

An active branch

Waitakere Branch is one of nearly fifty Society branches in the country. Through a subcommittee we run the 'Ark in the Park', one of the largest restoration projects of any kind in New Zealand. Having been involved for the seven years of its existence, I am still amazed at the dedication and enthusiasm of the scores of volunteers that make this programme work, and at the vision of the people who organise the sections they are responsible for. You and they can be proud that the Ark has such credibility that it can be entrusted with an endangered bird species such as kokako.

Your branch also maintains Matuku Reserve, the second largest of the 30 forest reserves the Society owns and the only one with an extensive wetland. Some improvements in access to the wetland edge are being planned and we will keep you informed as things develop. I encourage you this spring and summer to visit and be delighted by it as many visitors have, according to their comments on the visitor sheet at the cabin. Elsewhere in this newsletter are directions to the reserve.

'Tai Haruru', our lodge at Piha, is maintained by an energetic subcommittee at a very high standard for the use of members at a very reasonable tariff. It is comfortably appointed and in a warm sheltered position close to the beach and I recommend it as a pleasant place to stay. Booking details are given at the end of this newsletter.

The branch programme of evening meetings on the third Thursday of each month has proved especially popular these last two years, such that we have moved to a larger and more comfortable room within the Kelston Community Centre. The topics are often to do with wildlife and habitats, and are well illustrated. A subcommittee organises an interesting and well-attended Kiwi Conservation Club programme for children, support of which is a high priority for us.

Take advantage of what your branch offers, and keep warm this winter!

John Staniland, Branch Chair

Another Packed House for 'Concert for the Birds'

Our restoration project 'Ark in the Park' has benefited by over \$5000 from our concert in June which was booked out yet again!

This was our fourth variety concert held at the Glen Eden Playhouse Theatre, and it was very well enjoyed by all with lots of positive comments. *Concert for the Birds* is now certainly part of the local arts scene and the word is getting around!



The star performer was eminent soprano Patricia Wright who thrilled all with her beautiful and professional presentation of several solo pieces. A special mention must also be made of Judy King who accompanied Patricia and most other performers including the ever popular Show West Singers and Yuko Takahashi, all of whom have supported us by performing at all four concerts. A new and well received performer this year was Iranian pianist and composer Kamran Khodaverdian. It was also good to support young performers Julia Blazey, Reuben Goetz-Wyllie, and the Jubate group.

Thanks to Karen Staniland, the programme organiser, advertising person and stage manager on the night, without whom the event could not have happened, ably supported by Maj de Poorter, Karen Colgan and Rosemary Stagg. John Staniland was once again the incomparable compere.

Many thanks to our major sponsors: Montana Wines, Bush and Beach, and Morrison Funeral Directors. Geoff

Davidson (Oratia Native Plant Nursery) again donated plants.

Many people contributed to the setting up including John Sumich who managed signs, Louis Segedin, of Rocket Kitchen, with Rosemary and Karen were the caterers.

An army of volunteers were there on the night. Yvonne Vaneveld was front of house manager. At the bar were Rosemary Stagg, Judi Simpson, Jeanne Watrin, Chris Bindon, Sam Cowper, and Karen Colgan. Kathy Chandler and Alison Third collected tickets. Heidrun Schinke, Fiona and Grant Drummond were usherettes. Jenny Jenkin and Lesley Hartig kept the performers stocked with food and drinks. Patrick and Helen ran Help the Kokako. Sharon Osman and Klaus directed parking, and Margaret Bol and Raewyn Michael sold raffle tickets with John Sumich a very effective 'affle scout'.

The money raised will be spent on purchasing aerals and electronic gear to receive signals from transmitters placed on further kokako to be brought to the Ark next season.

Next year's concert for your diary: Friday 17 June 2011.

Our latest recruit



The photo is of Moby, one of two Kokako from Tiritiri Matangi recently released at the Ark, who is spending most of his time in the patch of bush between the golf course and Auckland City Walk, often within transmitter distance of the Ranger Station, and usually accompanied by Punga, who was released at the same time. Thanks to Eric Wilson, who managed to get close enough to catch him on camera.

Old Blue award for Chris Bindon



The branch is very pleased that one of our Society's top honours, the "Old Blue Award" has been given to committee member Chris Bindon.

This award is named after Old Blue, a female Chatham Island black robin which in the 1970s saved this species from extinction. The black robin (a separate species from our North Island robin) was then the world's rarest bird, but after a successful programme of cross-fostering her eggs into the nests of Chatham Island warblers Old Blue became the ancestor of over a hundred birds, taking the species off the critically endangered list. So famous was she that her eventual death was announced in parliament and on the BBC World Service.

Chris Bindon has been a committee member of Waitakere Branch for 21 years from 1989. Simultaneously, he has been on the Kaipara Branch committee for 6 years since 2004 when he helped it to 'bud off' from our branch.

Chris has brilliantly filled two main leadership roles on the Waitakere committee. Firstly, for many years he has been on the Tai Haruru Lodge (Piha) subcommittee carrying out practical maintenance and administration of this asset for members, and source of funds for conservation projects. In the last two years he has been the committee's chair, and under his leadership the lodge has further improved its facilities and standard.

Secondly, as chair of the Membership and Events subcommittee, Chris has for years shown a passionate energy and ability in educating people in conservation matters, as well as in promoting the Society and gaining membership of Forest & Bird at an amazing number of stalls, often every weekend, such as at local farmers' markets, A&P shows, Eco days, Bioblitz, etc. A major reason for our branch's stability in numbers of members is Chris' diligent efforts promoting the benefit of membership at so many events.

Kaipara Branch Chairperson, Suzi Phillips, says of Chris: "He has been a pivotal member of our Committee. Over the years he has also led or helped with many field

trips, and has been a stalwart at our F&B stalls at Helensville and Kumeu A&P Shows. We have relied heavily on Chris' enthusiasm and expertise to run these stalls and talk to the public about all aspects of Forest and Bird's conservation role, both locally and nationally. Chris has been a valued member over the years of our Committee ... though I know his influence is much longer and much wider than just our branch activities."

This mention of his wider activities refers to Chris' passionate interest in and promotion of our native plants and wildlife, in particular his extensive knowledge of native waterfowl and wetlands, and his practical work in their protection. For about 20 years he has been a prime mover in the Auckland chapter of 'Ducks Unlimited'. He has personally organised the construction and setting out of hundreds of nest boxes for Grey Teal in wetlands in Lower Northland, Auckland and Upper Waikato, as well

as their ongoing maintenance. One of the reasons for that species' improving numbers is Chris' dedication and passion. As well as this, for 6 years in the late 1990s he organised the annual Ornithological Society survey of Dabchick populations on the South Kaipara Lakes. He is always educating members and the public about waterfowl and the values of wetlands, and the night before opening day of the recent duck-shooting season he slept over at Tupare Wetland to ensure no hunters strayed too close! In his employment as a coordinator in the Twin Streams Project of Waitakere City, Chris has given dedication and energy to the massive task of replanting the banks of the Oratia Stream.

Waitakere Branch congratulates Chris on receiving this award, only six of which are given nationally each year. He joins a group of five others from the branch to also receive it.

Plant focus: *Hebe bishopiana*

By Michael Coote

Inevitable emergence of the Auckland 'Supercity' means that Waitakere City will disappear into a thing of the past. An opportunity missed by the vanishing city was to declare its one known uniquely endemic species of higher vascular plant – *Hebe bishopiana* – to be its official flower.

Hebe bishopiana was originally discovered by John Bishop in 1924 and finally recognised as a distinct species from 1982. Technically, the plant belongs to the 'Occlusae' subfamily of Hebes in not having a sinus, or small gap, present at the base of its young, unopened leaf buds.

Natural distribution of the plant is confined entirely to a small area of the Waitakere Ranges between Huia and Little Huia. Therein *Hebe bishopiana* is restricted to wet places on rocky volcanic outcrops. A good place to see it in the wild is along the walking track up to the trig station on top of the Northern head of the Manukau Harbour.

Hebe bishopiana is unmistakable in its natural habitat. It is a low, scrambling Hebe that interweaves itself with other plants around it. The leaves are long, shiny, and deep green. Most distinctive is that its new leaf buds and stems are maroon to wine purple in colouration. Other Hebe species grow alongside *Hebe bishopiana*, but none of them possesses this characteristic feature.

The flower heads are lengthy and conspicuous - mauve to begin with, fading into white as they age - and display a 'rat's tail' structure in that older blooms opened near the base are present with younger buds still developing at the tip.

Waitakere Forest and Bird members can honour *Hebe bishopiana* by planting it in their gardens. Specimens are available at the Oratia native plant nursery.



Photo by Tony Hayter of the Hebe Society (www.hebesoc.org)

For more information check the following texts.

Hebes: A Guide to Species, Hybrids, and Allied Genera, pp. 82-3, by Laurie Metcalf. Publ. Timber Press, Oregon USA, 2006.

An Illustrated Guide to New Zealand Hebes, pp. 184-5, by Michael Bayley and Alison Kellow. Publ. Te Papa Press, Wellington, New Zealand, 2006.

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Bird focus: matuku

We begin a new series of articles on birds and plants of topical interest with matuku – the Australasian Bittern. Of course matuku is also the name of our special bush and wetland reserve near Te Henga and Bethels Beach. The reserve is well-named as this shy, difficult to see bird, is a long term resident there and, by the time you read this, will be ‘booming’ frequently and easily heard.

The picture, taken by John Stewart, shows the bird in its ‘frozen’ posture, which usually makes it very difficult to spot among the dense beds of reeds and raupo which it favours as habitat. Their eyes are positioned so they can see all around while in this stance.

Bittern numbers are thought to have been declining through loss of habitat as wetlands are drained or ‘reclaimed’ and cattle are allowed to graze. In 1980, the estimated New Zealand population was just 580 to 750 birds, though this might have been an underestimate as matuku are difficult to see and are believed to use even small swamps which may not have been included in the census. Work is underway on a new estimate of the population.

Bitterns are large birds, about 70 cm long. The males weigh about 1.4 kg and females about 1 kg. They breed between September and February. The female builds a nest from broken reed stems hidden in dense stands of reeds and raupo. Three to five, but usually four, olive-brown eggs are laid which hatch after about 25 days. The chicks leave the nest after seven weeks during which time they are fed by the female only.

The most obvious sign of presence and breeding, and the only one most people are likely to notice, is the ‘booming’ call of the male, described as like a ‘muffled foghorn’ or ‘blowing across an open bottle top’. The males call to advertise their territory and attract a mate. They are said to be very aggressive towards other bitterns and will fight to protect their territory.

So, now is a particularly good time to visit Matuku reserve in search of this rare and exciting bird. We’d be delighted to hear from you if you manage to find one.



How to get to Matuku Reserve

After Swanson take right fork into Waitakere Road (not up Scenic Drive), up over hill, down past Waitakere village and turn left after passing over railway. Very shortly pass the school on the left, and very soon after take right fork into Wairere Road.

Drive about 5.5 km on Wairere, ignoring side roads until finally turning left into unsealed Jonkers Road. At one kilometre along this road go left into narrow Snows Lane at the Forest & Bird sign. One kilometre down this lane pass viewing platform and entrance, and reach car park 100 metres further on. There is space for about 10 cars.

Rare plants for rare fauna – news from Ark in the Park

Butterflies are an under-represented group of fauna in New Zealand, and no-one seems to know why. Our species number is low for our land area and worse, the indigenous species are becoming more rare. This latter fact though, is probably more explainable – the familiar consequence of the combined effects of exotic predators and loss of habitat. For over a century introduced wasps: German, Common, and then more recently various Paper Wasps, have been preying on butterfly larvae and other invertebrate prey. Less obviously to the casual

observer, various parasitic wasps, at least one of which was purposely introduced to combat the Cabbage White Butterfly, have also played their part. These parasitic species and also tachinid flies lay their eggs in the living butterfly larva, the body of which then nourishes the parasite. After pupation no butterfly emerges but one or many (depending on species) of the adult wasp or tachinid fly emerge. All in all our native butterflies face an uncertain future but as an expression of our interest in these most charismatic of invertebrates we recently held another release event. A low key affair this with no media or fanfare but yellow admiral butterflies raised and supplied by Angela Macgregor were taken out of their

cage where seemingly confused or just cold, they waited for a while on offered fingers, then flew off.



The butterfly release (photo by Robert Woolf).

While we wait for developments in control of primarily the vespulid wasps (German wasp & Common wasp) and will be very happy if such control becomes available to reduce the frequent stings our volunteers suffer, we are also progressing toward a butterfly haven.

An initial idea was to plant a sun-exposed but scrub and weed infested area in the middle of the Golf Course with butterfly friendly plants. Plants such as native broom for Blues, Muehlenbeckia for Coppers that would provide larval requirements and then other plants that would provide the nectar source for the adult butterflies. These would include manuka and hebes.

Expanding from that idea though, plant enthusiast Jeff McCauley suggested that the collection be not only of plants that were butterfly and other invertebrate friendly but also were rare or threatened plants of the Waitakere region.

Jeff McCauley and fellow plant propagator Murray Firth have both been growing on a large number of suitable plants. Murray is supplying over 400 of the necessary fillers: e.g. Gahnia, manuka, hebes, broom and lacebark while Jeff, who has a special interest in rare plants, has sourced seed from Waitakere specimens and is growing these on. Included here are various Pimelea, Scandia (native angelica), clematis, Geranium potentilla and Pomaderris amoena.

A further development has been that the Golf Club car park entry is being revised and the ARC planting of that area and an extension northward has been offered to us to plant our butterfly haven. This site is just as sunny and has advantages in that no weed clearing needs be done and access to remove any subsequent weed growth around the plants will be easier (and it's not in the line of fire of golfers!)

KCC Trip Report

The Saturday, July 17th trip into the valley below Kitewaho Rd on ARC land was wet and wonderful. Mike Siddens and Yvonne Vaneveld took us down a route they use to gain access to their pest control lines which leads down to the Cassel Stream. This route took us through to an amazing tram line cutting. While parts of the tram line have disappeared, it is possible to follow it all the way and exit at Tram Valley Rd in Swanson as Mike & Yvonne have done previously (we didn't on this occasion). They showed the children remnants of the old dam – a sill about two feet high with a water fall spilling over it. The mixed kauri forest is regenerating well. Large stumps of felled trees from 130+ years ago are visible with the tops many metres away, giving a good indication of the size of trees that were taken. Only the middle straight sections were actually milled thus leaving the stumps and branching top portions for posterity to ponder. For those who are interested in the time line of these historical artefacts the kauri dam was built around 1865 and was the highest in the Waitakere Ranges, it was 36 feet tall! The tram line was built in the 1880s about 20 years after the kauri dam and was used to transport sawn timber from a mill near the Scenic Drive/Te Henga intersection down to the Swanson Train Station area.

Get your branch newsletters by e-mail

The majority of our members receive a printed version of the Branch Newsletter via NZ Post. This is both expensive and not so good for the environment. If you have an e-mail address, and are willing to read the Newsletter on the Forest & Bird website (www.forestandbird.org.nz) rather than receive a paper copy, please let me know. Those of you that elect to read on line will be releasing more of our scarce funds for work protecting our birds and their habitats – and you'll be able to view the photographs in colour.

To switch to reading on line, please send me an e-mail with 'Online Newsletter' in the title. Then, each time a new edition of the Newsletter is available, I'll send you a brief e-mail to let you know. And, if you change your mind and want to go back to receiving a paper copy, you can e-mail me asking to switch back.

Thankyou

Janie Vaughan
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Field Trips

No trips are planned for July and August.

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

Saturday, 18th September 2010

Matuku Reserve Working Bee

John Staniland, honorary ranger and chairperson of our branch, has tasks that need doing on our wonderful reserve. Come with your gloves, hedge clippers and/or secateurs to give a hand.

Meet: at the reserve car park at the end of Snow's Lane

Time: 10am – 2pm (or as long a time as you can offer)

Saturday, 30th October 2010

Fernglen Gardens, Birkenhead

Come on a guided tour with John Staniland to this lovely reserve gifted by Muriel Fisher to the local Birkenhead Council in 1989. Fernglen includes a rock garden with alpine plant species, a fern house and much more. It is free for the public to visit. Further information including plant lists can be found at www.fernglen.co.nz/history.html

Meet: at 38 Kauri Rd. Birkenhead

Time: 10am Bring lunch if you would like to stay that long

Want to carpool?: contact Glenys

Saturday, 20th November 2010

Eaves Bush, Orewa

A visit to a mature kauri/podocarp forest (Eaves Bush) at the north end of Orewa. Nearby are also remnants of hard beech which reach their northern limit at this point. Spencer Drinkwater, an Orewa resident and member of F & B, will guide us around the reserve where he frequently works along with others.

Meet: at 26 Hillcrest Rd. (park on the road in a parking bay just beyond #26 if possible)

Time: 11am Bring lunch

Want to carpool?: contact Glenys

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

Evening Meetings

These are usually 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. If you need more

Thursday, 15th July 2010

Ken Catt, our former Secretary and a Life Member of Forest & Bird, recently returned from an 11 day Arctic cruise. Ken will give a presentation on Arctic wildlife and a historical commentary on a balloon attempt to reach the North Pole.

Thursday, 19th August 2010

John Staniland, John Sumich and Chris Bindon will talk about 'Pest Control for Small Landowners' and how we can make our properties free of predators.

Thursday, 16th September 2010

Kay Milton will describe how she and her husband John planned and created a new nature reserve on their Northern Irish smallholding and how the plants matured and the bird life changed over the next 18 years.

Thursday, 21st October 2010

Brian Chandler, a member of our Branch, will talk about the Galapagos Islands.

Thursday, 18th November 2010

Karen Baird of Forest & Bird will talk about the Kermadec Islands Marine Reserve.