

Kāpiti-Mana Forest and Bird

Newsletter April 2022

Chair's opinion. Impoverishing earth

At the end of Ereana's trip to our Sub Antarctic Islands (See below) she says she felt sad and angry. She had been where human presence was minimal and more recently that presence was to improve nature. But is the scale and speed of restoration efforts fast enough? The sheer beauty and abundance of life on the islands' natural landscapes show in her pictures.

To maintain our standard of living, we turn land into floral and faunal deserts. We cover the best land with a few selected high yield crops which we replace or rejuvenate - kale, plantain, grass, corn, and we fill the land with a few selected high performing fauna - cow, sheep, chicken. We use herbicides and insecticides to eliminate anything that might threaten the regime. We straighten the rivers and streams and drain the swamps.

We cover areas with houses and fill them with foreign plants, pets and hard surfaces.

But we reserve some natural bits. We like to walk through them so we put in tracks and explore their hidden spaces. And we are responsible for the pests and weeds that have invaded them.

The land is not as productive as it was and its produce is for us. We impoverish the land.

With the sea, it is different. Mostly we extract its biodiversity using nets and lines. But bottom trawling also damages sea landscapes. While we don't alter it as much as we do the land, we are impoverishing its underwater seascapes, its flora and fauna.

And over and through all this we spread our pollution - fumes, soots, oils, waste, plastics, silt, chemicals ...

The Sub Antarctic islands are too small and rugged for us to establish colonies on, though we have tried. We have not humanised the landscapes. We don't harvest the land fauna though we do harvest the sea

fauna. The pollution that is there is not obvious. The landscapes aren't impoverished.

I have never been to our Sub Antarctic Islands, but the thrill that I have felt on some holidays, come from landscapes brimming with life, which appears to be native to my eyes. (In Yellowstone or Hluhluwe-Umfolozi I would not recognize non-native plants).

This is speculation on my part, but I think that as humans spread around the world, everywhere was very productive. The seas were bursting with fish, the land held a huge variety and was a bounty of animals, birds, insects. Perhaps that is why we seek it out.

I'm conflicted over my standard of living, my need for comfort and luxury, so much of NZ being impoverished, and the thrill that I remember from those astounding, vibrant landscapes I have seen, only occasionally. That conflict and the knowledge that I am responsible sometimes make me, like Ereana, both sad and angry.

Climate change will force us to return some areas we farmed to nature, and it is true that NZ and other countries are farming less land than formerly. Allowing them, or helping them to regenerate will help biodiversity as well but that's not the only option and already the debate is hotting up. They could be planted in exotics, and cropped and replanted, and the wood (carbon) stored as framing timber or exported for valuable overseas exchange. Marginal farmland could become wood production. We can meet our climate change obligations and make a profit.

Or we could have a more vibrant and plentiful biodiversity. What will NZ decide? My opinion is that we have taken too much already. We need to give back.

Russell

Sub Antarctic Islands - Eireana Catsburg

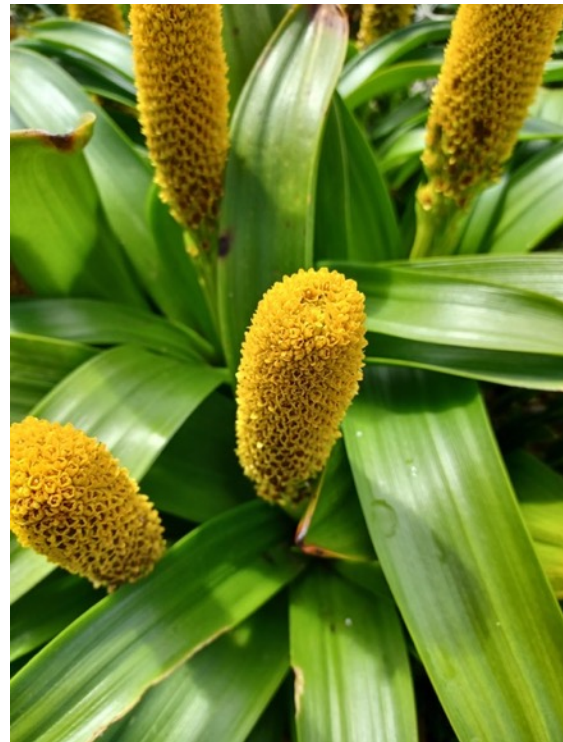
I have been to heaven - and back - and "No" - it wasn't through a near death experience. I visited the Sub Antarctic Islands. That destination was never on my radar. It's remote - between the latitude of 47 to 52 degrees. Also called the Albatross Latitudes. It is in the Roaring Forties and Furious Fifties - potentially scary high seas. It's cold; the mean annual temperature is 6 degrees on Campbell Island: too cold to support trees. It's bleak; when the sextant was the primary navigation tool, the cloudy weather contributed to many a ship wreck. Those shipwrecked, along with the sealers and failed farmers described it as 'dismal and depressing to humans'.

It's remote - My personal past boating experiences had made me vow to be a land lover. So how is it, when my good friend Susan Jane complained about her brother not committing to a trip to the Sub Antarctic Islands to see the albatross, without hesitation, I said "I'll go". Scary.

Have you heard of the mega herbs on the Sub Antarctic Islands? I had seen photos and thought, though out of my reach, that must be the most beautiful sight. Though many visit the subantarctic islands for the fauna, I am fascinated by the uniqueness and quirky beauty of New Zealand Flora. Eighty percent of New Zealand Native flora is endemic to us.



Campbell Island Daisy (*Pleurophyllum* sp.)



Ross Lilly (*Bulbinella rossi*)



Macquarie Is. Cabbage (*Stilbocarpus polaris*)

The special features of the mega herbs is their larger leaves, larger flowers and the greater range of flower colours than flora from the Mainland. Pink through to mauve compliment the red, blue and yellow. The large foliage is thought to be an adaptive response to the cool air and cloudy humid conditions devoid of frost. Flower colour theories include 'being more attractive to insect pollinators', or 'to absorb more warmth from the short growing season and diluted sunlight.'

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) has designated the region as 'A world centre of floristic diversity.' Of the over 230 native vascular plants identified, 35 are found only in this unique region and some are found only at a single island or group.

Besides the mega herbs there are those little gems too. *Astelia subulata*!! (So small compared to the astelia I know and love). And then the orchids, sundew, daisy etc.



Astelia subulata



Orchid - Campbell Island



Daisy – Campbell Island

Each Island group has a different dominant flora species.

The Snares group is dominated by forests of the large tree daisy *Olearia lyallii*, to a lesser extent by *Brachyglottis stewartiae* and along the coastal and forest margins by *Veronica elliptica*, *Kokomuka*, the coastal tree hebe. These, along with the crested penguin, the Snares Island tomtit flitting about the rock faces, the NZ sea lion playing in the pools and resting on the rocks, were viewed from the zodiac, as landing is not allowed. Our early morning wakeup call to the deck started our adventure with a sky full of thousands of sooty shearwater leaving their burrows.

Auckland Islands are dominated by southern rata, *Metrosideros umbellata* (see below).



This coastal forest gives way to grasslands and herb fields. Of the 233 vascular plants listed, 84% are indigenous. The flowering rata had the island glow red. As well as zodiac trips and views from the boat, the boardwalks on Enderby Island took us over the peat, through the forest and herb fields, past feisty and fearless NZ sea lions, curious skua, pipit, and disinterested albatross resting or busy greeting fellow friends.



Friendly Pipit

The Campbell Islands are too cold for trees so the shrubby *dracophyllum cockayneanum* and *D.scoparium*, are the dominant species until you get up to the herb fields.

To me, this was Heaven.

A high meadow full of pink, magenta, flowering megaherbs, stretching over the rim of steep cliffs in one direction and down the valley we had walked up in the other. All I could do was sit and soak in the sight of the megaherb meadow. The albatross soared overhead. The views over the rise broke out to the wild cliffs, the sea and more albatross playing in the wind. I soaked up the expanse of bands of pinks and purple flowers. I didn't want to leave. This high meadow was the highlight, the absolute highpoint, for me.



To keep these islands pristine, DOC manages the number of visitors, the areas you can and can't access, the system of boardwalks, the protocols re cleaning and checking regimes before you board the boat, before you board the zodiacs, before you land on the islands, and in between each landing. It's worth the effort to keep foreign seeds and disease out.

In Dec. 1998 the five groups of Islands were listed as a World Heritage Area. This United Nations listing recognises the 'outstanding universal value' with weight given to their biodiversity, natural habitats, threatened species, from points of view of science or conservation. They are recognised as 'Havens of Endemism.'

The Auckland Islands are the largest, highest and biologically the richest of the five groups. However, Auckland Island itself is still being decimated by feral pigs, cats and mice. Having had the privilege of seeing so much beauty I was hit with immense sadness on leaving. Why??

New Zealand mainland was originally covered in unique flora and fauna. To me, a phenomenal landscape. On the mainland, pests, weeds and humans (*including humans*

☺) prevail. Jokes aside, there is still a constant need to fight for the protection for what remains. Restoration is happening slowly, but has the bar been lowered to mediocre? I was both sad and angry.

What could I do?

I looked at the [DOC website](#) about their work on Auckland Island, and see DOC has a vision of NZ Sub Antarctic Islands as thriving, free of mammalian pests. A comprehensive report and feasibility study (2021) has been completed and reviewed by DOC's internationally renowned Island Eradication Group. Sadly the project was paused in April 2020 due to the financial impacts of Covid-19. Operational planning has been completed to allow for project restoration 'as soon as conditions allow'. Two years and more precious biodiversity is lost.

I have emailed DOC on their contact page to ask if this project has restarted and if not when?

What else can we do?

Ereana Catsburg

Drone Technology for Predator eradication

It's no secret that there are plenty of inaccessible areas in our country such as deep ravines, steep sided and densely bush covered slopes. This poses problems for pest eradication. Another difficulty is forest edges.

Professor Craig Morley of Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology who is passionate about predator control, started investigating how to deal with areas where 1080 drops cannot be achieved. In 2013 he selected drones and got in touch with Philip Solaris of X-Craft. Their project has grown into a collaboration between Te Ohomai Institute of Technology, X-Craft Enterprises and Aerospread Technologies, supported by funding from AGMARDT to develop an accurate GPS targeted approach to predator control. Now, they're looking for projects to trial their technologies. Advances like these will hopefully lead to better predator control

will use less poison, and help develop new Kiwi technologies with a raft of future applications for predator control and beyond. Read more [here](#).

Changes to recycling waste

Ministry for the Environment are currently consulting on the way we recycle waste. Submissions close on 8 May 2022. Find out more [here](#).

Petition government for wetlands

Wetlands are critical to biodiversity providing unique habitats and trapping carbon. Less than 10% of New Zealand's wetlands remain (2-3% in the wellington region). We need to make sure they are protected, improved and extended. Forest and Bird has asked members to sign their [petition](#) to get the government to do better.

Ngā Manu Winter Lectures

Six amazing lunchtime lectures to chase away the winter blues...

Where: Robin's Nest Education Centre at Ngā Manu Nature Reserve, 74 Ngā Manu Reserve Rd, Waikanae

Cost: Paper koha on entry

Register at admin@ngamanu.co.nz or call 04 293 4131

When: Lectures start 1.30 pm. Question time afterwards. Finish at 3 pm.

Arrive at 1.00 pm for tea & biscuits, or come earlier for a walk & BYO lunch.

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

Dates, Topics, Speakers:

11 May: *Cultural evolution of bird song: dialects, learning, function, & diversity* - Dianne Brunton, Professor of Ecology and Conservation, Massey University Auckland:

25 May: *Challenges for the conservation of freshwater ecosystems in a warming Aotearoa* - Angus McIntosh, Professor of Freshwater Ecology, University of Canterbury

8 June: *New Zealand ferns* - Leon Perrie, Curator, Te Papa Tongarewa

22 June: *Three waters reforms* - Mike Joy, Victoria University of Wellington

6 July: *Stories from a life in nature* - Alison Ballance, broadcaster and writer, Nelson

20 July: *Kiwi microbiomes change in captivity* - Manpreet Dhani, Manaaki Whenua, Lincoln