
WAITAKERE FOREST AND BIRD NEWS



Forest
& Bird

Wai~o~te~Kauri

‘Stream where the Kauri grows’

November 2005 – February 2006



CO-CHAIRPERSON’S COMMENTS

Great news – the finding of at least four nesting pairs of robin and the fledging of at least seven chicks at the Cascades is testament to the hard work of the volunteers and to the dedicated team led by John Sumich in the Ark In The Park Project. Well done! This is part of the restoration work being done by individuals and groups throughout the Ranges – from Whatipu (with work concentrating on New Zealand dotterels) to Karekare-Piha (extensive predator control), Bethells Beach (sand dune restoration) and Matuku Reserve (led by John Staniland). This work is supported and complemented by the Auckland Regional Council – both the Parks and Biosecurity sections are involved in pest and weed control and habitat restoration.

From comments received from both residents and visitors, there does seem to be a noticeable increase in flowering of various plants, from Clematis to Rewarewa, and a greater number of birds. On two occasions recently I have received complaints about the excessively noisy and aggressive tui. The tui had its own back in being voted Forest and Bird’s Bird of the Year. Thank you to all involved in helping restore the Ranges. So - what is on the radar? Proposals are now well advanced for the possible introduction

of stitchbird and kokako – wouldn’t it be excellent to achieve the latter in the lifetime of Bill Beveridge, former ARC Chief Ranger in the Waitakeres, who remembers seeing kokako in his youth? The search is on to find out if there are any remaining Wood Rose in the Ranges – Chris Ecroyd of our Rotorua Branch has mastered the technology of growing this plant, which is a root parasite. Studies of the invertebrates at the Cascades are being made with the help of Karen Colgan and Kathy Chandler - these are showing some interesting trends – some groups like beetles seem to be increasing.

If you are interested in helping in any of the activities at the Cascades, please contact any member of our Committee. We are hoping to combine with Ornithological Society in a Bird Census Day. The recent Society Appeal is aimed at work supporting the Dawn Chorus – supporting the many and varied restoration projects that Forest and Bird members are involved in throughout the country. And John Sumich will, I am sure, be only too keen in explaining the Help-a-Hectare Fund that contributes to the work of Ark in the Park locally.

The environment and conservation may not have been a major issue for the General Election but I think we should make sure that they are on the Agenda for the Local Government elections in 2007. In ending can I remind you that the Branch and the KCC organize a range of field trips and evening talks – the details of these are in this newsletter – we hope you will join us.

Peter Maddison Branch Co-chair

ARK IN THE PARK

A Forest and Bird, Waitakere Branch "Auckland Naturally" project partnered by the Auckland Regional Council

KAKA CHORUS CONTINUES

What a bonus! A normal year will have 2–3 kaka visit for 2–3 weeks in early autumn but, as reported in the last newsletter, 7 kaka were present in our Ark area by early May. Incredibly, this number increased continuously and at one stage 13 kaka were present. Now, after many weeks, up to 16 kaka are still being seen. Resident ranger, Riki, jokingly complains of being woken each morning by their calls! Conservation Minister, Chris Carter, was a guest at the Ark at the beginning of Conservation Week (August 1–7, 2005) and early on the morning of his visit, the impressive dawn chorus of tui song was more than matched by the whistles and chortles of kaka wheeling around the slopes. Two volunteers are going to spend some time seeing whether this prolonged kaka presence will lead to any breeding attempts.

Robins a success

Our robins released in mid-April have been monitored to see how they fared. Uta Lungershausen searched for and studied their dispersal for the first 10 weeks, with her observations supplemented by those from rangers, volunteers, and the general public. Of the 53 released, at least 21 have been positively identified in the Ark area, with other reports coming in from as far away as Huia, some 20 km distant. One unidentified robin was also seen with delight at the Piha residence of ARC Parks Committee Chairperson, Sandra Coney. Some

of our volunteers who are fortunate to live close to the Ark's boundaries have also had visits from the releasees.

In the Ark area, robins have spread mainly east-west along the Waitakere stream, with little dispersal north or south beyond the slopes to other seemingly suitable habitat. Importantly, pairs established territories. Pre-breeding behaviours were observed such as females caching the mealworms thrown to them, on the tops of dead ponga ferns. Males were also observed chasing their partner away from such thrown mealworms, then pompously present the "hard won" trophies to the female!



With seven fledglings from four breeding pairs now confirmed, all looks good for the robins in the Ark. Two of those pairs are already on to second clutches. One pair has two eggs in their new nest, and the other pair has two chicks. These chicks are oblivious to the many walkers passing only two metres from their nest on the busiest track in the Waitakere ranges. Searching for other breeding pairs is ongoing. Matthew Dickerson from Seattle is spending some weeks at the Ark and volunteer Gina Obushkenova is also dedicating some midweek days. Rodent control is still being firmly maintained with all lines having minimal bait uptake so the threat from this major predator is minimal.

Take a bow

Here's to all our wonderful volunteers who have navigated through untracked bush, nailed bait stations to trees, and placed track markers and tapes. You have all helped us reach the 1000-hectare mark for pest control. The network of bait stations over this large area was laid since January 2003, and is the key to managing the predator threat to the Ark's wildlife. Our goal was to reach 1000 ha by the end of 2005 and we managed that by August. But, of course, we didn't stop there! By the time you read this it is expected that the area will be closer to 1100 hectares and will expand further by year's end. Although bait stations are our way of managing rats and any of the rare possums which may

venture near, stoat traps were also added along tracks and the ever-expanding perimeter. Over 120 sites now have these traps. Volunteers on the stoat roster will add more traps and keep all filled with alluring eggs or rabbit meat.

Anyone for kokako?

An Ark presentation to the Kokako Recovery Group's annual conference in May has led to the offer of an opportunity to translocate kokako in 2007. The Recovery Group indicated that at least 20 kokako would be transferred to establish any new breeding population and that because of genetic issues, birds would be sourced from two distinct populations. For the Ark, these would be groups from the Mangatutu and Mapara Forest populations.

"Peerless" volunteers

I imagine that's how a group of volunteers could be described after a whole afternoon of peering down microscopes. Their task, described by all as "an enjoyable experience", was to pre-sort the various invertebrates gathered from the pitfall traps used in our monitoring. The contents of traps—small plastic containers set at ground level in an array at the Cascades—were gathered at intervals over a year. Now was the time to see the results! Dr. Peter Maddison supervised the volunteers in his office, where five microscopes were put to work. Broad groups, such as beetles, spiders, and molluscs, were all sorted and counted. Peter then carried out a more complete and specific identification. Invertebrate numbers were indeed up compared with a year ago, with a spectacular increase in beetles. Large, black carnivorous carabid beetles, which are tasty morsels for rats, stoats, and hedgehogs, were especially prominent. These microscope sessions will be repeated at intervals. This activity is ideal for any volunteer who finds hiking along our bait lines too rigorous, so let us know if you're keen....

Volunteer Days

Remember, our volunteer days are the first and third Saturday of every month. Meet 9am at the Ranger's station.

Tramway centenary

This event over three weekends centred on Labour weekend. Volunteers manned a stand at Watercare's Christian Road Filter Station and another set of volunteers guided passengers at the Waitakere dam ride terminus. Over a thousand people were informed about the Ark project and our volunteers gained valuable experience in guiding. We hope to capitalise on this next year by offering a regular guided walk at the Cascades.

HELP-A-HECTARE

Don't forget that the Help-a-Hectare appeal is still operating and your support will count!

For details, see:

www.forestandbird.org.nz/arkinthePark/index.asp
Or contact John Sumich on: (09) 818 5267, or email cjnk@xtra.co.nz

Ark in the Park contacts

John Sumich Phone: 8185267
E-mail: cjnk@xtra.co.nz

Karen Colgan Phone: 837 0443
E-mail: mcolgan@netaccess.co.nz

We need your email Address

From time to time a number of urgent or interesting items arise which we distribute to members on e-mail. If you are on email but have not received any messages from Ken, such as the recent item on pollution of the West Coast Beaches, please advise him at kiwicatt@xtra.co.nz. Please also note that we can save postage by emailing the newsletter to you. If this is agreeable to you please advise Ken. Phone: 8346214 email: kiwicatt@xtra.co.nz

◆ *Prestigious award granted* ◆

The branch's founder and present deputy chairman, John Staniland, has been honoured with a Science Teacher's Fellowship for 2006 from the Royal Society of NZ. This means that he will be working for his host organisation, 'Ark in the Park', for the full year on his current salary.

His programme is to be involved in the proposed capture and release of the very rare hihi (stitchbird) from Tiritiri Matangi Island into the Ark's Cascades area, and then to monitor the birds' position, behaviour, feeding and eventual expected breeding there. This Waitakere site has a rich diversity of plant species to support the stitchbird, and intensive predator control will enable its survival. Some of the birds will initially have transmitters attached to help in locating them. While carrying this out, John will also be monitoring the status of the previously released whitehead and robin as well as taking a great interest in the success of the kaka that are living there.

After teaching his great interests of Latin, English and Classical Studies at Kelston Boys' High School for 35 years, John says he will relish the one year interlude and the opportunity to do another thing he loves- going bush.

The Royal Society of New Zealand's mission is to promote science, mathematics and technology and it is funded by the government to grant up to 60 fellowships each year.

Another Threat to Maui's Dolphin

A recent announcement has signalled a major threat to our beaches and fisheries, as well as to our marine species. A Chinese owned company has been given permission to commence iron sand mining survey off the Taranaki Coast and the Awhitu Peninsula. Reports in the Taranaki Daily News suggest that seabed mining could be as little as four or five months away. Iron Ore NZ, the company concerned, described a 400 square kilometres area off Waitara as a good quality vast resource.

One might ask what has all this got to do with the Auckland Region? Our beaches consist of sand that is carried northward up the coast. If there is huge sand extraction to the south our beaches will not be replenished and could be substantially damaged.

Awhitu Peninsula

Of particular danger is the proposal to sand mine in the Awhitu Peninsula area. This is the main habitat of the Maui's Dolphin. Their population is thought to be somewhere between 80 and 120 and it has been estimated that because of their slow breeding rate just one or

two fatalities in a year will lead to their extinction. This survey will involve drilling and dredging, or the use of suction hoses, to extract the sand. It seems highly likely that such activities will have an impact on marine habitat and possibly even result in dolphin fatalities.

We asked the Ministry of Economic Development that before any application is granted a research programme be instituted to establish what effects there might be on the dolphin population. Their response was that marine conservation matters was of no interest to them and that mining legislation took priority over protection of marine life.

If the survey leads to marine mining then sediments will be strip mined and removed, thus killing all marine life in or on the sediment, which is the food source for many fish species. Fish and marine mammal numbers will be reduced due to a loss of food resources. There has been no research into effects and none seems to be proposed.

Iron Ore NZ infer that the Regional Council resource consent process will be a formality. However discussions with the Government and Regional Council indicate that at the moment

mining approval will not be obtained easily. On hearing the announcement of the impending survey I wrote to many agencies and immediately discussed the matter with Chris Carter, Minister of Conservation. He advised that he would have to sign off any such mining application and would not do so. He has confirmed this position in subsequent conversations with myself and other people on the basis that we know so little about Maui's Dolphin that no threat to them would be permitted.

Harry Duynhoven, Associate Minister of Energy has stated that Iron Ore NZ assumptions that they will be allowed to mine is highly speculative and premature. The Auckland Regional Council indicated that whilst minor surveying activities are a permitted activity (removing no more than one cubic metre of sand every 24 hours), any application to mine is a very different proposition as it will require a coastal permit. This would be publicly notified and opposition submissions would be expected from residents and conservation groups.

However we still have grave concerns regarding protection and at a recent meeting in Hamilton suggested that the Society immediately urge the government to establish an Auckland West Coast marine mammal sanctuary like the one on Banks Peninsula.

Ken Catt

Set nets continue to kill

The Society has repeated its calls for a national ban on set netting after the killing of four Hector's dolphins in set nets in South Westland. New Zealand is well behind other countries in permitting such indiscriminate fishing. Hector's dolphins are especially vulnerable because of their slow breeding rate.

Kaipara notes

The Kaipara section should become an independent branch at the Society's November 12 Conference in Rotorua. The boundaries will follow those agreed between Kaipara, Waitakere and Mid-North branches. The Northern

boundary is along the middle of the Hotoe River on the Kaipara coast. 75 Waitakere Branch members will become Kaipara members after the establishment of the branch.

Kaipara mussel farm opposition

Kaipara section is continuing its effective fight against the proposed mussel farm in the Kaipara Harbour with the assistance of environmental lawyer Kit Littlejohn. The case is not against the concept of marine farming in general, but rather against the siting of this particular farm in an inappropriate part of the harbour. The principal concern is over adverse effects on the landscape and character of the Kaipara, especially in the Omokoiti area where there is a walkway right along the cliff parallel to the intended location of the farm. This would be just 100m from the shore in a navigation channel used by local fishermen and the local scenic boat trip owner and would affect the beautiful, sweeping view of the harbour.

The ARC failed to adequately consult the public when they decided to put proposed aquaculture management areas (AMAs) on the Kaipara talking only to the aquaculture industry. Consequently they obtained a very biased view of where appropriate sites were. In 2003 when public submissions were finally called for, there were 1300 public submissions in opposition. A recent draft study on the ecology of the South Kaipara has shown that many areas where AMAs were imposed (including the proposed mussel farm) contain important marine habitats. For instance, in an AMA where a 104ha oyster farm is proposed, the study found a third of the area was covered in a rare and unique sub-tidal zosteria seagrass.

Calendars and diaries

2005 Forest and Bird Calendars and diaries are now available. Calendars are \$13 and diaries are \$21. You can pick them up at monthly meetings or alternatively contact Chris Bindon on 8336363 or email him giant.weta@orcon.net.nz. Note: postage and packaging are extra.

FIELD TRIPS

Wear strong, non-slip shoes or boots and bring rainwear, jersey, lunch and drink. Trips are usually held wet or fine, but if in doubt phone the contact person for confirmation. For all queries please phone the contact person.

Saturday February 18, 2006 Goldies Bush Walk

This will be led by John Staniland. We will meet at the end of Horsman Road at 10am. Park at this location. Contact: Glenys on 818-3241.

Saturday March 18, 2006 Wetlands at Pararaha

This is a trip that will be led either by Keith Thompson (or a committee member). Gather at the carpark at Karekare Beach at 10am to walk over to Pararaha together. Be prepared to get wet feet. Contact: Glenys on 818-3241.

Saturday April 22, 2006 Ark in the Park walk

This walk will take in Whatitiri Track and Long Road Track to Smythe Corner. We will then return to the Cascades Car Park at the end of Falls Road by way of the Upper Kauri Track and the Auckland City Walk. Contact: Glenys on 818-3241.

Saturday May 20, 2006

Matuku Reserve working bee

Spend time in our own wonderful Forest and Bird reserve and lend a hand to our honorary ranger, John Staniland. Look for the Forest and Bird tui logo at the top of Snows Lane. Snows Lane winds down to the reserve from 1 km along Jonkers Road. Meet at the reserve car park at 10am with either spade or hedgeclippers. Please book to enable John to plan jobs. Contact: Glenys on 818-3241.



EVENING MEETINGS

These are held at Kelston Community Centre on the corner of Great North Road and Awaroa Road at 7:30pm and feature illustrated talks. Refreshments are provided and donations for the hall hire are appreciated.

Thursday February 16, 2006 Kokako Recovery on Rangitoto Station – Mangatutu Forest

Mike Graham will tell us how a new initiative to save the kokako 9 years ago is blossoming with success as the birds increase in numbers.

Thursday March 16, 2006 From the Mountains to the Sea – a World of Wetlands

Keith Thompson will give an illustrated talk on wetland types both national and overseas and discuss some of the important conservation management issues. Keith is a trustee of the National Wetlands Trust and a retired lecturer from the University of Waikato. This talk was scheduled for August but had to be postponed..

Thursday April 20, 2006 The Animal World Within

Margaret Morley will talk about where shells live, what they eat, how they grow and reproduce. She will answer the question ‘do shells need our protection?’. Bring any shells that you would like to have identified.

On sale will be Margaret’s 2004 publication entitled: *A Photographic Guide To Sea Shells Of New Zealand*.. Copies will be available at a discounted price of \$20.

Thursday May 18, 2006 Watercare – Present and Future

Annabel Davies of Watercare will inform us about how stormwater is dealt with and what can be done to improve the health of our waterways and sea.

Matuku Musings

Visit your reserve this season

Now is a good time to visit Matuku Reserve, the society's 120 hectare forest and wetland reserve in the Waitakere Valley. It is open for both members and the public to enjoy. The first block of the reserve was purchased in 1979 and it has grown substantially through subsequent land purchase and land exchange.

About a fifth of the reserve is wetland comprising open water for ducks and swans, and reedy marshland ideal for pukeko and other birds such as the infrequently seen bittern, fernbird, and spotless crane. (The name *Matuku* is the maori name for the bittern.)

The forest, logged in the early 1920s, is regenerating well and is dominated by a broadleaf canopy of puriri, karaka, nikau, rewarewa, kowhai and treefern as well as significant stands of kauri and kanuka. The high number of flowering and fruiting species accounts for the high numbers of tui and kereru (NZ Pigeon) that can be seen. There are great views of the wetland and the wider Te Henga valley from constructed lookouts, and 200 metres in from the entrance is an information station, water supply, toilet and a lovely picnic area with a huge table. Walks vary from 1 to 3 hours and are well formed, though steep to moderately steep in places. All tracks are signposted.

Predator control

An extensive programme of possum, rat and stoat control has led to a significant increase in bird numbers, including the previously rare tomtit. It is anticipated that over time the reserve will be colonised by species like whitehead and robin which have been reintroduced to 'Ark In The Park', the society's restoration project at the Cascades 4 km away. Pest control has also resulted in an increase in the number of insects and this has been the object of scientific research.

Management Plan

The Management Plan for the reserve has now been completed. It was compiled by Mark Bellingham and Petra White and is a comprehensive review of the Management Plan as originally compiled by David Slaven in 1985. John Staniland shepherded the Plan through its final stages to printing.

Waterfall magic

A very special part of the reserve is the part of the Taranga Track which passes behind a waterfall dropping over a highly coloured cliff. The vegetation is very rich and varied, and an intensive predator control programme allows you to always see many birds, and if you are lucky an occasional tomtit will come up to inspect you.

Please note: strictly no dogs allowed in the reserve

How to get to the reserve

After Swanson take the right fork into Waitakere Road (not up Scenic Drive), up over the hill, down past Waitakere village and turn left after passing over the railway. Very shortly pass the school on the left and then take the right fork into Wairere Road. Drive about 5.5 km along Wairere Road, ignoring side roads until finally turning left into the unsealed Jonkers Road. Travel 1 km along this road then go left into (narrow) Snows Lane at the Forest & Bird sign. One kilometre down this lane travel past the viewing platform and entrance, and reach the car park 100 metres further on. Note: there is no access to the reserve from Bethells Road.

Wear boots and bring binoculars, food and a drink. Parties of more than 10 people should first contact the ranger, John Staniland, phone 810 9516. Email: bushridge@slingshot.co.nz For pictures and more information go to: www.forestandbird.org.nz/Magazines/02Nov/matukureserve.asp

**Deadline for next newsletter:
24th February 2006**

Newsletter Editor Robert Woolf
Email – sprukam@yahoo.com.au

Letters and thoughts welcome

Assistance Needed

We are seeking people with a few hours to spare occasionally for sub-committee work, in particular those with experience in planning or accounting. If you have an interest in getting involved with aquatic resources, biodiversity/biosecurity, Harbour View Park, Kiwi Conservation Club, Marine/Marine Reserves, School Environmental Awards, Transport/Traffic, or Water/Wastewater/Stormwater, contact Ken Catt.

Waitakere Branch Committee 2005/6

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