, preceding tonight’s talk.

Chrissie Painting will talk about her study of giraffe weevils at our Matuku reserve. Her title is 'Does extreme size variation in the giraffe weevil drive the evolution of alternative reproductive tactics?'



Giraffe weevils are New Zealand's longest beetle, and are also highly size variable within each sex. In particular the size variation in males (16 mm to 90 mm body length) becomes interesting when considering how the smallest males are able to compete with larger males for access to females for reproduction.

Males possess an elongated rostrum which is often used as a weapon during combat with other male competitors, but small males will have a disadvantage when faced with larger competitors. Chrissie will discuss her research on giraffe weevil behaviour and how the elongated rostrum and size variation within males may have driven the evolution of alternative reproductive tactics.

## 2011 AGM

Our 2011 AGM will take place before the evening meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> May at 7pm in the Kelston Community Centre. All are welcome to attend though only members may vote. Please come along and help to elect your committee.

### *Thursday, 16th June 2011*

Karen Baird will give a talk on the Kermadics where the surrounding waters are 'one of the last pristine oceans on the planet'.

This meeting will take place in the Activity Room, Te Atatu Community Centre, 595 Te Atatu Road (parking is off Pringle Road).

### *Wednesday, 6th July 2011*

Nicola Vallance will give an illustrated talk about Forest and Bird's on-going campaign to save the McKenzie country.

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## Tai Haruru Lodge, Piha

The Branch's Tai Haruru Lodge is a seaside haven set in a large sheltered garden on the rugged West Coast, 38 km on sealed roads from central Auckland. Close to a store, bush reserves and tracks in the beautiful Waitakere Ranges. There is one double bedroom and one bedroom sleeping three, plus a large lounge with wood burner, dining area and kitchen. A self-contained unit has four single beds. Bring food, linen and fuel for the fire and barbecue. Off peak rates apply. To book contact Jean and Peter King, 10 La Trobe Track, Karekare, Waitakere City. Tel: (09) 812 8064.

Email: [hop0018@slingshot.co.nz](mailto:hop0018@slingshot.co.nz)

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