

Kāpiti-Mana Forest and Bird Newsletter

March 2024

The coming fight

I was so privileged to be involved in the "Save the forests" campaigns in the 1970s to 1990. At that time, National Parks consisted of only high-altitude land. Virgin lowland podocarp forests were under the control of the Forest Service. The land that was soon to be cut and wastefully used was virgin (it had never been logged) lowland (not high altitude) podocarp (the large NZ timber trees that were centuries old and contained NZ's most valuable land biodiversity; rimu, mataī, miro and tōtara forest communities). Kahikatea and non-podocarps were cut and left or burnt in landscape sized fires by the Forest service - a government department. Later our campaigns fought for beech forest as well. Native forests were being slaughtered, then burnt along with their native fauna. Much of the land produced by this process was not suitable for agriculture. What has happened in the Amazon in this decade is similar.

This was the time of "Rob's Mob". Rob Muldoon was Prime Minister and was formidable and, to opponents, scary. His Minister of Forests was Venn Young.

An initially small group of very young dedicated educated people (later called NZ Forest Action Council and later joined by Forest and Bird) objected, started a petition called the *Maruia Declaration*, and presented it to parliament in 1975 with 341,160 signatures. Government departments leaked information of what they were up to. People sat in trees that were about to be logged at risk of their own death. Politicians were challenged in town hall debates by very capable and articulate people such as Guy Salmon and Gerry McSweeney. Groups were bussed into logging areas. Huge days-long meetings were held in native forests over long weekends and

holidays. Tens of thousands of submissions were written. Books like *Rush to Destruction* were published and Craig Potton photographed the beauty and the destruction. Some forests were lost. Some were partly logged then saved. But overall, huge amounts of NZ's native forest and encompassed lakes and wetlands were saved, the Forest Service, and Lands and Survey, were demolished and the Department of Conservation was created. The fight for the Forests was over. While I have only mentioned Guy, Craig and Gerry, there were many, many others. The story of the *Fight for the Forests* is written in a book of that name by an insider Paul Bensemann. It is an enthralling and encouraging book, an important part of F&B's history and shows what can be done when government attacks nature.

In 1987, the land from the two government departments was allocated to production or conservation. 2.7 million ha, designated as Stewardship Land, was allocated to DOC and should have been designated national parks, reserves, wilderness areas, forest parks etc. or disposed of, but this did not happen.

The current proposed fast track legislation reminds me of the Muldoon era. The legislation is less about fast tracking than getting projects going that due process may, would, or has, declined. It essentially does this by overriding about 10 mainly environmental Acts and giving decision making into the hands of 3 men.

Chris Bishop said that the fast-track process would override previous court

decisions blocking large-scale projects for environmental reasons.

Shane Jones said, "Stewardship land was not DOC land" and "if there is a mineral, if there is a mining opportunity and it's impeded by a blind frog, goodbye, Freddie" - referring to critically endangered Archey's frog (that is not blind). So, one minister is saying that a new law will allow the overturning of environmental decisions and the other is saying that mining takes precedence over the extinction of a species. The fast-track legislation does not consider the environment and does not allow for consultation by environmental organisations or the public. The concentration of development decisions is also like the Muldoon era. Our concern will essentially be projects that are on that 2.7mha of Stewardship land. On climate matters, walkable /bikeable cities, light rail, clean car discounts, - proven climate change strategies. - gone. Ban on oil and gas exploration, repealed. Jobs for nature -???

I read this as an attack on nature, climate change initiatives, the legal process and democracy. Who will fight this assault on nature, climate change initiatives, the legal process and democracy? We don't know yet, but it is unlikely to be led by people of my age.

The energy, creativeness, daring and sacrifices in time that such a fight entail, I think, are too great for oldies like me. We will support it but we will not lead it.

Somewhere, out there are new young, motivated leaders who will oppose this legislation. They will connect groups of people in NZ: scientists, conservationists and environmentalists, recreationalists, NIMBYists, climate groups and youth who will inherit a poorer environment to live in if these projects proceed. They will be the new leaders.

I was privileged to be part of the 'Save the Forests' campaign because it taught me that governments and councils may be in power and formidable but they are not indomitable.

I did not know it at the time but my small involvement taught me to organize, write, speak in public, learn all the pertinent facts, strategize, argue, deal well with people, stay positive in the face of adversity and some failures, and to stay the distance in a cause I considered worthy. The skills I learnt served me so well in later life.

The legislation is a challenge to what F&B and many others hold dear but also an opportunity for many young people to develop and hone their skills, develop as people, and make the future their own.

Russell

Make Some NOISE 

Fast Track Approvals Bill - please write a submission before 19 April 2024

The proposed Fast Track Approvals legislation will be devastating to our environment. It ignores 10 environmental Acts. It will overturn existing environmental court decisions. It has no regard for nature. It is designed to approve projects which would not gain approval under existing law because the environmental consequences are too severe. Some projects may be local.

Once approved they will require no other permissions, and we will have no ability to comment.

Here are links to the most useful documents:

Radio NZ article (explainer with graphics): <https://tinyurl.com/mtyf972u>

Article reproduced by Greenpeace (explainer with links): <https://tinyurl.com/4azckk7e>

F&B's view and suggestions: <https://tinyurl.com/yv49ctc2>

Environmental Defence Society's suggestions <https://tinyurl.com/3y2f94bp>

Fast Track Approvals Bill page - <https://tinyurl.com/mr3r52v7> (see the real deal for yourself)

A personal submission is best, so write your own if you can. Write about non-National Park land/coast/ocean you love and don't want damaged. Use your democratic right to speak to your submission at the Select Committee hearing at Parliament. Also write to your local MP opposing the Bill and demanding the release of the projects that may use the Fast Track legislation.

If you only have five minutes, sign the F&B quick submission form <https://tinyurl.com/3tu9sb4u>

Remember **it isn't law yet**, but it may soon be. **The time to act is NOW – before 19 April 2024**

The teachings of plants

By Pene Burton Bell

Recently a friend lent me a copy of Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer <https://tinyurl.com/5byeard8>

Robin is a Professor of Environmental Biology in Syracuse, New York, a mother, and a proud native American of the Potawatomi Nation – from around the Great Lakes. Robin oscillates between her perspectives as a mother, as an indigenous person, and as a botanist. (She is a [bryologist](#)).

Braiding Sweetgrass has an indigenous wisdom bent – the first chapter relates the creation story of the First Nations people of the Great Lakes – the story of Skywoman's fall from Skyworld and how she created earth. In her hand she brought seeds and the first of these to grow was sweetgrass.

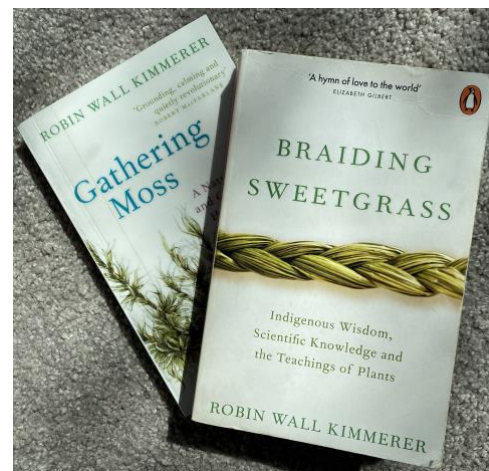
Robin uses stories from her family's life and indigenous stories and knowledge to provide context for each chapter – whether pecan nuts, strawberries, beans, or lichen, or environmental damage, then suggests how we should respond. She made it easy to absorb indigenous perspectives.

After reading 'Sweetgrass', I found myself pausing and being more present when in nature, being thankful, wondering about parallels, and how much more there is to learn from plants and indigenous wisdom in our local context.

I enjoyed it so much that I found it awfully difficult to return to its owner and persuaded the local library to buy Robin's other book Gathering Moss <https://tinyurl.com/2px3uces>, which shows her passion for mosses.

Gathering Moss is about this primitive and underrated group of plants. She explains different aspects of mosses from the physical characteristics, environmental and sexual challenges and how they respond to those challenges. She also draws out what we can learn about relationships from mosses.

I at once felt at home in Robin's world, at her pace, sneaking a peak through her eyes. I found common ground and learned a lot.



From both books I discovered how many lessons we can learn from the natural world of plants, and not just about their physical characteristics.

It is hard to say which book I enjoyed most, but I recommend reading Sweetgrass first.

Raupō/Bullrush

Braiding Sweetgrass has a chapter on bullrushes which I read twice for the joy of it. In it she describes a three day field trip to a swamp full of bullrushes (*typha latifolia*, similar to our raupō – *typha orientalis*) with a group of ethnobotany students and how they began discussing Maslow's hierarchy of needs (<https://tinyurl.com/2xzdc26>) which starts with basic human needs for air, water, food, shelter, clothing etc. and moves up to self-actualisation through several layers.



Birds' Nests

One way to find out who's nesting nearby is to study the nests you find. I'm certainly not suggesting removing them from where they are built (it is illegal to disturb any nest or eggs of native wildlife without a Department of Conservation Wildlife Permit under the Wildlife Act 1953), but in some cases we walk past one and – especially at this time of

They are both books easy to read and the chapters are short.

I also found, within myself, fresh hope for the way the natural world can respond to challenges. We might find it harder to respond and survive. I highly recommend both books, why not look out for them?

Then they visit the swamp to see how many of the basic needs the bullrush can meet as their local 'store'. After a day of collecting, they found they could use bullrush for thatching (shelter), eat three parts of the plant (food), weave clothing, use the sap for sunscreen, make bedding and much more. I have since learned cattail fluff was also used for nappies, and even to stuff flotation devices.

Māori similarly used raupō for thatching and food etc. but also to make sails, fishing floats, rafts, flooring and more: <https://tinyurl.com/5a557hpn>. Of course, raupō isn't only useful to humans, but also to fish (eels and whitebait in particular) and is a home for birds such as bittern, crakes, and fernbirds amongst others. Furthermore, being fast growing, raupō has one of the highest rates of biomass production of any habitat. In winter, it rapidly decomposes and it is estimated that only 6.5% of it becomes part of peat reserves and its roots are very effective at purifying water so are used to treat stormwater and effluent. Members of the typha/bullrush family are found on every continent except Antarctica – another resource we are at risk of overlooking as a weed, which could present opportunities instead.

year when it's been windy - one is likely to find the odd nest blown out of its original home.

Birds New Zealand have some online information on nests here: <https://www.nzbirds.com/birds/nests.html>

Here are three nests found recently:

Eurasian Blackbird – Manu Pango (one unhatched egg and fragments of another)



(Pic: Russell Bell)

Grey warblers are clever nest builders (See next page). They have distinctive domed hanging nests with a small side entrance hole. This is not a particularly great example where the hole is enlarged and migrated to the top of the nest.



Grey Warbler/Riroriro (Pic: Joy Glasson)

I'm looking forward to the publication of Tara Swan's book on the Eggs of New Zealand <https://www.swanphotography.co.nz/eggs-of-nz/> but that is still in the pipeline.



Pūkeko (Pic: Russell Bell)

Use your voice

[Porirua Long Term Plan](https://tinyurl.com/2sj8nasz) (begins 26 March, ends 26 April 2024):
<https://tinyurl.com/2sj8nasz>

With Three Waters projects now back with local councils, and the cost-of-living crisis, rates are going to increase, and this will not be welcome, but somehow costs must be met. I encourage you to submit on Porirua's Long-Term plan, because when costs are cut, often it's the environment that pays, because savings have to come from somewhere and this could mean worse results for parks,

reserves, the harbour, the environment, and biodiversity.

[Greater Wellington 2024-34 Long Term Plan](https://tinyurl.com/3tz3njsx)
<https://tinyurl.com/3tz3njsx>
Closes 22 April 2024

[Speak up for public transport](https://tinyurl.com/3udpkp8s)
<https://tinyurl.com/3udpkp8s>
Closes 2 April 2024

Change to our Forest and Bird Public Meetings

We decided to change the regular venue for our public meetings to keep costs down and to meet closer to the station (meetings will be easily accessed by train).

Starting on 17th April (with our AGM) we will be meeting at **Waikanae Community Centre, 28-32 Utauta Street, Waikanae**. If coming by train, on exiting, walk north along the station until you get to the railway pedestrian crossing, then turn right and the centre is behind the tennis courts next to the Memorial Hall.

Please note that our public meetings will now be on the THIRD WEDNESDAY bimonthly.

Mark them in your diary: 17/4, 19/6, 21/8, 16/10, 20/11.

Next meeting: 17 April 2024, 7.10 - 9pm

It is our AGM. We won't cajole people to join the committee but we are a small committee, and one member is standing down, so we'd love to encourage a couple of new people to join us. Why not give it a try?

Many hands make light work, and political changes are likely to make more hands more necessary, so please call me if you want to discuss the options. 021 159 2409.

As usual we will start with tea or coffee at 7.10 pm (until 9pm). Bring coins for raffle & koha.

Our speaker will be Russell Bell on the successes of 12 Kāpiti carbon reduction projects from a \$276,000 grant over the last 3 years. It was called the "Inspired by Sanderson" project for a reason that Russell will explain. The projects included planting 1000 totara, restoring wetlands, riparian planting on private property on Emerald Glen and altogether saving 78,000 tonnes of carbon by 2050.

At Waikanae Community Centre
28-32 Utauta Street, Waikanae
(a few hundred metres from the station).

Russell and Pene

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