

Dec 2003

Reminder!!!!

The R.F.P.T. Christmas Party will be held on Sunday 14th December at the Visitor Centre. If you would like to attend please contact John and Evelyn Rush on 564 8551.

Schools and Trust help to plant the Entrance to the Park

Konini Primary School, Wainuiomata Primary and Tawa Intermediate students helped to plant over 3000 seedlings at the entrance of the Park and Peace Grove in August and September this year. Karamu/Coprosma Robusta, Mahoe/Whiteywood, Makomako/Wineberry, Kowhai, Carex and Northern Rata seedlings now greet you at the parks entrance.

The students spent about 2-3 hours at Catchpool with the time divided between planting and a conservation "walk-and-talk" explaining the project, what was involved and the long term vision for this part of the Park. They were especially interested in the pest control and were fascinated by the demonstrations of the various traps. The feedback from the teachers was very positive. They felt that it was an excellent learning experience and introduction to conservation and the park for the students and looking forward to next year when it is proposed to plant a further 5000 seedlings.

Many thanks to all those who helped.

Planting Day

A party of Trust members and DOC staff were active on planting day – Saturday 27th September above the camping ground at the Catchpool, which had been cleared of

pinus recently. Several hundred Rata and Kowhai were planted on the very steep slopes, everyone got stuck in and thoroughly enjoyed the day. An earlier day planting was also done on the steep slope above the Visitor Centre, with Rata, Kowhai and other natives being put in around the May/June period.



Bill Milne

Global Volunteers assist at Park

A group of global volunteers spent 3 days working in the Park with John Rush and Bill Milne on 15th October. They were from Alaska, California, Texas and the UK and all very good keen workers. I think they all enjoyed the checking of possum/stoat/rat traps, clearing a new trap line and putting out a couple of stoat tunnel depots – John and Bill McCabe kept them hard at it!

They were due to be back in the Park to do some more work in late November. This group have been involved in several areas in New Zealand: Bushy Park at Kaiwi Wanganui, with the Rimutaka Park Trust, Taputaranga Island Bay, Castlepoint Sheep Station – to name but a few! The leader and organiser is Robert Ashe.



Bill Milne

Restoring the Dawn Chorus Programme

Last Sunday, at about 2.00 p.m. up on the Tawa Grove, (cutting through to bludge a cup of coffee off Evelyn) I got stopped dead in my tracks by a cacophony of sound. The temperature was warm, the air was still and the bush alive with birds singing, flying, chirping and hopping. Most spectacular were the Tui, a group of fantails took up the chorus jumping and chirping. Riroriro (Grey Warbler) burred on with enthusiasm to the max! A filthy great Paradise duck landed up in the Rata tree and his white-headed girlfriend landed beside him. What were they doing up there? Numerous thrush, blackbird (great seed dispersers) and rosella were making their presence felt but they can't match the singing of the natives.

Later, I checked diary records and noted the number of birds seen and heard throughout the whole Tawa Grove area - Thursday March, 2000 - 1 Kereru: Sat. 4 March - 2 Kingfisher, 2 Piwakawaka; March 7 - 1 Tui, 1 Kereru, 1 Kingfisher, Rosellas: 8 March - 1 Piwakawaka; 9 March - magpie invasion, no native birds seen or heard and so on.

Since March 2000 we have dispatched over 2000 possums, innumerable rats, 60 magpies, 70 hedgehogs, over 100 stoats, feral cats, mice and 3 roosters. Winston Churchill once reckoned that "Never before had so many benefited from so few" and it applies out here in the Catchpool. Over one hundred thousand visitors a year benefit from the efforts of a few committed enthusiasts.

We haven't restored the Dawn Chorus to all of the Park yet or even to very much of it but where we have the somnolent beauty of the landscape and spectacular vibrancy of the birdsong is the best tonic for melancholia, stress, overwork and disappointment that I know.

So get out here! Tell all your friends to spend an hour or two in the Tawa Grove, Five Mile, Nature and Nga Taonga Trails, knock back one of Evelyn's coffees and a couple of her "World-famous Cookies" at the Visitor Centre and save making visits to the medicos and chemists.

Bill Milne joins me in thanking members of the DOC staff who have encouraged, guided and financed us through much of this work. We take this opportunity to wish all members of the Trust a truly Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

John Rush

Update on stoat control in Turere Region

At the time of writing we are busy marking stoat trap locations along the tracks surrounding the Turere stream area, in preparation for a helicopter drop of the stoat boxes in January 2004. We plan to do multiple helicopter drops (ie into several drop sites) so that boxes will not have to be carried for large distances during subsequent deployment.

The tracks we are planning to trap include: McKerrow, Whakanui, the Turere Ridge (cut track), the Havaard track (cut track), and Clay Ridge. In addition, the Big Bend track and Orongorongo track form outer boundaries for the Turere area.

Those interested in the current progress can check out a temporary web-page: <http://tsellis1.freewebsite.org/Turere.html> for a map of tracks we intend to trap along, and some updates on tracks that have been marked.

During and after the helicopter drop in early 2004 we would appreciate some help from

Trust (and other) volunteers along the McKerrow and Whakanui ridges. We'll keep you posted!

Once traps have been deployed, we envisage setting up several semi-autonomous groups of 2-5 people maintaining each line. The people in these groups will be able to 'spell' one another, so that maintenance should not be too arduous! Each line needs to be checked/rebaited once every month in winter and once every 2 weeks in summer, and should involve a 4-5 hour tramp with minimal time spent at the traps.

Russ McStay is maintaining a volunteer list for those of you who are keen to help out! He can be contacted at:

37 Mawson St
Waiwhetu
Phone: 569-2915
Email: r.mcstay@hyper.net.nz

October 24th 2003
Susan Ellis, Bill McCabe, Paul Jansen, John Rush and others.

Pest Plants of the Greater Wellington Region

Members attending the Trust's AGM benefited from a most informative *Power Point* presentation by Mark McAlpine from the Biosecurity Division of Greater Wellington Regional Council. His key message was that pest plants are everyone's responsibility, pointing out in this regard that Greater Wellington provides free plant identification and control advice.

Greater Wellington classifies identified pest plants under four Categories:

Eradication Pest Plants – There are currently 13 species in this category. Greater Wellington will control any of these on your property at no cost to you. They are:-

African feather grass
(*Pennisetum macrourum*)
Bathurst bur
(*Xanthium spinosum*)

Blue passion flower (*Passiflora caerulea*)
Climbing spindleberry (*Celastrus orbiculatus*)
Eelgrass (*Vallisneria spp*)
Manchurian wild rice (*Zizania latifolia*)
Mignonette (madeira)
vine (*Anredera cordifolia*)
Moth plant (*Araujia sericifera*)
Perennial nettle (*Urtica dioica*)
Saffron thistle (*Catharmus lanatus*)
Smilax (*Asparagus asparagoides*)
Sweet pea shrub (*Polygala myrtifolia*)
Woolly nightshade (*Solanum mauritianum*)

The above pest plants are of limited distribution and the long term objective is their complete eradication from the region.

Containment Pest Plants – There are currently 7 species in this category, most well established within specific areas of the region. The objective is to prevent them spreading into unaffected areas. The species concerned are:-

Boneseed (*Chrysanthemoides monilifera*)
Darwins barberry (*Berberis darwinii*)
Evergreen buckthorn (*Rhamnus alaternus*)
Hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*)
Mistflower (*Ageratina riparia*)
Nodding thistle (*Carduus nutans*)
Snakefeather [Climbing asparagus] (*Asparagus scandens*)

Responsibility for the control regime applicable to each of these pests varies between local government districts within the region. Greater Wellington will carry out free control for some in particular areas. For more specific information consult Greater Wellington or your local council.

Suppression Pest Plants – There are currently 4 species in this category, all quite widespread throughout the region. The objective is to minimise adverse impacts to the region. The plants concerned are:-

Banana passionfruit (*Passiflora tripartita* varieties)

Cathedral bells (*Cobaea scandens*)
Old mans's beard (*Clematis vitalba*)
Wild ginger (*Hedychium
gardnerianum.* & *H. flavescens*)

Occupiers are responsible for controlling infestations of these plants on their property.

Site Led Pest Plants – There are currently 3 species in this category, all so widespread throughout the region that boundary control is considered the only option. The plants concerned are:-

Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*)
Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*)
Variegated thistle (*Silyburn
marianum*)

Occupiers must control infestations within specified distances of their boundaries, if an adjoining occupier lodges a complaint with Greater Wellington.

Greater Wellington publishes a pamphlet "*Pest Plants of the Greater Wellington Region*" which provides descriptions and coloured photos of each of the foregoing pest plants to facilitate recognition and reporting by members of the public.

A more comprehensive reference publication available is "*The New Zealand Pest Plant Manual – Including National and Regional Pest Plants*". This comprises a set of colour printed cards containing photographs and descriptions of plants that are considered pests in New Zealand. The cards are perforated at the top and the set comes wrapped in clear plastic complete with two hinged holding rings to facilitate use in the field. All plants included in the manual are banned from distribution, commercial sale and propagation at a national or regional level. Several of those included are popular with home owners, e.g. *Cotoneaster glaucophyllum* & *C. franchetii*, *Jasminium polyanthum* and Tuber ladder fern (*Nephrolepis cordifolia*).

The manual also lists some species which are not yet included in any of Greater Wellington's pest plant categories, but which are commonly encountered on hillsides around the region and which do inhibit

native bush regeneration. Examples are Himalayan honeysuckle (*Leycesteria formosa*), Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) and Hawthorn (*Crateagus monogyna*). An infestation of Tutsan (*Hypericum androsaemum*), another of those listed in the manual, was reported by an eagle-eyed visitor to be growing in the Rimutaka Forest Park. This has been removed and destroyed.

Unfortunately, the listed plant *Buddleia (Buddleja davidii)* is already rampant in river beds and many stream beds in the Park and is beyond the resources of DOC to effectively control, let alone eradicate. Nevertheless, we do ask Park visitors to report to the Department of Conservation any other listed pest plants they see growing there.

Russ McStay, Secretary

What Hutt City Council is Doing To Control Pest Plants

Old Man's Beard is a total control plant within Hutt City boundaries, whether on Council land or private property. HCC will undertake initial control and ongoing monitoring of sites free of charge for Hutt City residents.

Currently HCC is actively surveying the city to assess location and size of infestations of Cathedral Bells (*Cobaea scandens*) and Banana Passionfruit (*Passiflora tripartita* varieties). On Council managed land HCC will undertake control and ongoing monitoring. On privately owned land HCC will advise on best removal methods.

HCC is taking a proactive approach in dealing with Darwin's Barberry (*Berberis darwinii*). All known sites on Council managed land are being controlled and monitored, while on private land it can advise on best control methods. For this pest, there is a real possibility of achieving in due course total eradication within the city boundaries. In this regard, Hutt City is fortunate that it does not have infestations as massive and widespread as those encountered in the Wrights Hill and Hawkins

Hill areas of Wellington. Residents, walkers and trampers are asked to assist by reporting to HCC the location of any Darwin's Barberry plants they come across anywhere within the Hutt City boundaries.

A proactive approach is also being taken in respect of Wild Ginger (*Hedychium gardnerianum* and *H. flavescens*) and Purple Ragwort (*Senecio glastifolius*). The latter, which is rarely encountered in Hutt City, will be controlled by HCC when and if spotted. HCC controls and monitors infestations of Wild Ginger on Council managed land and can advise private land owners on best removal methods.

The person to contact in HCC about pest plants is Beckee Hobbs, phone 570-6702, or E-mail rebecca.hobbs@huttcity.govt.nz

HCC staff would like to be to do more to help contain the spread of Snakefeather (*Asparagus scandens*). This pest plant is prevalent in a number of areas of regenerating native bush within the city boundaries and can strangle emerging young trees. The main source of spread is by birds eating the attractive orange/red berries and dispersing the seeds. With significant infestation in parts of the East Harbour Regional Park, it may be only a matter of time before this "nasty" appears in the Rimutaka Forest Park.

Russ McStay
Secretary

Animal Pest Management By Greater Wellington Regional Council

The second guest speaker at the Trust's AGM was Ken Wright from the Biosecurity Division of Greater Wellington Regional Council. He too gave a most informative *Power Point* presentation on the Council's policies in dealing with the region's animal pests in areas outside DOC's conservation estate. The main emphasis of his address was on GWRC's activities in dealing with possums, goats and magpies.

GWRC undertakes possum control not only for environmental enhancement reasons, but also on behalf of the Animal Health Board to help guard against the spread of bovine tuberculosis through possums interacting with cattle and deer herds.

Ken's presentation showed very clearly why aerial application of 1080 poison is by far the most effective and most economic means of reducing to a very low level the possum density in dense bush clad areas and rugged terrain where alternative ground based operations are not really feasible. Using GPS equipped helicopters carrying custom-designed bait applicators; it has been possible to reduce quite dramatically over recent years the amount of poison bait per hectare needed to achieve the desired control level. The current lower sowing rates have not only reduced operational costs, but also have served to lower the risks to non-target species.

Magpies are being increasingly perceived by the public as a pest warranting some control to reduce their numbers. GWRC will make available on loan to private property owners cage traps, complete with call bird and operating instructions, enabling them to catch and kill unwanted magpies on their land.

The 1080 Debate

From time to time the news media gives coverage to the sometimes vociferous opposition expressed by groups campaigning against the use of 1080 poison as a means of controlling possums. In May 2003 the Animal Health Board and the Department of Conservation published "*The use of 1080 to control possums and other pests – A resource document*". This highly informative 49 page publication (ISBN 0-47822425-7) is recommended reading for all those wanting to gain a better understanding of issues that have fuelled the debate concerning the widespread use of this poison in New Zealand. Copies are available for perusal in the Catchpool Visitor Centre.

Russ McStay
Secretary

Weed Control in the Rimutaka Forest Park

DOC staff are continuing to work on the control of a number of exotic pest plants within the Rimutaka Forest Park. The work is being carried out mainly in the Catchpool and Orongorongo Valleys and targeting the following species:

- Pampas Grass (*Cortaderia jubata*, *C. selloana*) - large-clump-forming grasses which have a similar appearance to native toetoe.
- Wandering Jew (*Tradescantia fluminensis*) - a creeping, perennial groundcover which forms large mats. Leaves are dark green.
- Mexican Daisy (*Erigeron karvinskianus*) - a sprawling, evergreen perennial daisy with white or purplish-pink, yellow centred flowers.
- Old Man's Beard (*Clematis vitalba*) - a deciduous, climbing and layering vine which grows to 20m tall. Leaves consist of 5 widely spaced leaflets. White flowers are present between December and May. Note all native *Clematis spp* are evergreen, have 3 leaflets and flower between August and December.
- Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) - a vigorous, evergreen climber with deep shiny green leaves and yellow, sweetly scented flowers.

Additionally, a number of exotic trees have been removed from the Catchpool Valley. Work has initially focussed on *Eucalyptus* and *Acacia* species in the vicinity of the top carpark, and various exotic trees in the Tawa Grove area. A group of Rimutaka Trust members joined DOC staff for a productive day in February and removed a large number of ash and alder from the Tawa Grove area.

Please report any discoveries of weed infestations in the Forest Park to DOC (Catchpool Office tel: 564 1249, Ponoke Area Office tel: 472 5821)

Peter Griffen (DOC)

Pulling & Planting

On 26 August a group of Trust members and some DOC staff undertook the planting out of young Northern Rata and Kowhai trees on the hillside behind the Catchpool Visitor Centre. The area selected for planting was the rather steep south facing slope above the road, and beneath the newly cleared section of the former Pine Loop Track.

Looking down from the track, one could see quite a number of wilding pines emerging among the regenerating native plants. Our instructions were ".....and while you're down there planting, pull out any wilding pines you come across." Clearly, "pulling" in this part of the hill had not been done for quite some time.

Full of enthusiasm and each equipped with a narrow spade and an armful of young trees, Trust members spread out and clambered down off the track. Pulling out the young pines we encountered was the relatively easy bit. Finding a secure footing as we descended soon proved quite a challenge. Not only was the emerging vegetation becoming dense in places, but also there was much slashing material (from the logging operations) which had to be negotiated at times. Most of us found ourselves somewhat uncomfortably straddled on occasions when probing for a firm footing on the downhill side – ouch!!!

However, the ratas and kowhais all got duly planted with appropriate spacing between them. Hopefully, there will be a good survival rate, providing in due course both a colourful showing to Park visitors in spring and summer and an attractive food supply for native birdlife.

All who participated in the planting were pleasantly surprised to see first hand the species diversity in the natural regeneration already occurring on these slopes.

Russ McStay
Secretary

Dog Survey

As part of the preparation for our proposal to DOC to release kiwi in the Park we have been running a survey of Park visitors. Along with the usual "Where do you come from?" and "What do you do in the Park?" we ask how people feel about the introduction of threatened native species, such as kiwis. Because dogs are perceived as being potentially harmful to kiwis, we are trying to find out how many visitors bring dogs with them and where they like to go. The last question seeks an indication of support for several suggested dog control measures. It may come as a surprise to some that the Forest Park Regulations require dogs to be on a leash at all times except in designated areas!

Bill McCabe

Office Bearers For 2003/04

At the Trust's Annual General Meeting on 9 October the following office bearers were elected for the current financial year:

President	Bill McCabe
Vice President	Bill Milne
Treasurer	Jackie Mitchell
Secretary	Russ McStay
Exec Committee	Marty Green John Hunt Melody McLaughlin Don Millward Kevin O'Donnell John Rush Evelyn Rush
Auditor	Phil Rundle
Newsletter	Nicky Rush

Due to the frequency of absences while travelling away from Wellington, Dave Fitzgerald did not wish to continue as a member of the Executive Committee.

Presentation to Don Millward

Members attending the AGM were informed that Don Millward had decided to step down

from the position of Treasurer after many years of undertaking this key responsibility on behalf of the Trust. As a token of appreciation of Don's outstanding contribution in this role, President Bill McCabe presented him with a book titled "*The Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand*". That Don will continue to serve the Trust as a member of the Executive Committee is much appreciated.

A gentle reminder -

to all Trust members: Annual Subs. are due - final payment would be appreciated before Christmas. Many thanks and a Merry Christmas to all.

Jackie Mitchell/Treasurer

If you would like to make a contribution to The Rag, please email Nicky Rush at the following address: nicola_steve@msn.com or write to her at 7 Main Road, Titahi Bay.