

Chairman's message: Seasons of change



It has been said that the only constant in Nature is change.

The variation in seasons is obvious, though I didn't realise its degree until we came to live out in these forested hills behind Bethells thirty-seven years ago. Here the setting sun in midsummer drops into the sea to the south of our rimu, yet in winter its arc finishes astonishingly far to the north, out of view behind the small stand of kauri.

Quite easy to observe is the variation in abundance of bush fruits and flowers in consecutive years. Some have remarked on this last season's poor kowhai flowering, though that was possibly just a local phenomenon. The pohutukawa gave its usual glorious show, yet a month earlier I noticed its very close relation the Northern rata displaying only fitfully. Rainfall, sunlight and temperature must have an influence, but are this season's factors the deciding ones, or those of previous years? What other subtle influences come into play? If we knew the answers to these fascinating questions we could say we really understood the rhythms of our forest. The scale of change is notably variable in different forest types: a piece of regenerating scrub can change remarkably in five years, but any change in a patch of old climax kauri forest on a ridge is often imperceptible to us. Yet even this stable system will pass away well beyond our short timescale. Occasionally a kauri giant will suddenly fall, as happened a few months ago to a grand old specimen right on the Upper Kauri Track in the Cascades.

Change in our Society's Matuku Reserve is instructive: at first a slow recovery from logging in

the 1920s, and more recently a more rapid assisted recovery through noxious animal control. When Forest and Bird purchased the first block in 1979, damage from a herd of goats had resulted in a thinner understorey of shrubs, and possums were taking a toll of some species of trees in the canopy, with negative consequences for bird life. The adjacent farmer assisted by fencing the herd out of the reserve and on to his farmland. Within about seven years, parts of the forest that once could be seen through easily became so dense with shrubby undergrowth that it was not possible to push through much of it, and for many years it seemed it would remain like that. However, the understorey began to open up after a further twelve years, but this time for the right reasons. These species have now matured sufficiently into a sub-canopy, so that vistas are reappearing. Improved forest health is also shown in a greater abundance and density of ground covering ferns, herbs and small shrubs.



*Gap in the canopy caused by fallen kauri
(photo by John Stewart)*

So nothing stays the same. A reason why I have been musing on change lately is that a great change came into my life at the end of 2010. I retired from my teaching position of 41 years at Kelston Boys

High School, and the same week the government kindly sent me a small golden coloured plastic card. More time for the bush now. I will miss teaching my subject Latin, but at least I can use it on the

poor plants. No more haranguing pupils; more time for harassing weeds.
I wish you all an interesting and successful new year.

John Staniland, Branch Chair

We're rich!

New Scientist magazine recently published an article from a group of environmental economists who for the first time have estimated the cash value of ecosystems. They say the figures show the case for conservation is overwhelming in pure economic terms. One case study found that protecting and replanting mangrove swamps in Vietnam cost \$1.1 million – an investment that reduced spending on dyke maintenance by *seven* times as much *each year*! Yet the scientists behind *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity study* admit frustration that most mainstream economists are blind to the value of biodiversity (an exception in our city is Rod Oram of Unitec).



Wetland and temperate forest in Matuku

They estimated the cash value of nine ecosystems in dollars per hectare per year, and the following list ranks them from highest to lowest in value: coral reefs, coastal wetlands, other coastal systems, inland wetlands, rivers and lakes, tropical forests, temperate and boreal forests, grasslands, and woodlands.

Each ecosystem had a range of values depending on their differing values in various parts of the world and whether they were in prime or strategic locations or not.

Taking our Matuku Reserve as an example, and using the mid-point in the range of dollar values, I have calculated the cash worth of its two broad ecosystems: 20 hectares of inland wetland (key values: natural water reservoirs, waste treatment) at US\$23,000, and 100 hectares of temperate forest (key values: food, gene banks, watershed protection) at US\$2,465, giving a total of US\$25,465 or about NZ\$33,500 per annum.

We cannot actually realise the asset, but we sure can protect and enhance it. And this exercise of course does not try to take into account the ecosystems' aesthetic qualities or their value for our precious wildlife. In this they are simply priceless.

John Staniland, with acknowledgement to The National Wetland Trust.

Wild Wetland Walk on Waitangi day, February 6th 2011

The wetland at the base of the Forest and Bird reserve, Matuku, is easily seen by those approaching it from the ridge access but involves more than a kilometre of steep, sometimes slippery track. Through 2010, the resident ranger John Staniland, John Sumich and two French interns from the Ark

in the Park, have been clearing a track to allow full quad bike access along all of the reserve near the wetland edge. Clearing the track will allow good access for people to control rats, ferrets and stoats throughout the whole reserve. The route came upon an old embankment constructed and used from about 1920 when kauri was taken from the slopes, slid down deep trenches and placed on small carriages to be hauled up along by the Waitakere River. At a junction, logs that had been milled up the Mokoroa arm and floated up the Waitakere

River were hauled also on to carriages and the line went to Steam Hauler Track. Here, they were hauled up by steam engine and over the ridge down to Waitakere Rail Station to be taken on to Auckland and the Kauri Timber Company's mill. This embankment, most of which is in good repair, is going on show on only a handful of occasions.



Help us celebrate the 40th anniversary of the signing of the International Convention on Wetlands at

Ramsar, Iran, with a self-guided walk along this embankment. With access from the Bethell's valley most people of moderate fitness can walk the flat 4km return trip.

Reed beds, flax and cabbage tree habitat, emerging kahikatea are to one side and the rapidly regenerating forest the other. Fernbirds are frequently observed but bitterns [matuku] after which the Reserve is named, are heard more than seen. Of course the walk can be extended westward to the original part of the Reserve with two small easy hill sections that offer different views of the wetland and forest. Twelve years of predator control means the forest has good numbers of tui, pigeon, fantail, and now, tomtit have returned.

Access will be through 119 Bethell's Road with nearby parking. The walk is suitable for families, it's flat, it's nearly all dry but sorry, no dogs allowed on the private property and reserve. We'd appreciate a gold coin donation to help Forest and Bird's predator control at the reserve

Kokako news from Ark in the Park

The stunning news from Ark in the Park is that the first Kokako chick to be born there in over fifty years has successfully fledged. The new chick is called Miro. John Stewart's photograph shows Miro held by Robbie Havell while he or she was banded. Kokako chicks have small violet wattles rather than the larger blue ones of the adults. You can also see some wispy 'down' feathers on the back of Miro's head. These will have fallen out after a few more days. As well as putting on the bands, two small feather samples were taken and sent off to the laboratory where DNA analysis will be used to find out the sex of the chick.

The parent birds were Maurice and Kowhai. And there may be more good news to follow, as Moby and Punga, the birds brought from Tiritiri Matangi, also have a nest with chicks and our nest-finding team believe they have found a third nesting pair not far from the site where Miro was born.



The following account by John Sumich gives a flavour of the excitement of finding and watching kokako nests in the Ark.

Easing ourselves onto the rimu leaf littered ground; we kept our eyes on the slightly darker, denser collection of branches in the canopy that Robbie had pointed out to us. To confirm the direction, sighting along two blue tapes tied to twigs assisted slightly but the scrappy collection of sticks was greatly obscured by hanging supplejack. Having settled us down on site Robbie departed to install another sound recorder. Gerhard and I were having our first session on nest watch near a boundary of the Ark territory where only a week before, the first kokako nest in the Waitakere Ranges in perhaps as much as 80 years had been seen. The walk, initially along an easy trail, was interesting with its flora being slightly different to that in lower altitudes of much of the Ark. With its upright bottlebrush-like racemes of small white flowers, specimens of tawheowheo [*Quintinia serrata*] were distinctive. Their curly edged leaves, green when new but red with age give the trees red highlights. Green or red however, the leaves always have a cold, vinyl-like texture. The slight lime citrus smell of hangehange is here and throughout the Ranges at this time of year but visually spectacular was tawari [*Ixerba brexioides*]. Lime-green stamens reaching beyond ivory white petals in pentametric symmetry, the large flowers were used as adornment by Maori and the flowers were one of few they gave a specific name to, whakou, separate from that of the tree.

Our pair of kokako though, had chosen another species found generally at these higher elevations—a mature heketara [*Olearia raniū*], festooned with supplejack. We'd come prepared to monitor for at

least two hours but within 5 minutes of settling in, a soft “dook dook” alerted us to the presence of kokako. A movement of leaves, a branch bent and released, a grey shape showing, feeding on the leaves of an adjacent tree. One leg viewed, luckily the right one with band combination seen, then the bird vanished only to appear from behind the tangled canopy within half a minute. Here though its presence was noted more by interruption to shafts of light between leaf clusters which darkened then reappeared rather than by any definite shape. A slight rising and falling of perhaps tail feathers over the nest edge and all was quiet – or nearly so. Tui called with lots of staccato wing flapping and noisy flights; fantails flitted constantly with sharp “tweets”; occasional waxeyes 4 or 5 at a time; grey warblers in ones or twos. Blackbirds sang, keruru passed by with their “wump wump wump” and even a tomtit visited with its “olly olly olly”. At 25-30 minute intervals the kokako left her nest, often with the male attending and he sometimes giving full song sequences, but more commonly soft vocalisations between the pair were heard. What most impressed was the secretiveness of approach and departure. Sneaking noiselessly through the well-camouflaged canopy of the olearia with barely a twig disturbed the bird waited till at least 20m away before vocalising with her mate. Later we found that this frequency of nest departure and return implied that there must be chicks being fed yet never a peep was heard as commonly occurs in many other species when the parent brings food to chicks. What a thrill to see this in our own Waitakere ranges –and how easy for us but finding this nest initially was the culmination of many many weeks of effort.

We need a new Branch Secretary

Janie Vaughan will retire from the post of Branch Secretary at our AGM in May 2011. We are hoping for a volunteer to take up this interesting and important role. A few of the basic tasks are listed but this is the best way to learn more about the inside working of F&B and to support the hard work and long hours that the activists put into running your branch.

The main duties and requirements include:

- access to a computer is necessary

- receiving and distributing the mail (most of it is on-line now)
- setting an agenda, in conjunction with the chair, for committee meetings
- sending welcome letters to new members
- you may be required to take minutes of committee meetings, but definitely the AGM
- you may want to collate the email news we send out, but this optional.

To volunteer or for more detail Phone Janie on 817 9262, or John Staniland on 810 9516.

Los voluntarios mexicanos

Two Mexican visitors, Federico Mendez and his wife Luciana, who've been volunteering at the Ark in the Park, will give a talk on 'Invasive species eradication off some of Mexico's pacific Coast islands'. Laysan albatross is one of the species protected by this work.

The meeting will be held at Waitakere Golf Club on Falls Road (the usual access road for Ark in the Park) at 7:30 pm on Friday, 25th March 2011.

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

Saturday 19 February 2011

Motu Manawa/Pollen Island Clean Up

Hayden Smith and Ben Harris of the Waitemata Cleanup Trust will help us in a rubbish clean up of the island. This is your chance to set foot on the island and lend a hand to the flora and fauna by cleaning up their habitat. You need to feel comfortable with using a kayak as this will be the mode of transport.

We are suggesting that participants give a donation of around \$10 to the Cleanup Trust.

Time: 9am – 12 noon

Place: the wharf at Te Atatu Boating Club in Bridge Ave., Te Atatu South

Bring: gloves and strong lace-up shoes.

Saturday 19th March 2011

Matuku Reserve working bee

Join John Staniland, honorary ranger, in maintenance of our 120 hectare Matuku Reserve. Please bring hedge clippers OR a grubber OR a spade. Gardening gloves are a good idea too.

Time: 10am – 2pm

Place: meet in Snow's Lane car park 1 km off Jonkers Rd.

Sunday 17th April 2011

Karamatura Loop Walk

Join in a beautiful little walk through kanuka, nikau, kahikatea, mahoe, rewarewa, pukatea and northern tree rata. This place of regenerating native bush is steeped in milling history. The Huia Museum is open Sunday afternoons so you may like to follow up the walk with a visit to the museum.

Time: 10am – 1pm

Place: meet at the car park up the drive on the opposite side of the road from the museum.

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.

Evening meetings

These are held at the Kelston Community Centre (except for the March meeting) 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.

Thursday, 17th February 2011

Jacqui Knight of the Monarch Butterfly NZ Trust will give a talk on New Zealand's moths and butterflies.

Jacqui warns us, she is neither an entomologist nor an expert on butterflies, more of an activist. But she is prepared to share with us what she knows (and doesn't know) and explain the reason behind the Monarch Butterfly NZ Trust's tagging project. No it's not graffiti, but the placement of numbered labels on Monarch butterflies during the autumn. It's bound to be interesting and I'm sure we'll all leave with new information about the butterflies of New Zealand.

Thursday, 17th March 2011

Venue: The Activity room in the Te Atatu Peninsula Community Centre, 595 Te Atatu Road. Parking available on Pringle Rd, off the main roundabout.

Gillian Vaughan from the Miranda Naturalists' Trust will give a talk about the astonishing flights of the Bar-tailed Godwit which link New Zealand with China, Alaska and Siberia. For ten years Trust members have been working to conserve the godwits in their threatened staging sites in the heavily populated Yellow Sea. Some of what they've learned will be outlined here.

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. I will discuss my research on giraffe weevil behaviour and how the elongated rostrum and size variation within males may have driven the evolution of alternative reproductive tactics.



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

Branch contacts

Chairman: John Staniland
Email: bushridge@slingshot.co.nz

Secretary: Janie Vaughan
Email: waitakere.branch@forestandbird.org.nz

Field trips organiser: Glenys Mather
Email: glenys.mather@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor: John Stewart
Email: johnreastewart@gmail.com

Evening meetings organizer: Raewyn Michael
Email: micharmz@gmail.com