

Kāpiti-Mana Forest and Bird Newsletter

September 2022

Editorial: Local and Regional Council elections

The single greatest threat to ecology, biodiversity, our landscapes and future is climate change. I believe that climate change is also NZ's and the world's greatest financial threats. Our vote this September/October is important if we want to have any chance of slowing the declines and reducing that threat. The following is very much my opinion, based on what I have seen over the last 6 years.

GW's activity mainly affects the environment – parks, rivers, transport etc. What GW has been doing over the last 3 years in the climate change space is very significant. It has been driven mainly by new councillors. They have recognised the climate problem and their ability to do something about it, but there are some councillors who have other agendas.

In local body elections, it is sometimes hard to determine which councillors are driving these changes, who are for status quo or those for whom it's a job and they shift with the wind direction. The wind shifters support decisions after they are made and if they have been well received by the public. Their website and election brochure may well say they have worked hard to secure this or that result as part of chairing this or that committee. Even how they voted on a particular issue may not represent their views. When they want your vote, they may imply that they were responsible for what council achieved yet what they initiated and supported in council may have been something else entirely. This can be very confusing.

During my work on the QEP peat wetlands, starting 6 years ago, I expected support from GW councillors because climate change was already serious, though perhaps not here. That support was not forthcoming – rather the opposite. Change came when I met Thomas Nash just before the last election. (He was soon to be Councillor Nash - Chair of the climate change committee *Note: He is not a candidate in our electorates*). I walked

with him to Mataihuka and looked down on the drained and farmed peatlands and explained that turning these back to functioning wetlands was the greatest carbon and biodiversity opportunity on the Coast and could be decided by GW because they administered the Park. He said, at the time, that he would make this one of his campaigns, and he has been true to his word. Better still, he has initiated climate change opportunities in all the regional parks. Native flora and fauna is being protected. Large new native plantings, to absorb carbon, are being undertaken. Wetlands in QEP are to be restored. The parks are now for people to passively recreate in. We owe this to Councillor Thomas Nash.

QEP is no longer farmed and where people are no longer denied access, as was happening under GW before the last election.

They are now climate mitigation areas. This is important because mitigation, such as stopping drained peat wetland emissions, will reduce climate change. Adaptation, such as putting in larger storm water pipes or building a sea wall, may reduce damage to Kapiti but will not reduce damage to Nelson, Westport and the rest of the world. It's a question of "Do we reduce the risk to all" or "Do we try to protect some of us". And no matter how much adaptation we undertake, it will be outrun if we don't mitigate.

We need councillors who realize the situation the human race is in, who understand the difference between mitigation and adaptation, who care about the world, and are capable of making the big decisions required. We do not need wind shifters.

My experiences during the QEP climate /wetland project, helped me work out those councillors who were on board and those who were not.

In Kapiti, it's a vote between only two GW candidates for one position – an incumbent

and a new candidate. In my opinion, voting last election fundamentally changed Greater Wellington for the better. We are now seeing climate change initiatives become a reality. We need to continue that trend.

It is important that you vote and this election, we need a vote for the earth.

Russell

Guardians of Pauatahanui Inlet asked local body candidates questions about their position on the protection and restoration of the Porirua Harbour. You can view the responses, and their paper on changes to the Porirua District Plan, on the top left of their website: <http://gopi.org.nz/>

Restoration of Whitireia Park

Since 2005 the Whitireia Park Restoration Group has been restoring biodiversity values in Whitireia Park. Whitireia Park sits on the southern headland of Te Awarua o Porirua (Porirua Harbour) and covers around 180 hectares of mainly grassland with some substantial areas of gorse.



Ngāti Toa Rangatira is mana whenua and the Park has over 100 archaeological sites which demonstrate the level of human occupation of the land. One of the most prominent archaeological features is the mountain Whitireia, and there are large areas of terraces and pits within the Park.

The suburb of Titahi Bay is adjacent to the southern boundary. The north-western edge has an escarpment and rocky coast opens to the Tasman Sea. The remaining coastline falls within Te Awarua o Porirua and alternates rocky points with sandy bays. A large part of the park interior drains to Te Onepoto stream which enters Te Awarua o Porirua through a wetland and estuary. A tiny remnant of coastal kohekohe forest, some spectacular coastal escarpments, a small estuary, coastal sand dunes, stony beaches, seeps, a permanent and some intermittent

streams and freshwater and coastal wetlands provide a diverse range of ecosystems to work with within the park. Much of the Park was grazed by cattle.

Restoration of Onehunga Bay

A small area around Onehunga Bay was fenced off from cattle in 2005. This allowed The Whitireia Park Restoration Group (formerly known as the Onehunga Bay Restoration Group) to begin restoring some native vegetation. The group's initial vision was to link the bush remnant to the coast. Our group's first planting day was in the winter of 2006, planting the side of the gully below the bush remnant.

For the next four years we continued to plant around the wetland, in the wet areas and the dunes at the eastern end of Onehunga Bay. Swamp flax, cabbage tree, manuka and toetoe have replaced open grassy paddocks. The mānuka, kānuka, tree daisy and ngaio on the gully sides now provide enough cover for natural regeneration to occur. Under this canopy kohekohe, māhoe, titoki, kaikōmako and pigeonwood seedlings are germinating and growing. Kererū which used to pass over this area now stop and visit as more and more food is available to them. Tui, largely absent prior to our restoration efforts, are now everywhere, particularly when the flax is in flower.

Onehunga Bay



The marram and kikuyu grass dunes have given way to spinifex and pīngao. Behind the dunes, sand coprosma and shore spurge (*Euphorbia glauca*) have been planted.



It has been difficult to establish plants because the climate here is harsh. Strong dry salt winds come from the north and the north-west and cold southerlies are strong enough to rise over the top of the Park and blast down the valleys. The summers are usually very dry and any rain that does fall in summer is quickly evaporated. During our first years we discovered that even though we were planting plants grown from local seed adapted to the local conditions, many would die or sulk for years before they finally adapted and started to grow. Even ngaio and hebe stricta would have half their leaves drop from salt burn. Those that survive the first three years go on to be vibrant strong plants.

Onepoto Catchment

An intentional fire which ripped through much of the park in February 2010 also destroyed some of our plantings and burnt off most of the gorse cover on the hills and inland valley of the Onepoto catchment. The stream's riparian vegetation was burnt, and all the fences were also destroyed. The cattle were removed and have never returned.

Although we were devastated by the damage, it has given our group more opportunities to replant and now it is not grazed, natural regeneration is occurring in competition with the regrowth of gorse. Near the headwaters of Te Onepoto stream a large area of machaerina rubiginosa, swamp buttercup and puha have all reappeared.

Onepoto estuary



Kaiaua Bay

Our efforts extended to Kaiaua Bay, a ten minute walk along the coast east of Onehunga Bay. This is a dune site which has been transformed from a flat grassy resting spot for cattle (one of their favourite spots) into a fully functioning dune. Hundreds of spinifex and pīngao have been planted on the foredune and they have grown into beautifully rounded natural dunes.

Kaiaua Bay



This site is a strange place for sand to accumulate as it is nearly 1.5 kilometres from the open coast however large waves, after a few days of north-westerlies, push sand up the harbour neck from a bar at the harbour entrance. Behind the foredunes, bidibidi, native spinach, sand coprosma, twiggy tree daisy, flax, and toetoe are thriving.

The Escarpment

More recently efforts are centred on the coastal escarpment. Recent surveys have discovered a large population of northern grass skinks and common gecko and fewer copper skinks. There are historic records of spotted skink, but these have not been detected recently. Much of the escarpment is

grassy, however there are good numbers of mingimingi, thick-leaved mahoe and some coastal flax. Many other species were grazed out so we are returning some of these to the escarpment. Because the whole escarpment is too large to plant, we have planted nodes or large groups of several species and over time these will spread and provide more suitable habitat and food sources for the lizard species.

Each year I collect seed and send it off to nurseries to grow on for the following years plantings. Much of the seed was collected on-site but because there was a limited number of naturally occurring plants of many species we wanted, I was concerned about the limited genetic spread of these species. Now seed is collected from many local sources around coastal Porirua.

Trapping

The group is also partnering with Goodnature and GWRC to trial the use of A24 resetting traps to control mice. Mice, hedgehogs, cats and mustelids are the main predators of lizards here and some lizards have only been able to survive because of refuges between

rocks and by hiding amongst driftwood. The DOC200 traps along the escarpment provide some protection of these predators however mice are difficult to control and numbers usually increase when populations of their predators such as weasels are reduced.

Currently we are funded by a new Biodiversity programme that was established by GWRC, the Key Native Ecosystem Programme and the GWRC Parks Department. We often need to apply for external funding to top-up funds.

The group is entering its 18th year and has grown its knowledge and experience. We are looking to make significant improvements to the biodiversity of Whitireia Park by applying that knowledge for the benefit of future generations.

If you would like to join us, check out our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1055760224479856/>

Robyn Smith

Bittern sighted in Whitireia Park

In early September, Robyn Smith was walking her dog in Whitireia Park near Te Onepoto estuary when she was fortunate to see a matuku-hūrepo Australasian Bittern fly up after being flushed out of the estuary by another walker. These are significantly endangered birds and very rarely seen - good spotting Robyn! You can read the full story from NZ Herald here: <https://tinyurl.com/3uv9bbht>.

Rewetting the Southern Peatlands of Queen Elizabeth Park

This is the largest of the "Inspired by Sanderson" projects has \$115,000 allocated to it.

On Monday 5/09/22, I met with an ecologist, a hydrologist, a resource consent writer, a dam designer, and two GW staff at QEP. We discussed which areas of QEP could be rewetted and not possibly affect adjacent property owners i.e. rewetting was well away from other land owners including the expressway. We visited each site and discussed how they could be rewetted, whether they needed a resource consent and the likely benefit (land area rewetted for the effort). We looked at soil profiles, vegetation and other issues I knew little to nothing

about. This work is being undertaken by independent consultants for GW so that one resource consent can be written to cover all areas in the southern areas of peat and peaty soils.

If the resource consent is approved, the dams will be built using the grant money that we obtained. Note that while I call them dams, they are really not much more than blockages to field drains that drain the paddocks after rain, and many of those blockages will be constructed where the field drain runs through a culvert under a farm vehicle accessway.

I have to admit that when we thought this project up we thought it had a very low chance of success, but steadily over a year and a half, we have inched closer to creating (or recreating) wetlands in QEP. The reason for the grant is to stop the carbon that is

Emerging wetlands Is this the future?

From an ecological point of view, Waikanae park does not look very exciting. But in the area leased to equestrian interests, there are small wetlands, areas of Kanuka and some largish podocarps. I have walked through this area over the years but this year, it is different. The large basin that sits in the dish shaped bottom of the area is now well under water. Much of the area that horses used to graze is under water or saturated. There is no escape for it. It will just have to evaporate or slowly sink into the ground below. This year, the area of the country covered by weather events and the amount of rain that kept on coming from them appeared to be

emitted from drained peat and then, as the wetlands are re-established, they will also draw down some more carbon. I acknowledge the help of GW Councillor Thomas Nash in helping to progress this project.

remarkable, yet Kapiti got off lightly compared to Nelson and the West Coast. Is this a sign of things to come? I think so.



Revegetating five hectares of Queen Elizabeth Park

This is the second largest project in the "Inspired by Sanderson" projects and has \$65,000 allocated to it. Over the last few weeks we have been talking to a forest restoration company called Red Tree www.redtree.co.nz. They are a Christchurch based company that started after the Port Hills fire in 2017. Instead of growing plants until large enough to plant, they experimented with land preparation and seed collection, then scattering the seed on the ground and managing the crop as it

emerged. Scattering can be done by drone. They claim to be able to obtain 20-40,000 plants per hectare, in contrast to 2,500 using traditional methods. They also mix enrichment plants with pioneer species. The area that we want planted is the eastern side of a sand dune in QEP facing Whareroa Stream. When walking down the stream track, it will be seen on the left. It will support the eco corridor we want down the stream connecting the Remnant forest to the coast and to the Raumati escarpment.

Make your vote and voice heard

Stop mining on Conservation land

Have you supported the Crown Minerals (Prohibition of Mining) Amendment Bill yet? F&B have asked us to write to Labour MPs to remind them they promised to stop mining conservation land. There's an easy way to do this here: <https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/show-your-support-no-new-mines-conservation-land>

Do you want a Low carbon Kapiti Future?

There is still a little time to have your say about lowering carbon emissions to Kapiti

Council. Answer their survey here: <https://tinyurl.com/yc2er2c3>

Urban Development & Freshwater Management

Greater Wellington is consulting on proposed changes to the Regional Policy Statement for the Wellington Region. The focus *"is to implement and support the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 (NPS-UD) and to start the implementation of the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (NPS-FM). We are also addressing issues related to climate change,*

indigenous biodiversity and high natural character." Submit here: <https://tinyurl.com/29pre7d2> before 14 October '22.

Coastal marine wetlands and Emissions Trading
MfE has two open consultations - one on our coastal marine wetlands, and one on proposed changes to the Emissions Trading Scheme and related price settings. To find out more visit: <https://environment.govt.nz/what-you-can-do/have-your-say/>

Pene Burton Bell

Learning about Dunes

Coastal Restoration Trust has released a series of seven videos about the natural processes behind our coastlines. They can be viewed

here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4cs0Y9nX77cJWpzRAwvML97apwExAoAg>

While we're on the subject of dunes, now's an especially important time to stay off them, especially near estuaries, as shore birds such as Dotterel (tūturiwhatu) and Oystercatchers (tōrea pango) are currently breeding and are easily disturbed.

Kākīānau Black Swans (*cygnus atratus*)

One of the largest birds in New Zealand, Black swans are a bird of great controversy. Until sailors reached Australia they were considered an impossibility, and their discovery was such a surprise, they now have a theory named after them! In addition experts disagree whether they should be considered exotic - the Acclimatisation society brought in 100 from Melbourne in the 1860s at the same time, evidently, as the birds decided to come here by themselves (which would make them self-introduced natives), and to add further intrigue they are now considered the same species as New Zealand's extinct native swan (which would make them native). Since we're discussing these terms, endemic means a species is only naturally found in New Zealand, so that's a label that doesn't fit Black Swans in New Zealand. They are also not entirely black, with red bill and eye, grey legs, and white flight feathers.



Black swans eat aquatic plants, but if these are not available due (for example) to silting, then they will eat pasture and leave their manure behind - this has made them unpopular with farmers. They are considered a fine eating game bird, with a population of about 60,000. They breed generally between September to November building an impressive raised nest as water subsides in wetlands, as you can see from the photo above. The clutch of 5-14 pale green eggs are incubated for just over a month, and the fluffy grey goslings fledge about three months later. Pene Burton Bell

This pair were photographed next to Paetawa Stream near Peka Peka by Joy Glasson.

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/wetland-birds/page-4>, <https://nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/black-swan>

Editors: Russell Bell & Pene Burton Bell
Email: russelljamesbell@gmail.com
Phone: 021 22 66 047

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