



Branch news

A new year

by Mike Britton, Chair, Wellington Branch

The branch AGM has come and gone and there is a newly elected committee – that looks much like the last one. The great news is that Melanie Vautier has joined, a fresh and younger face. We could still do with at least a couple more regulars or maybe some people willing to be co-opted for particular tasks.

Last year, effort went into progressing the existing projects, and also a number of submissions on Regional and City council 10-year planning; Shelly Bay, Wellington Airport extension and the Outer Green Belt Plan. This year we want to be more proactive with both our projects and our involvement in community conservation. We are planning to start campaigning about the threat that Darwin's Barberry poses and we face a likely need to shift the nursery to a new home. We would also like feedback from our members about whether there is an appetite for restarting talks and walks. So watch this space, and if you do have ideas or some time to contribute please get in touch with me at mike@pelorusjack.co.nz.

Local news

A cold snap in early April came as a shock after the long hot summer. It was very early in the year for such low temperatures, accompanied by a strong southerly blast. On the 11th of April temperatures in Wellington got down to 5 °C and autumn moved in. Some pohutukawa dropped seeds in extraordinary numbers. Kerbs and gutters in some locations had drifts of what looked like sawdust forming patterns shaped by the wind. Pohutukawa have tiny pointed seeds. Like all members of the *Metrosideros* genus they are distributed by wind and due to their light weight, can travel enormous distances. The genus is widely spread across the Pacific as a result of this characteristic, and some species are known as pioneers on newly exposed soil e.g. after a slip.



Pohutukawa seeds wiper blade deep

In March and April there were sightings of black fronted terns at Island Bay. This indigenous tern is not commonly seen in Wellington, and when present, they are just passing through. They breed on the dry beds of South Island rivers and head to the coast in winter, including some north island locations. They are smaller than the frequently seen white fronted tern, have a greyer back and a less forked tail. On adult birds, the give-aways are the orange bill and feet.

In May the duck hunting season started. Only four species of waterfowl are protected while five can be shot. Waterfowl that are protected are whio/blue duck, pāpango/scaup, pāteke/brown teal and tētē/grey teal. Those that can be legally hunted include the handsome kuruwhegi/shoveller – a beautiful bird with a magnificent bill, of which other ducks are probably envious. Other species that can be hunted are mallard, pārera/grey duck, pūtangitangi/paradise shelduck and wāna/black swan.



A pair of shoveller – fair game

Zealandia Education Appeal by Mike Britton

Zealandia is just launching an appeal for help with its education programme. Zealandia started as a Forest & Bird Wellington Branch initiative and it is something I am passionate about, so I hope it is something branch members might think about helping.

Forest & Bird is the 'voice for nature' and it is there when all the other voices are silent — don't believe Greenpeace is saving the Mackenzie. It is Forest & Bird with some allies like the Environmental Defence Society. And that voice is important in leading change.

But the groundswell that makes change possible comes from changes in the perception of the wider community. In this Zealandia has been important in two significant ways. The 'sanctuary-in-the-city' lets people see how nature could be – and how it can be without predators. It makes the community start to both value New Zealand's nature and want to see a change in the way we impact on it. And make it seem an attainable goal.



But to secure the future we need to give all young people the chance to experience nature and learn about how to care for it. And to want something different for their future. Forest & Bird, its new youth branch and Kiwi Conservation Club have a major role here, but we need those messages out there in the schools as part of the normal curriculum. Currently Zealandia provides over 55% of all nature education in schools in Wellington. It is also providing the education support for Predator Free Wellington.



These programmes do get help from the Ministry of Education and Predator Free Wellington but without support from some generous donors and the members of Zealandia, nature education in Wellington would really suffer. It especially needs support to help schools from less affluent areas visit the sanctuary for nature education classes and to support a unique 'Junior Ambassadors Programme' where young nature lovers are helped to become the conservation leaders of the future. Zealandia also needs to take the education programme back out to schools so the learning from the sanctuary can be reinforced and made relevant back in their own area and community.

The first dream was to create a sanctuary in Central Wellington. The next dream is to use it to inspire a community so that it values and wants to save nature, and to grow the number of voices speaking out for conservation.

If you would like to help, you can do so online at www.visitzealandia.com



Fernbird update

Geoff de Lisle from Birds NZ reports that as part of a Forest and Bird initiative, another 25 fernbirds were recently released in the Pauatahanui Reserve. The birds were captured at Lake Rotokare, a predator-free reserve near Eltham, Taranaki. This is the second transfer of fernbirds to Pauatahanui, with the first release of birds occurring a year ago. Birds NZ will be following their progress closely.

Forest & Bird programme

The fourth Forest & Bird Wellington branch project we check out is the plant nursery. Tucked away in Highbury it is unknown to most Wellingtonians. The nursery started some 25 years ago and moved a few times until settling into its current location about 10 years ago. The land is owned by WCC but is part of the area leased by Zealandia. The nursery is based in what was a Water Board house lived in by Karori reservoir staff.



The nursery is managed jointly by Chris Streatfield and Gary James, and they divide the work between them according to their likes and experience. Chris Streatfield is the expert on the day to day management of the nursery, managing volunteers, work schedules and maintenance.

Gary's main involvement is the raising of the plants themselves. From humble beginnings when the aim was to branch out from the couple of

dozen species offered at that time by the Council, the nursery is now a major contributor to the local flora. Gary explains that "We want to offer plants that cover the entire range of local species to offer a food source all year round to the birds and other wildlife".

Gary is a paramedic by day, who spends much of his spare time volunteering at the nursery doing what he loves, and the results of his work can be seen all over Wellington and beyond. "We grow about 120 species of plant, all from seed. In the last few years we have regularly been supplying about 13,000 plants per year" he says.



The nursery has a team of dedicated volunteers. There are working sessions timed to offer a choice of when to attend. If it wasn't for the volunteers, the plants would not be grown. The nursery prides itself on the quality of its plants, the weed free nature of their output and the wide range of species they produce.



The nursery costs about \$9,000 per year to run and gets funding through grants from various organisations such as WCC, Greenwood Trust, Lotteries Commission, Wellington Community Trust and Pelorus Trust. The vast majority of plants go to local groups. To be eligible to receive plants, which are supplied at no cost, recipients are mostly native plant restoration groups, planting on public land, most of which is owned by WCC or

GWRC. The nursery also supplies a few individuals and farmers who want to fence and plant land with native species with the intention of later covenanting the areas. By these means the nursery fosters relations with the wider public and receives much needed koha to help run the enterprise. Challenges include funding, space which governs the output, and occasionally shortage of volunteers.

Growing 120 species means collecting seeds in the wild for all varieties. The work is divided in two and species-specific seeds are collected by hand in alternate years. The team works hard to carry out 'genetic sourcing'. Separate populations of species that exist in isolated areas are carefully labelled and kept separate, then planted out in their native locality, thus preserving the genetic differences between them.

Chris and the team rear only local species, some of them rare or endangered. The large leaved milk tree *Streblus banksii* is found in Wellington, but it seems not to breed naturally. Initially seeds were sourced from Mana Island. The nursery has discovered they can grow the species well, and that if it is closely planted it will manage to produce viable seed. It seems they do not like being too far from their mates.

Of all the plants raised at the nursery, Gary's favourite is the Matagouri, *Discaria toumatou*. The reason: "It's tough. It can exist on dry windy hillsides where virtually nothing else can grow". The local variety is a prostrate form that grows coastally. There is only one natural population remaining and seeds sourced from there are grown to plants which are given to groups in locations that offer the right conditions for it to flourish. Anita Benbrook from WCC oversees what species go where to ensure that they are only planted in areas that offer the conditions they need to thrive. Other special species reared at the nursery include the leafless bush lawyer and also the leafless clematis, both of which are climbing plants that photosynthesise through their extensive mass of green stems. Shrubby tororaro, *Muehlenbeckia astonii* is another local speciality that Gary is proud to send out from the nursery.



Large leaved milk tree

But it's not all plain sailing. Zealandia has said that it needs the land and building occupied by the nursery, and for about the fifth time in its 25 years, the nursery will need to move. Various locations have been checked out and negotiations are underway to find a suitable alternative. The move will take place in about February 2019 and the team is winding down its plant stocks. Every time the nursery moves, about a year's production is lost. 10 years ago, 4 shade houses were moved to the current site and it proved a real feat. This time, success has meant that there are now 17 shade houses and 7 standing out areas to move, so it will be a serious challenge and extra help would be welcome. If you'd like to help as a volunteer, learn about propagation and see your work flourishing around wellington for years to come, email Chris on chris@kriss.nz.

Fragrant Native Plants article and photos by Chris Moore, Wellington Botanical Society

The flowers of many New Zealand plants are perfumed. Surprisingly, perhaps, it is the smaller less colourful flowers that are the most perfumed; conversely the larger more showy flowers often lack any fragrance. Examples of the latter are flax, kākābeak, and kōwhai.

Plants common to Wellington that have fragrant flowers are akiraho, tauhinu, kohia (Passionfruit), kaihua (NZ Jasmine), whauwhaupaku (Five finger), and tarata (Lemonwood). The latter is well known for the lemony smell of its crushed leaves. Unfortunately, the smallness of these and other perfumed flowers makes the extraction of any fragrances challenging as the flowers cannot be collected in sufficient quantity to produce a perfume. As a result very few commercially produced perfumes are available.



Tarata/lemonwood

An exception to the rule that large native flowers lack a perfume is pohutukawa (NZ Christmas Tree). While fresh the flower has little or no perfume but it exudes a pleasant fragrance when dried and was reputedly used by Maori women to scent themselves.



Taramea/speargrass

Fragrances from the gums and oils of native plants are much more easily obtained. Taramea (Speargrass), in time honoured tradition was scorched by Maori girls who would light a small fire on top of the plant. This would draw out the gum which was collected the next morning and used by the chiefs to scent themselves. The gum yields one of the choicest and rarest scents.

Samples of taramea and other New Zealand native plant fragrances can be sourced from Francesco van Eerd at the Fragrifert Parfumer at the top of the Cable Car. He describes the taramea fragrance as “straddling the senses of smell and taste, it can best be described as green amber with Tonka bean and a hint of saffron”. A commercially available taramea perfume, associated with Ngai Tahu, is available at Te Papa, and elsewhere, under the name MEA.

Wellybird, a personal view — Kōtare

The kingfisher, more correctly called the sacred kingfisher, is found scattered throughout the Pacific and is seen relatively frequently in Wellington. The name is a bit misleading, as generally fish do not form a large part of its diet. In warmer months it's often seen inland sitting on overhead wires above open areas such as streets or parks, and sometimes in residential areas. It has a squat shape with a big bill reminiscent of its kookaburra cousin and is hard to confuse with any other bird.



Regurgitated crab shell pellet

It is usually seen keeping an eye out for prey such as lizards, large insects and other tasty snacks, and on sighting something edible it drops down for the catch, often to return to its original perch. The female is lighter in colour with an off-white breast, and in the male the chest, belly and parts of the head are orange.



Female in typical pose

In winter it is more likely to be seen on the coast. When looking for prey it always seeks a vantage point whether it is an overhanging branch, a flax stem, an elevated rock or a bit of driftwood only a few centimetres higher than the surroundings. On the coast it might be feeding on fish, but more often it is on the lookout for crustaceans such as small crabs. When it eats these, it will occasionally regurgitate a pellet of indigestible shells about the size of a small grape. In Wellington, kōtare are quite often seen in winter around the coastline of the Miramar peninsula, but can pop up anywhere. In early June one was hanging out near the seal colony at Sinclair head on the south coast.



They look neater in a headwind

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E-newsletter

Do you have any ideas for subject matter or things you'd be interested in hearing about in this newsletter? Please let us know by email to wellington.branch@forestandbird.org.nz. Any photos submitted must include photographer's credit and permission to be used.

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