

Kāpiti-Mana Forest and Bird Newsletter

December 2023 – Summer Edition



Conservation

There are different objectives that drive conservationists to work to save the natural world.

1 Some see the natural world and the species within it as having a right to exist - We are all in this together. It is an ethical position.

2 Some see the loss of charismatic species as tragic. Whales, panda, elephants, kauri, kākāpō. To some extent kokāko and their beautiful song were used to save Pureora Forest. Saving a charismatic species may save a whole environment.

3 Some are worried about the rate of extinction. In this view, the loss of a native snail would be as concerning as the loss of takahē. This led to the identification of conservation hot spots – areas with a high number of native species.

4 The protection of genetic diversity; trying to save each species. This sometimes leads to breeding back species such as the auroch (Heck cattle) or the idea of bringing back extinct species from recovered DNA. A group called EDGE (Evolutionary Distinct and Globally Endangered) identifies and promotes the saving of threatened species which are on a remote branch of the evolutionary tree. where the loss of a single species would be a loss of evolutionary progress in a particular direction.

5 The protection of biodiversity. This tends to focus on environments, such as forests or wetlands, that support various species. Many of the species saved may be unknown to people who work for this objective.

6 Joining up natural areas with eco corridors because the size of an area determines how many species it can contain and the joined area will be more robust.

7 More recently, because ecosystems have been recognized for the services (ecosystem services) they provide to us - such as water, oxygen, flood protection, materials, aquatic nurseries, carbon absorption, recreation, to name a few. The objective is to increase the ecosystem services that nature can provide. Pricing ecosystem services can be a strategy to engage the financial community.

8 There are those who want to preserve and enhance the spiritual and aesthetic experiences we get from nature. Our national parks were based on this objective. They are grand, beautiful, challenging landscapes of ice, mountains, beech forests, and clear streams and rivers. With the rise of the conservation movement, ecological considerations have become more prominent.

9 Some are motivated for the species themselves while others are motivated because they make the connection between the loss of species and human poverty and decline.

The conservation volunteers I connect with have one, more, or perhaps all of these objectives in mind and it does not matter which objective they are following.

There are several reasons for this.

Our early National Parks, as well as saving large intact and beautiful landscapes, saved many environments, species, charismatic or not, provide ecosystem services for us all, and lowered the rate of extinction that might have occurred had the land been forested, farmed, mined, or used recreationally; as was hoped for when, in 1910, heather was planted in Tongariro NP and pheasants and grouse were to be released for hunters.

The Oostvaardersplassen reserve in Holland was set up to mimic European riverbank environments before human disturbance.

Heck cattle were introduced as a substitute for aurochs, as were other species to mimic what may have existed. Animals were uncontrolled and the dead animals were not removed. After some years insects and birds that live on carrion, and had not been seen in the area for decades, arrived. This experiment fulfills many of the above objectives and also has become a recreational destination for humans.

The focus on panda stopped hunting and logging in many of the remaining suitable habitats in China.

These are examples where one objective serves all.

When with other volunteers, we often discuss aspects of these objectives. How can we get kākā established in QEP? What sort of wetland will we try to restore? Should we concentrate on plants that support insects or birds? Should we just arrange a very wide range of trees, vines, ferns, and ground

cover and let nature sort it out. Should we plant thousands of tōtara because they would be good for climate change (and other conservation uses)? What about the huge range of wetland plants that must have been here and we don't even know the names of?

We did not anticipate that fernbirds would return to QEP. They indicate that the environment has developed to the point where a relatively rare insect-eating bird can be sustained. This is the best and most dramatic indicator that things are improving. What will be the next indicator?

We never resolve these issues. We keep our own pet objectives but I think we all agree; *We believe the work is valuable, we cannot predict the outcome and the outcome will be whatever results.*

Russell



iNaturalist – Seek and Ye Shall Find by Pene Burton Bell

I have previously mentioned that I am a member of the iNaturalist community.

I recently watched a great seminar by the executive director of iNaturalist and colleagues talking about the value of this tool to global science. You can view it here: <https://youtu.be/PrzOb9iCsTs> but let me tell you a bit more about this tool as holidays are a perfect time to enjoy using it.

iNaturalist is an app you can download on your mobile phone or your computer which enables you to identify and record occurrences of biodiversity from any part of the tree of life wherever you are. I have recorded items when on holiday in Australia, for example, and of course at home.

iNaturalist and its baby brother, Seek https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/seek_app, have a community around the world and provide an excellent way to learn more about the biodiversity around you. You can take a photograph of something (perhaps a spider that's moved into your lounge!!) and the app will suggest what it is, using the international databases behind it.

Seek* is kidsafe with great privacy settings and no requirement to share what you find, so you can record and learn without fear of being 'entangled' with others (that also means you won't make new contacts though). You can also earn badges etc.

*Seek is not the same as the local job app.

Over 40 million observations by 1 million people around the world were made in iNaturalist this year. Species previously presumed extinct were rediscovered, new species identified, and over 1 in 6 of all species in the world have been documented. Nearly 800 academic articles were written in the 2023, based largely on the data provided through iNaturalist.

As well as getting help to identify what you're seeing, your observations become accessible via an international network and data infrastructure called GBIF (Global Biodiversity Information Facility) and can be accessed by others for further research. GBIF provides open access to data about all types of life on our planet to anyone, anywhere. You can learn more about GBIF here:

<https://www.gbif.org/>

Let's take an example of the song thrush – a non-native bird brought here by colonists probably because of their beautiful song. It is common here but now quite rare in England where it is native. Is this because of the loss of insects due to the use of poisons? Someone might wish to study if it might relate to changes in climate, and they could use GBIF's internationally datasets.

The GBIF organisation estimated that more than half the data it now holds came from observations through iNaturalist. So, it becomes a powerful way for citizens to contribute to science internationally, nationally and locally.

If you are visiting Fiji or Fiordland National Park, your iNaturalist observations may be even more valuable because there are lower populations hence less observations, in fact the more remote you are, the more valuable your sightings are likely to be.

But making a detailed record of a park or place near home is also useful to provide

baseline studies and reveal the presence of previously unknown species.

We have heard that local and regional councils use information in iNaturalist to help them ascertain the biodiversity treasures of a site. If a developer then applies to clear a site, in which you have recorded a gecko, an orchid, a shining cuckoo etc., that might result in protections being put in place there.

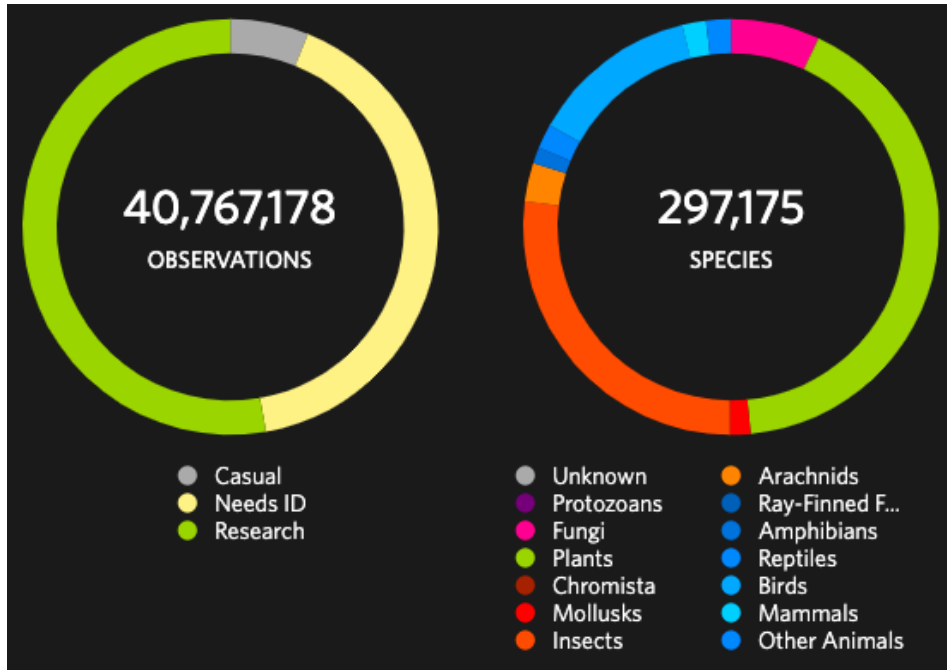
You might also record a nasty weed like woolly nightshade or a pest like a wallaby though you should also notify councils directly so they can take action (The Antenna app is a good way to do this).

I have found that using iNaturalist has helped me to walk more mindfully wherever I am, noting what is around me and becoming more inquisitive – iNaturalist helps me learn and document what I see. I have made 150 observations so far. It's been a fun way of learning and I recommend it. You don't have to upload every sighting immediately either, you can process your findings when on WIFI at home.

It may be that some readers can no longer walk the trails as you once did, and becoming an identifier (a person who confirms that what was observed is in fact a tawapou – a small rare coastal tree) is another great way of supporting citizen science while getting to see things you don't see every day. It could also help connect you with others and learn/share knowledge.

Why not learn more about iNaturalist: <https://www.inaturalist.org/> or download the app.

Te Taiao – our environment will benefit and as Forest and Birders, that's what we're about.



Above are a couple of stats from iNaturalist's 2023 Year in Review

Below are my recent observations (left), and the tawapou that caused some discussion (right):

127 Observations

- Coastal cutty grass** (1 day ago) - Queen Elizabeth Park, Paekākāriki, Welli... (1 comment)
- Canada Goose** (1 day ago) - Queen Elizabeth Park, Paekākāriki, Welli... (2 comments)
- Eurasian Skylark** (1 day ago) - Queen Elizabeth Park, Paekākāriki, Welli... (1 comment)
- Slender Forest Orchid** (3 wk ago) - Nelson Lakes National Park, Nelson Lake... (1 comment)
- strand sedge** (3 wk ago) - South Island/Te Waipounamu, Motueka... (1 comment)
- Green mistletoe** (3 wk ago) - Tasman, NZ-NE, NZ (1 comment)
- Tau Emerald** (1 mo ago) - Gordon, NSW, AU (5 comments)
- Stylidium productum** (1 mo ago) - Gordon, NSW, AU (1 comment)
- Narrow-leaved Triggerplant** (1 mo ago) - Gordon, NSW, AU (1 comment)
- Flannel Flower** (1 mo ago) - St Johns Ave, Gordon, NSW, AU (2 comments)
- Pink Matchheads** (1 mo ago) - Gordon, NSW, AU
- Hyssop Loosestrife** (3 mo ago)

pburtonbell 13/03/23, 4:51 PM

dicots [paraphyletic]
Class Magnoliopsida

This doesn't look like other pigeonwood that I've seen. The leaves leave the stem differently and their shape differs so I hope someone can help me figure out if it really is pigeonwood

Te Ika-a-Māui/North Island, Parapara...
ZE 3ARB RD, FYTFIEI PL, WATERSTONE AV

Honeydew



Pic: A drop of honeydew forming on a beech tree © P Burton Bell

Russell and I recently returned from visiting Lake Rotoiti near St Arnaud. One thing I love about southern beech forests is their beautiful aroma of honey.

It comes from the sweet nectar produced by a scale insect that sucks the goodness out of the bark of the beech trees (*nothofagus* sp.) leaving them with a distinctive sooty black velvety cloak (sooty mildew) adorned with many fine white 'hairs' which drip the honeydew from their tips. The drips come, in

fact, from the anus of the scale insect. The insects have a very simple structure – just mouthparts with a long white waxy tube which looks like wayward hairs protruding from the trunk.

Having tried it (after collecting 5-10 drops) it tastes like candyfloss, no wonder it's popular.

Honeydew is a high calorie food source for many organisms in our beech forests including bellbirds, kākā and bats. Drops not collected directly, fall on the trunk enabling

the sooty mould to grow, and this dense black fungus feeds several species of insects. Being available year-round, honeydew provides an especially important food source when there are few other options around. Unfortunately introduced wasps don't just sup the nectar, they eat the whole tube (damaging or killing the scale insect) so there is less food available in the ecosystem.

This is why DOC has worked hard to eradicate these wasps but it's an ongoing battle.

Some visits to Lake Rotoiti are plagued by wasps and sandflies – we were very fortunate on our visit to see only a handful of each, so we could enjoy the beauty of this stunning place.



Lake Rotoiti, near St Arnaud in the Tasman District

© P Burton Bell

Favourite Walk: Bird Count Walk – Queen Elizabeth Park

Distance: 4 km loop returning to start (about 1 hr 30 minutes)

Attire: Sturdy walking shoes, at times the track can be boggy in parts

Transport: Car (enter Whareroa Road* at Mackays crossing off the Kāpiti Expressway) or by bicycle (catch train to Paekākariki, cycle along Te Ara Whareroa to Whareroa Road then turn right and cycle until you reach the Marines Memorial – about 4km,

you can take a shortcut back along the Yankee Trail)

Food/Drink: BYO – you might be able to get chippies and a juice at the Tram station if it's open

Toilets: At Ramaroa near Mackays Crossing entrance (or Whareroa Beach carpark, or in Paekākariki village, or the QEP Paekākariki carpark)

Dogs: No dogs are allowed in QEP's wetlands

Why is it special? A varied landscape – wetlands, paddocks, podocarp forest, swamp, and birds and some historical sites. The bird count sites have had five-minute bird counts done on eBird for 7+ years. Feel free to add your counts using this method, hopefully all four stations will soon be public hotspots on the system.

Directions: Starts in Queen Elizabeth Park on Whareroa Road. The start point is from the US Marine's memorial parking area about 500m from the entrance.

Cross the grass and enter through the wooden gate into the Marines' Wetland.

Soon you will pass Jean Luke's seat (she was awarded an Old Blue from F&B for her service to conservation groups in our area). The seat is almost opposite the short track to the Bird Hide, and an information board on how the wetland was created.

From the main track near Jean's seat progress to next signpost turning left to follow Te Ara Tipapa (TAOT) walk signs over the bridge

After the bridge is a Bird Species information board and Bird Count Site 4.

At next intersection Turn left to stay on TAOT along the edge of Marines Wetland – watch your head on the low-hanging Ngaio branch.

The track gets rougher as you continue up and onto ridge beyond. Watch your step, it is uneven.

Pass the Ohairu fault sign (the Faultline is now covered in grass) and past another way marker to reach Daphne's seat. Daphne Steele was a great champion for nature in Kāpiti being part of Kāpiti Environmental Action. This seat has nice views along escarpment and over the parade ground to your right, Kāpiti Island and the first glimpse of large kahikatea in The Remnant depending which way you look.

The map is on the next page...

Continue until next intersection, turn right and head downhill into The Remnant through the wooden gate.

Watch out for a low hanging titoki on the track, and admire it's amazing natural form. Shortly after this the track turns sharp left.

The next Bird count site is nearby on your left, about 10m from the corner.

A little further on, near a Poroporo sign, there are two logs to sit on

Pass the entrance to the macrocarpa forest on right (though you might want to stop off to botanise for Carex Raotest which covers the path under the macrocarpa)

Continue on The Remnant path loop returning to the ridge when you exit.

Turn right to re-join the main ridge track and continue to the wooden fence where you'll find bird count site 1.

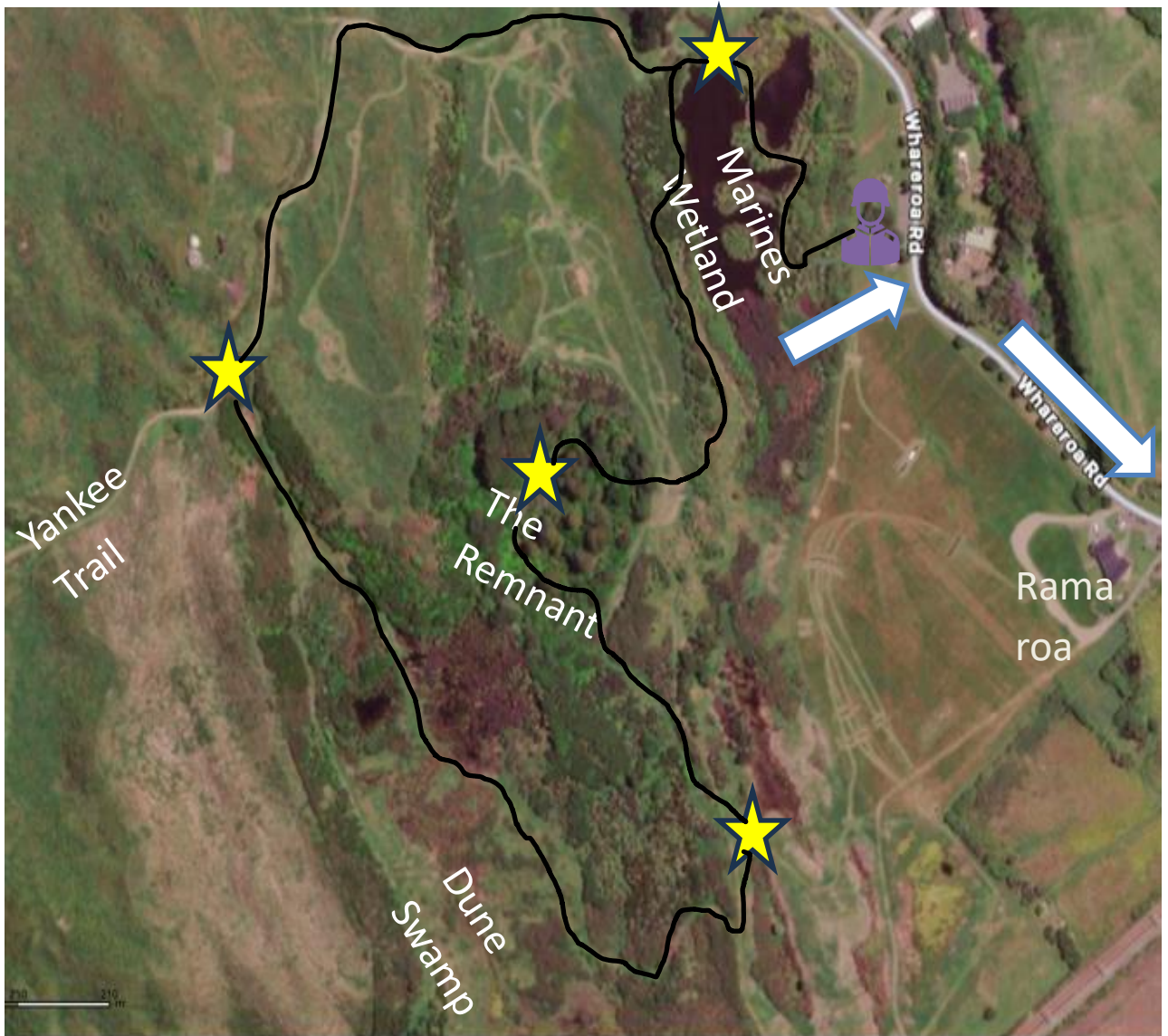
Continue along ridge until you reach the turn off to the Dune Swamp on your right (100m)

As you continue along through the swamp you will pass a stand of totara planted on 24 June 2013 to celebrate the Park's 60th jubilee.

Continue on the swamp track passing a wetland and the ephemeral stream flowing from it and, climbing up the ridge to the intersection of Yankee Trail you will see the final bird count site (Site 2). From here you can see the Transmission Gully Road to the Southwest, and the Mataihuka Escarpment to the Northwest.

If returning to Paekākariki, turn left to re-join Te Ara Whareroa, otherwise turn right to return via Marines wetland (turn off about 400m along the track) or continue straight to end of Yankee Trail to reach Whareroa road and return to your vehicle via the road.

* Note: there is another Whareroa Road in Raumati South (so if on GPS check you get the right one)



It only remains for us to thank you all again for being part of our branch, and part of Forest and Bird. We suspect our presence will be more important than ever in our current economic and political climate. We'll have to factor that into our new year's plans.

We hope yours is good and green

Russell and Pene

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We would love to receive relevant content to contribute to our newsletters.

Tell us about your amazing finds, or your favourite local walks, or other topics you think will interest other members. And what about great photos?

Your feedback is also welcomed.

Our next public meeting will be:
ON Thursday 22 February 2024
AT 43 Ngaio Road, Waikanae
**Paul Callister will be talking about
the Lizards of our district**