CHIRPINGS

The e-magazine of the Wellington Branch of Forest & Bird

Forest & Bird
TE REO O TE TAIAO | Giving Nature a Voice

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Friends of Ruapehu Lodge

by Mike Britton, Chair, Wellington Branch

Forest & Bird's Ruapehu Lodge is one of the real benefits for members, nestled as it is at the foot of the Maunga, just a short walk from Whakapapa Village. After the original lodge burnt down some years ago, it was Jon Wenham, then Executive member and Waikato branch stalwart who stepped up to lead the rebuilding. The magnificent asset members now have is pretty much due to the time and effort Jon put in.

It was therefore a great shock a couple of weeks back when Jon died suddenly. He is a real loss for the Society, the Waikato Branch and for conservation to lose a man of his dedication and humanity and for those privileged enough to have him as a friend. With Jon gone, though, the question is how to support the management of the Ruapehu Lodge? It has always suffered because there is not a large branch close by like the other Society lodges, although Waikato has always supported it.

Before Jon died we talked about possibly setting up a `friends' group to support the staff in managing the lodge. Waikato Branch is interested to see this idea developed and has reached out to other branches to see if there are members prepared to help. Most club lodges on the Maunga are kept going through an organising group and it would be good if we could set one up for this lodge. If anyone is interested in being involved please get in touch with me.

Local news

Pīhoihoi, the New Zealand pipit, is not seen in the city or suburbs - it's a bird of open country. In summer, their stronghold within the city limits is the high country of Te Kopahou reserve, south of the Hawkins Hill Radome – the golf ball like structure south of the Brooklyn wind turbine.

Pīhoihoi/New Zealand pipit

In winter they come down to lower altitude and can be seen on the beach that runs from the Owhiro Bay visitor centre via the Sinclair Head seal colony and round to Karori light. The Pīhoihoi is easy to distinguish from another winter denizen of the seaweed zone – the dunnock. The pipit is larger, has a spotted breast, light belly and eyebrow, and its white outer tail feathers are visible in flight.

Forest & Bird programme

Places for Penguins part 2

In the April 2018 issue of Chirpings, we looked at how the Places for Penguins team had realised that penguins were getting killed by cars when they crossed the road from the sea to their nests inland. To counter this the team has installed over 100 nestboxes between the waterline and the road in secluded locations at suitable bays round the coast. Monitors check the nestboxes 2 weekly in the breeding season and 4-weekly at other times of year, when the boxes are occupied by moulting adults or by single birds or pairs just visiting and maybe checking out the accommodation in preparation for the next breeding season. They record temperatures inside and outside the

nestbox and note exactly what is seen inside whether it is nothing, adults, eggs or chicks, and they follow the development of the chicks until they fledge and make their own way in the world without any adult supervision.


Kororā chicks in nestbox

Breeding results have been encouraging. The PfP team has been carrying out full monitoring for four seasons. Each year has seen an increase in the number of chicks, with a record 56 successfully fledged in the most recent nesting season. The team also monitors natural nests by using a specially trained penguin detector dog, and advises WCC on projects that might affect colonies of kororā that nest in natural sites around the harbour, the Miramar peninsula and south coast.

Season	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18
Boxes occupied by breeding pairs	26%	29%	34%	33%
Eggs laid	35	55	61	60
Chicks hatched	32	45	49	58
Chicks fledged	29	43	45	56

Places for Penguins summary breeding results

Another main activity of the programme to enhance kororā habitat is to reduce the number of pests that could predate adult birds, eggs or chicks. The team operates 13 lines of about 15 traps each which are monitored, baited and reset by a team of almost 50 volunteers. Results are impressive and are tracked over time to show trends in pest movement. In a recent one-month period, the lines using DOC 200 & Victor traps killed 38 pests including 3 mustelids. The A24 Goodnature ™ self-setting traps in 3 lines around Miramar coast recorded 50 strikes, meaning up to 50 kills, although the actual number and what species is unknown due to scavenger activity.

The objectives of the Places for Penguins programme are to:

- Improve nesting habitat
- Manage introduced predators
- Improve breeding success
- Reduce unnatural penguin deaths
- Raise awareness – public education and communication
- Involve stakeholders – WCC, GWRC, DoC, Zealandia, community groups

It's a wide scope and until recently the small team involved had to prioritise its limited resources, and the last two objectives were not progressed much. But the project recently got a great boost with several enthusiastic new members joining the committee, bringing different skills and fresh outlooks. The important communications and advocacy aspects of the team's work will now be promoted much more. A recent scoping study into educational aspects was carried out as Places for Penguins hoped to put together an education package for use in local schools to teach youngsters about Little Penguins, what they need to survive in an urban environment, how to respect their needs and what the kids can do to give local kororā the best possible chance of increasing in numbers.


Adults checking out the accommodation

However, the committee does not currently have the resources to support such a development, so it has decided not go ahead for now, but to set this as a long term goal.

Expect to see more activity from the programme. If you'd like to help with habitat enhancement, nestbox monitoring (when places become available) or have skills that may be useful on the committee please contact placesforpenguins@gmail.com.

On 21 August 2018, the Dominion Post published a piece voicing concern for Little Penguins. Thanks to the Stuff website for the following article which has been slightly adjusted.

Two little blue penguins have settled at Wellington's Lyall Bay, but their new beach neighbourhood is a popular stomping ground for dogs - the penguin's largest threat. The busy coastal suburb is also home to construction work for a new carpark, and the removal of an old one.

Forest & Bird Lower North Island regional manager Tom Kay said the organisation was concerned for the penguins' wellbeing. "Lyall Bay is a really popular area for people exercising their dogs".

"It's this time of year in particular when the penguins are starting to breed, and it's really important that people control their dogs. "It's not worth the risk," Kay said.

The little blue penguin, the world's smallest penguin, has a declining population in areas not protected from predators. Department of Conservation considers dogs to be their greatest threat, but cats, ferrets and stoats could also pose a danger.

Last year, Te Motu Kairangi Miramar Ecological Restoration called for dog owners to be responsible for helping to protect penguin in urban areas after an adult bird was found dead at a Wellington reserve. The penguin had most likely died by dog attack, it said.

Kay said this time of year, people should be keeping their dogs close, even in the areas considered free to roam.

Forest & Bird Youth by George Hobson

Kia ora! My name's George, I'm 14 and I'm a council member of Forest & Bird Youth Wellington, and its official photographer.

Forest & Bird Youth is the newest branch of Forest & Bird – F&B Youth is aimed at young people, aged between 14-24. The goal of F&B Youth is to bridge the gap between KCC and Forest & Bird. So far, it's doing that very well!

Right now, there are three F&B Youth "hubs" across the country: Auckland, Manawatū and Wellington, which is the most recent addition having only started this year.

F&B Youth is committed to providing young people with opportunities to get out into nature and make a difference to our precious environment. All three hubs have different approaches to accomplishing this – for example the Auckland hub has an amazing piece of bush they're restoring.

Our goal in Wellington is to try and link in with lots of amazing existing environmental projects, and to provide opportunities for young people to help out. We also want to eventually host our own events, which will give young people great opportunities to gain practical skills and the chance to meet incredible people.

The youth team with Minister for Conservation, Eugenie Sage

From everyone on the F&B Youth Wellington Council – we're looking forward to connecting with you, and we appreciate all the support so far!

To find out more about Forest & Bird Youth, check out our nationwide Facebook page here: https://www.facebook.com/forestandbirdyouth/ and the F&B Youth Wellington Facebook page here: https://www.facebook.com/ForestandBirdYouthWellington/

Biological control

At the Forest & Bird Wellington branch AGM, Megan Banks, Greater Wellington Regional Council's biosecurity officer for plants gave a great talk on biological control. This article summarises her presentation.

There are about 2,500 native plant species and roughly 25,000 introduced plants which, if they escape into the wild and become a nuisance can be classed as weeds. The first weeds tackled with biological controls were ones presenting problems for farmers such as ragwort which is poisonous to livestock. The next category was environmentally damaging weeds such as climbers that can smother and restrict or kill native species.

Biological control as described by Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research, the lead organisation for biocontrol research and development is "*A technique used worldwide where we attempt to restore the balance between a weed and the environment by reuniting it with some of its key natural enemies.*"

Gorse pod moth larvae

Weeds tend to be introduced plants that grow much better here than in their native range. One reason is the absence of the natural enemies found in their native countries. Some cause loss of production and others a decline in biodiversity which affects balance in the environment.

One problem is that few weeds have reached their potential range and abundance e.g. high altitude. Even long-established species such as gorse and broom are still spreading. Long-lived species can have lag phases of tens or hundreds of years. Herbicides may not be practical or effective, they can be expensive, bring health and safety concerns and are often too damaging to the environment and/or non-target species.

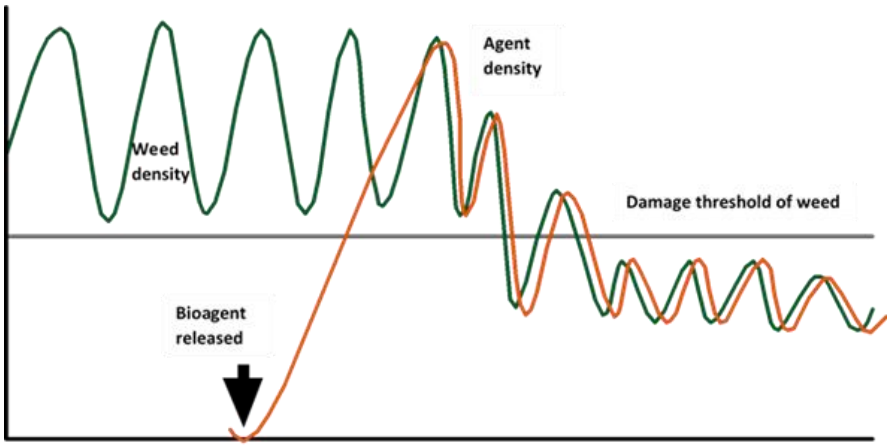
The main principles of biocontrol are:

- It's long term, self-sustaining and perpetual
- It won't completely eradicate a pest plant but may reduce vigour to a level where negative impacts on other species become negligible
- It may be the only answer for many species, especially where other methods of control aren't possible or practicable.

Biocontrol is sustainable, it takes an initial investment but on-going costs are small. It results in a reduction in pesticide use and only target plants are damaged. There are no health risks associated with it and it controls weeds everywhere as it is not limited by boundaries.

However there are some disadvantages. It can be slow, sometimes taking decades to be effective and there are no guarantees. The level of control is likely to vary and weeds will not be completely eliminated. Land managers need some knowledge of biocontrol and the agents. A successful biocontrol programme will often progress in the manner depicted in the graph shown.

Before any biological control is carried out a detailed study is done in stages. The pest plant is surveyed in its introduced range to gain key baseline information. A detailed survey is also done in its native range to identify natural enemies, if these are not already well known. Any damaging species from the host range are collected for testing. The agent species is extensively tested to check if it will eat any species other than the target. If the trial is successful, a submission is made to the Environmental Protection Authority seeking approval to import and release the agent species.



Testing results are scrutinized by experts and made available for public comment before approval is given. If the go ahead is given, the agent is disease-tested and released from containment. This is followed by an extended period of mass-rearing, field releasing, monitoring and assessment.

Worldwide there have been more than 40 successful biological controls implemented. It's been calculated that the cost-benefit ratios for these projects range from 8:1 to more than 4,000:1. The reduction in the pest plant St John's wort in the US was so successful it resulted in the building of a monument in honour of St John's wort beetle.

In New Zealand, the cost benefit ratio for ragwort control is estimated at 14:1. There are agents at work on St John's wort, and Mistflower is being attacked by an introduced white smut fungus. Broom is under siege from gall mite, a twig miner, a seed beetle and broom psyllid. Californian thistle is being attacked by the tiny Green thistle beetle and Buddleia leaf weevil are helping reduce the vigour of their host plants.

Ragwort is controlled by 3 agents including the Ragwort flea beetle, the rather lovely Cinnabar moth, (illustrated) and the Ragwort plume moth.

On gorse, the Gorse pod moth, Gorse seed weevil (see image) and Spider mite are all active. (Along with a couple of moths and thrips).

Gorse seed weevil

Tradescantia – is being successfully reduced in some areas by 3 insects - the tradescantia stem beetle, leaf beetle and tip beetle, although the results are not as good in Wellington as they have been in warmer regions. Due to the high cost of development of the agent to the point of release, the cost can be significant. Megan mentioned that the going rate for a tradescantia beetle can be around $13. Additionally, a fungus for tradescantia has recently been released in the region.

Of particular relevance in Wellington, is that Darwin's barberry weevil has been introduced at 4 sites, with about 400 weevils being released at each site – enough to develop a breeding population. It was imported from Chile, after EPA permission was obtained in 2012, with the first releases in 2015. Eggs are laid in developing fruit and the larvae feed inside the fruit and either damage or eat the seeds. The larva exits through a hole to pupate into adult in the litter below.

In order to control its only host, the Japanese honeysuckle white admiral butterfly has been introduced at two sites. Its caterpillars feed on foliage and when in large numbers can defoliate plants.

Photos: Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research

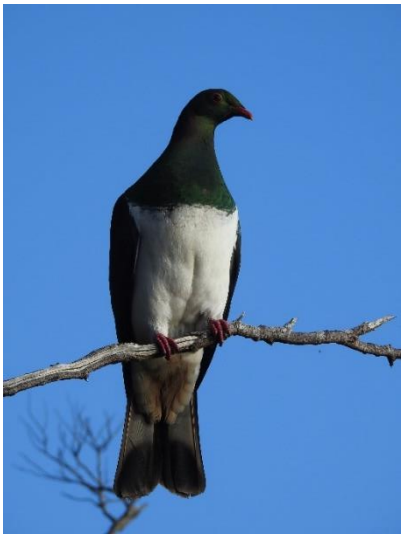
Please Help Us - Darwin's Barberry

The Wellington Branch Committee has resolved to start a project to eradicate Darwin's Barberry in Wellington City. Darwin's Barberry is dominating over native species and must be removed.
We would greatly appreciate your help to establish and manage this new project.
If you are interested in helping or in knowing more, please send an email to Angus Napier at angus@napiers.nz or call Angus on 021 209 6722.

Wellybird – a personal view

Wellington has made tremendous progress in increasing Kererū numbers in the last 20 years or so.

In the early 90s, the New Zealand pigeon also known as the woodpigeon, was a rare sight. Now they are frequently encountered in many parts of the city. The setting up of the Karori Wildlife Reserve in the late 90's offered a refuge safe from predators. Widespread eradication of possums and more recently back-yard rat trapping campaigns have further reduced predator numbers and have increased breeding success. Their stronghold is from the western hills to the edge of the CBD, but they are encountered along the town belt from Oriental Bay south and on the Miramar peninsula. They are famously loud fliers and they can be identified from just the thrumming of the air rushing over their wings. Indeed the noise from their wings is louder than their gentle 'coo' call. Kererū spend most of their time in trees eating flowers, fruits, buds and leaves.



Sometimes they can be seen feeding on the ground. Clover seems to be favoured, but one was noted in East Harbour Park feeding on broadleaf plantain.
They are known for their display flights which comprise a steep upward fight and a soaring dive downwards. They are large birds and play an important role in dispersing the seeds of trees with large fruit. With their increase in numbers, it is not uncommon for them to be struck by cars when swooping across roads. It is wise to drive cautiously in kereru country.

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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