

## Raumati/Summer: Forest & Bird, Hauraki Islands Newsletter 2016



Tena koutou, tena tatou katoa,

*Tangi e te riroriro*

*Te tohu o te raumati*

Sweetly sings the grey warbler

Chant of summer days

Happy New Year to all! After a slow start to summer, it is now heating up, although the forecasted drought has not yet happened, don't be fooled as it is on its way, so continue to conserve water for those dry coming months. Putting water out for our native birds is also good practice and one that they will truly appreciate when in need.

The koromiko, native hebe is in flower at the moment, its sweet smelling scent is an enticement for our honey bees. There was a wonderful array of korari, harakeke (flax) flowers before Christmas, its heady scent warming in the summer air. The pohutukawa did not seem to flower so much as in previous years, but there were still some stunning displays around our coastlines.

There is quite a ropu of kuaka (godwits) on Blackpool beach this year, along with several pairs of dotterel. You can get quite close if you are quiet; see the photo below.

Kaka have been found nesting also in the Onetangi Forest & Bird Reserve (see article below), which is very exciting. So we need to be extra vigilant with our cats and dogs. Keep cats inside at night as much as possible and ensure that your dogs are on leads when walking through our reserves.

Enjoy the rest of the summer.

May it be sunny and cheerful!

Naku noa, na  
Jacqueline Joseph  
Chair of Forest & Bird, Hauraki Islands Branch

*Godwits on Blackpool Beach – photo by Bob Scott*



## **Summer Twilight Rambles**

We have recently had the last of our four January 2016 Twilight Rambles which were a great success. They were made possible by funding from the Local Board. We had four separate evening walks. The first one on Tuesday 5 January was around the Pukerakau extension to the Onetangi Reserve. It focused on areas that were once open spaces but have now been replanted. This walk was led by Lincoln Jackson, our volunteer co-ordinator, and about 50 people attended. The next was on Tuesday 12 January. Jacqueline Joseph and Rob Brennan led a botanical walk from the Orapui Road at Te Matuku along the bush track on Rob Fenwick's property. Despite the heavy rain before and during the walk, 12 hardy souls participated. The barbeque stayed at home that night. On Tuesday 19 January, over 50 people accompanied council ranger Jonah Kitto-Verhoef on a walk from Poukaraka car park through wetland and shoreline at Whakanewha Regional Park. It had an emphasis on the birds of these tidal zones. Our final walk and follow on barbeque on 26 January also attracted over 50 walkers. Noted author and now chair of the Taranaki Branch of Forest and Bird, Janet Hunt, led a loop walk with Hue Ross through varied terrain from the Stockyard Reserve on the Orapiu Road around to the Pioneer Cemetery then into the Te Haahi/Goodwin Reserve. The pack up was completed just on dark as the humid rain arrived. A big thanks to all the rambles leaders and to the barbecue crew. We hope these rambles will continue to be a summer feature in future.

## Kaka Nesting Update

The members of the kaka nest monitoring team, led by Hue Ross, are becoming more like expectant parents as each day goes and we wait for the fledgling chicks to leave the nest tree at Onetangi Reserve. We keep saying to each other "it must be any day now that they will emerge to spend time on the ground". And then another few days go by without any real change. As at the end of January 2016, the kaka parents continue to visit the nest on an average of once an hour to feed their young. Some of the monitors have, on a non-invasive basis, obtained glimpses of the chicks in their nest and sometimes the young birds can be heard at feeding time.

We have signs in place at the entrances to the reserve notifying walkers that dogs must be on a lead. Disappointingly there has been at least one occasion when that clear and necessary requirement has been ignored by a dog owner. Her response, when one of our monitors pointed out her failing, was "my dog would never attack a bird on the ground". In fact instinct is a powerful thing and even a small house dog is fully capable of wiping out months of rearing in a few uncontrolled seconds. If you are in the reserve and you see anyone breaching this condition of access, please do speak up. We need you to be our eyes and ears. Cats also need to be kept in at night, so again if you are in a position to educate neighbours living on the edges of the reserve please do.





## Karaka: The enduring question

Karaka (*Corynocarpus laevigatus*) is a common canopy tree in broadleaf forest on Hauraki Gulf islands. During January and February it becomes more noticeable as its large shiny green drupes ripen to an orange colour ('karaka' is orange in Māori). Those fruits not eaten by kereru litter the ground and release a pungent fruity smell.

Māori legend has it that karaka were introduced by early Māori voyagers from an ancestral homeland but this belief remains contentious amongst botanists, some of whom reject the notion while others give it tentative support. Most of them acknowledge the legend in their texts. Certainly Māori did introduce plants to New Zealand, kumara (*Ipomoea batatas*) being the most obvious example. Karaka was an important food source for pre-European Māori, both directly and indirectly. As the kernels of karaka are extremely poisonous to humans and other mammals, Māori subjected the karaka seeds to a lengthy treatment process before they could safely be eaten. Fruiting karaka also attract kereru, another key food source for traditional Māori. Māori often planted karaka around their settlements and clearly introduced them to cool temperate regions such as the Chatham Islands (where they are called kopi) and Banks Peninsula.

Other factors supporting the legend are that the tree is mostly coastal, the shiny leaves and relatively smooth thin bark are typical of sub-tropical plant species, and seeds germinate very readily whether or not they have passed through a bird's digestive systems. In favourable conditions they are capable of dominating vegetation, especially the sub-canopy. Seedlings are typically plentiful within the drop zone of mature karaka trees. According to botanist John Wardle, there are no "authenticated records of fossil material of karaka being discovered in New Zealand which pre-date Māori occupation" (Wardle's Native Trees of New Zealand and Their Story, New Zealand Forestry Association, First Edition 2011 at p222).

The main reason given botanists who doubt the accuracy of the legend is that karaka is not found outside New Zealand's territorial waters. Its northernmost location is the Kermadec Islands. Supporters of the legend respond that the Kermadec Islands could well have been the source for introduction by early Māori in transit to the New Zealand mainland. Curiously, karaka has become a major weed pest on many of the islands in the Hawaii Group after it was introduced in 1929 to Kaua'I Island for re-forestation purposes.



*Karaka berries are much loved by kereru*

## Make war on mothplant and rhamnus

It's coming up to the dreaded **mothplant** flowering season again. This is arguably the most invasive exotic plant we have on Waiheke. It is particularly threatening because:

- The flowers turn into pods which can have as many as 1000 seeds each
- The seeds either drop on the ground, forming thick carpets of seedlings, or are blown by the wind for up to 30 kilometers
- The seeds can remain in the ground for several years, depending on conditions
- If any root is left in the ground it can regrow
- The vines can strangle other vegetation, native and exotic

Mothplant vines can grow up to seven metres in two or three years, and can cover huge areas very quickly. The flowers are bisexual, so pollination is easy. They are often pollinated by moths, giving rise to the name "mothplant". It is also called kapok vine, milk vine, and milkweed. (Rumour has it that they were brought to New Zealand to eradicate moths – will we never learn to be careful about what we use for biological control!)

Mothplant is native to South America, where presumably it had some kind of natural predator control. It is said that some native populations in South America eat the fruits after roasting them. However, the vines and choko-like pods give off a milky, smelly exudate that can irritate the skin, which makes them very unappetizing.

To get rid of mothplant, pull out small seedlings, taking care to remove the entire root. For larger plants that cannot be pulled out, cut the stem just above ground level and apply Vigilant, or 'Cut and Paste' to the cut. All pods should be put in the (red bag/bin) rubbish, but the rest of the plant can be safely composted.



**Rhamnus alaternus**, commonly known as evergreen buckthorn, originated in the Mediterranean area, but it seems to love the coastal cliffs in the Auckland area, often displacing pohutukawa. In the late 1990s, the Auckland Regional Council deployed abseilers to remove rhamnus from the cliffs at Matiatia, because it forms dense colonies that prevent native seedlings from establishing themselves. Today, unfortunately, rhamnus is still thriving here.

We have found many juvenile and mature rhamnus trees in Atawhai Whenua Reserve, and we all must be on the alert to spot them.

The trees can grow up to ten metres high. The bark is reddish-brown. The leaves are leathery and slightly serrated, dark green on top and darkish yellow green underneath, oval or shaped like a lance head and up to 6 cm long. The trees flower from May to November, with the female berries ripening dark red to black in December and January. While plants are usually male or female, there can be crossovers with some predominantly male plants producing berries. For some reason, this plant is often mistaken for a native tree – but the yellow-green underside of the leaf and fine serrations are telltale signs that it is not.

When removing a small tree, be sure the entire root has been dug up. Otherwise, cut it at ground level and put gel on the stump. If there are any berries, they need to be safely disposed of in the rubbish.





## **Helping our native fauna survive “the big dry”**

### **From committee member Sue Fitchett**

While it looks to be a marvellous summer for Islanders and visitors, the birds and other native species struggle to survive through the long dry period. You can help by placing water containers around your property and hanging them in trees for birds and gheckos. Shallow containers are good for insects e.g. wetas and lizards, but birds need bigger containers to wash and drink. These containers need to be cleaned out and refilled every few days to stop the spread of disease amongst species.

Kereru may come down to lower water sources e.g. bird baths, but can also drink from gutters. So if your gutter retains a bit of water, then refreshing it each day can give kereru a safe drinking place. They may need to drink more as fruit dries out because it takes them some time to digest some of the big fruits they favour.

Insectivore birds e.g. riorio and piwakawaka become short of food because insects and larvae creation are compromised by the dry conditions. Composts full of rotting fruit or caches of fruit will create fruit flies and some insect activity, which will be useful both to insectivores and lizards. If you have deeply mulched areas, soaking these areas will help insect larvae develop. Lizards will also eat a mashed up mix of banana and honey if these are placed in bottle tops in tracking tunnels, under corrugated iron sheets or up trees.

While some people suggest not feeding “common” species (e.g. seed and worm eaters) during a prolonged dry summer, they may also be struggling to find food. You can put out a mix of soaked white bread or seed for sparrows and seed for chaffinches. Blackbirds will relish a few handfuls of cat biscuits a day.

