

Kāpiti-Mana Forest and Bird

Newsletter February 2022

Chair's opinion. Fights of long ago

It seems year since Forest and Bird fought and saved the native forests of NZ. Gerry McSweeney and Guy Salmon were names that everyone knew and over some years, the forests came our way.

Pene and I walked the Hump Ridge in Southland recently. The first day is a steep uphill walk to the Okaka hut. But there are boardwalks that help you go further onto the highest part of the Hump ridge.



It was only then that the memory of fighting for Waitutu forests beyond the Hump Ridge came back to me. As I looked down on them their significance was clear.



In the 19th century, an Act of parliament gave South Island landless Maori an area (4270 ha) of forest beyond the coastal end of the Hump Ridge. North of the coastal area, was Waitutu State Forest (45,000 ha). Part of the Maori block was logged in 1920s.

The land falls in 10 giant steps to the sea and contains valuable rimu and other podocarps. The hump slowed the progress of mustelids into Waitutu forest so biodiversity values were very high.

When the Maori owners (Waitutu Incorporation) sold the cutting rights in 1984, Native Forest Action Council and F&B fought to stop the potential logging. This is the bit that I remember. A settlement was finally reached in 1996. The Waitutu Incorporation received cash and cutting rights to other forest in Southland. They retained ownership of their land (as they do today) but it became managed as national park. Waitutu State Forest (ten times larger than the Maori land) that might have been logged after the Maori land was added to Fiordland National Park.

I cannot comment on the Maori deal but from a conservation point of view this complex deal was huge. The forests are superb. They fit the criteria we were fighting for – lowland, virgin (never logged), podocarp. All lowland, virgin podocarp forest, so crucial for our wildlife, had been excluded from national parks, so they could be logged.

Walking the track is great but hard. A jet boat trip (checking traps as you go) from Lake Hauroko down the Wairaurahiri River to the coast is an alternative way to see the Waitutu forest.



Along the Hump

This was a very satisfying memory for me. Fighting for our forests taught me so much. It matured me and gave me new skills. Fighting to reverse climate change will do the same for today's young people. I hope they too will be able to look back with pride.

Bringing Queen Elizabeth Park a wild heart, a haven for mokomoko

Lizards once inhabited all parts of Aotearoa New Zealand. They would have once been common on the Kāpiti Coast.

Many species are now missing from the mainland and others are under threat or declining. Whitakers skinks have disappeared from Pukerua Bay and only survive through captive breeding programs. We know that from reports produced by the Department of Conservation and Greater Wellington Regional Council.

The islands of Matiu-Somes, Mana and Kāpiti provide safe havens for many of the threatened lizard species. Additionally, there are two predator proof fences in the Wellington region that also protect some species. These are Zealandia in Wellington and Ponatahi in the Wairarapa.

In the last decade, we have learnt much about the state of remaining lizard populations on the southern end of the Kāpiti Coast through MfE funded research. Four species can be found on the Paekākāriki-Pukerua Bay escarpment. These are the reasonably common Northern grass skink and Raukawa gecko, and much less common copper skink and brown skinks. Northern grass skinks have been found on the margins of Queen Elizabeth Park and are common in the wilder spots along the Kāpiti Coast. Small numbers have been found in Whareroa farm. A few green gecko have been found on Whareroa farm and Waterfall Road. Ngahere gecko have also been found in the Waterfall Road area.

Lizards face various threats on the mainland. There is habitat destruction. They had traditional predators, but now additionally have rats, weasels, stoats, hedgehogs, cats and even [mice](#) attacking them or competing for resources. They are not helped by their slow [breeding](#) and our local trapping efforts are not enough to protect the more vulnerable species.

Local groups have built lizard gardens to provide habitat. Pukerua Bay School has long had a lizard garden and now Paekākāriki School has one too. There is a large lizard

[garden](#) constructed by Ngā Uruora at the old quarry site on the escarpment. Volunteers at Queen Elizabeth Park have built a small lizard garden next to the Ramaroa centre. The Guardians of Whareroa Farm have planted 'lizard friendly' plants at the cairn site. But on all these sites, lizards remain at risk from a range of introduced predators.

In order to more fully protect and grow lizard populations, the Kāpiti Coast Biodiversity Project has been investigating the building of a predator proof fence in Queen Elizabeth Park. With the help of a grant from the Department of Conservation, we have carried out a feasibility study. This suggested a 16 hectare fence based around the area known as 'the remnant' would enclose a range of habitats suitable for both rare and common lizards.

The potential lizards that could thrive inside the fence include the following gecko: goldstripe, Wellington greens, Ngahere, and Raukawa. In terms of skinks, Northern grass are likely to be there already in small numbers browns, ornates and Kupe could be added. There would be additional benefits too for other animal and plant species.

If and once the fence is built, we will begin investigating potential translocations. We are also working with Ngā Manu and Wellington Zoo in relation to their captive breeding programs.

A small team of enthusiasts has been brought together to work on the next stage of the project. This year, the work has included weed control within the site and planting 'lizard friendly' plants.

In this initial investigation and work, we gained support from a wide range of stakeholders, including local iwi but more signoffs and support is needed to bring our dream to fruition.

Paul Callister & Sahra Kress

For more information see <https://www.Kapitibiodiversity.org.nz/lizard-protection-fence>

The State of NZ's Garden Birds

2021 was the 10th year of the New Zealand Garden Bird survey.

In the [results](#) for the Wellington region: the biggest increase over the decade was sadly Myna birds which unfortunately are an aggressive pest spreading south.



Myna bird [Photo credit](#): Gerrie van Vuuren

But the second biggest increase was Kererū (NZ Pigeon). Greenfinches, Tūī, Fantails, Goldfinches and Bellbirds (Korimako) also showed signs of increase, while Silvereyes (Tauhou) are still decreasing, but less quickly than they were a decade ago. The summary of results for New Zealand can be found [here](#).

I was initially surprised that Kaka and falcon were not increasing but perhaps they are not so much 'Garden birds'.

The next Garden Bird Survey will run for a week from 26 June 2022 (and not even COVID will be able to stop it!), so save the date.

If you would like to brush up on your te reo for the birds surveyed, these Land Care Research [resources](#) may help

Falcon flies

Readers may be interested to know that the falcon chick who appeared in the last newsletter has made it out of the nest and is currently being taught how to receive prey mid-air by its parents. We haven't been able to get a photo of that, but we can confirm how quickly those chicks fledge (and we thought kids grew up quick!) This photo was taken 17 days after the one in last month's issue, so fully fledged in three weeks, as the literature says, is right.



Photo credit: WJ Rae

Who cares about mozzies?

We live next to an amazing swamp, with the associated amazing number of mosquitos. Mosquitos are, it seems, a necessary part of our summer experience, though mostly underappreciated. Did you know that only the females suck our blood? Male mosquitos are important pollinators. There are thirteen native species, which mostly feed on birds, and a few introduced species. Te Papa is currently undertaking New Zealand's very first audit of mosquitos and you can help. Instead of swatting the next pesky attacker, try and catch it in a glass or similar, slip a piece of paper underneath, and freeze it overnight, then send in whole specimens to Te Papa for study, with the relevant information. There's a neat video and more information on their [website](#).

Safe Drinking water consultation - until 6 March 2022

Changes are proposed to New Zealand's drinking water standards to strengthen their ability to protect water sources. Details so you can have your say are [here](#).

Copper butterflies - Pepe Para Riki

On a recent walk in our area we happened to see these copper butterflies getting friendly. It's unclear whether these are Coastal coppers (part of the Common Copper family - *Lycaena Salustius*), or Rauparaha coppers. They are short lived: 1-2 weeks, are usually found on sand dunes, and require Pohuehue/Wire Vine/*Muehlenbeckia Complexa* on which to breed. This is the round leaved vine you can see in the photo.



Photo credit: P Burton Bell

The removal of pohuehue from many areas, the habitat for these beauties has been greatly reduced. We've come to greatly value pohuehue not just for butterflies, but also for its ability to bind soil and overcome grass, bracken, gorse and even blackberry. Pohuehue forms the shrub field next to the beach on Great Barrier Island.

Whitirea Snorkel Day - 5 March

Don't forget there are still a range of summer programme events being run by Greater Wellington, including this one, for swimmers of all ages. Go on, I know you've been dying to know what's underneath the waves... (more details and requirements [here](#).)

Climate Change - António Guterres

Our addiction to fossil fuels is pushing humanity to the brink.

We face a stark choice. Either we stop it - or it stops us", UN Secretary-General António Guterres added, delivering five key messages to world leaders.

It's time to say 'enough'

"Enough of brutalizing biodiversity,

killing ourselves with carbon,

treating nature like a toilet,

burning, and drilling and mining our way deeper.

We are digging our own graves

Our planet is changing before our eyes from melting glaciers, to relentless extreme weather events.

Keep 1.5 degrees alive

Our planet is telling us something and so are our young people.

G20 countries have a particular responsibility as they represent around 80% of emissions.

Read the whole story [here](#).

Next public meeting ?

To comply with our requirements under Health and Safety legislation, Forest and Bird has made the tough decision to only restart public meetings when we are back at the GREEN light setting, so we will keep up the newsletter and the work for our branch until we can meet again. Contact us if you have any queries before then.

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Your feedback on this newsletter would be most welcome as would contributions to future newsletters.