

THE FRIENDS OF MANGEMANGEROA SOCIETY INC

Winter Newsletter 2006



Chairman's Ramblings:

We have had discussions with the Manukau Parks team about the shocking destruction of regenerating tree species along the Mangemangeroa track.

At first it was hard to accept that the recent destruction north of the Rotary Loop on the Mangemangeroa track, could be vandalism. It looked likely to be over-eager bush maintenance. The Parks team has investigated this aspect with the contractor and feel this is not the case. At the other end of the track (near the Moreton Bay figs) the deliberate damage is depressing with the kawakawa and mahoe (Whiteywood) undergrowth cut in an apparent attempt to display the form of the introduced Moreton bay fig, and the view beyond.



Photographs can't adequately illustrate the extent of the damage to young bush.



It seems more than one perpetrator is involved. The damage just north of the Rotary Loop (below the barn) is different. Here regenerating bush on both sides of the track has been cleared. This damage has involved some quite serious cutting. In particular the whiteywoods have been attacked.



Why and by whom?

Much has been said about 'signage' on the reserve. Parks have now agreed to erect temporary signs on the track where damage has occurred. These will draw attention to the seriousness of this vandalism and give phone numbers for immediate contact. The only way to protect this bush is to identify the perpetrators of this "crime"

IF you have seen anyone in the reserve, using, or carrying equipment that could have been used to carry out these attacks please phone Manukau City Council on 262 5104.

Caring for bush on private land

Nestled against the hill with a backdrop of rimu, rata and kowhai is the Williamson homestead. For 50 years Derek and his wife Primrose have nurtured this bush along with stands existing on their property. They are amazed at the considerable growth which has occurred over this time.

The Williamson family bought the farm at the head of the Mangemangeroa Valley in 1950. The previous owners had made a living by cutting and selling firewood but the Williamson Family wished to pursue a more conventional use of the land and developed a dairy herd. For the first few years the cattle grazed on any land available including the bush understory. It took about 10 years until the family could get the bush fully fenced to prevent stock access. Of this fenced bush 25 acres has been deeded to the National Trust and a further 10 acres remains fenced to prevent stock entry. It is only in the last 15 years with the serious control of possums that Derek and Primrose have seen the undergrowth "come away".

Derek recalled how the "rabbit" board in the 1960's could get 500 possums a night along the Mangemangeroa Creek! Friends and family over the years have attempted to reduce possum number through shooting but it was the introduction of the poisoning regime which finally saw the possum numbers noticeably reduced. A consequence of this has been the flourishing, once again, of the bush understory.

Each month (except over winter) Derek lays bait for the possums and sets traps. He now places each bait in a plastic bag to keep it fresh and dry. He assured me that the possum has "no trouble ripping the bag open and getting the bait". One interesting point that both Derek and Primrose had noticed was that some possums are more wary than others. One particular possum was not easy to catch and was decidedly bait and trap shy. As far as they know they have now caught him as the lemons on the lemon tree are no longer "skinned on the tree"

Derek has done far more than just fence his bush, he has, sprayed the wandering jew and climbing asparagus, removed a variety of weeds and transplanted many seedlings. As well the natural bush behind their homestead has large rata, rimu, kanuka, kowhai, puriri, totara and taraire within it. These trees supply a seed source germinating among the roses. Rather than weed these out the Willaimsons pot them up ready for transfer to areas where revegetation is in progress. Primrose commented that "the native seedlings always seem to be near her rose bushes". We decided that the fertiliser she uses for her roses must be a suitable mix for native germination!

Some of the natives have transplanted more successfully than others, in particular the kowhai prove difficult. In Primroses experience the puriri are the quickest growing of the native species that germinate in their garden.



Two rimu plants potted up from Derek and Primrose's garden which have been given to us to reintroduce rimu into the reserve.

With the bush so close native birds are plentiful, Primrose believes that their number has increased recently. The tui come and feed on the camellias and the wood pigeons strip the leaves off the kowhai trees. These wood pigeon at this time of the year come in mass (of about a dozen) all performing their aerial acrobatics. Primrose observed, during the nesting season, one wood pigeon breaking twigs off the kanuka and carting them to the rata. In the rata Primrose watched her construct a rather untidy nest. Unfortunately the nest fell out of the tree!

Kaka occasionally visit from Maraetai heading for the big rata and rewarewa. Also heard but not seen is the morepork.

Two species living in and around this area and of which Derek expressed concern because of their increase in numbers were the peacocks and Paradise ducks. The four original peacocks released by neighbours have now formed a mob of at least twenty while the paradise duck has 14 young ones.

It is through families such as the Williamsons who had the foresight to protect stands of bush that we have a seed stock of native species from which to raise seedlings and re-introduce "lost" species back into the reserve.

Bird of the Season: the Dunnock or Hedge Sparrow by Bruce Keeley

While our indigenous bird species rightly hold a special place in our affection and our conservation efforts, it's good to be aware also of those species which have been introduced from other parts of the world, notably Britain and Europe. The Dunnock was introduced from Britain around the 1870s and spread widely, including to off-shore islands as far away as Campbell Island and the Chathams.

This little colonist's Latin name *Prunella modularis*, loosely translated as 'small brown singer', alerts us to the fact that it is more likely to be heard than seen. Little brown birds are easily overlooked anyway, but given that they are relatively scarce and rather furtive into the bargain then it is no surprise if you've not yet seen one in the Reserve.



The more common name of Hedge Sparrow is rather misleading, since this bird is not a sparrow at all, but belongs to the Accentors, a family of drab little insect-eaters spread across Europe, North Africa and West Asia. Drab in appearance perhaps, but the Dunnock has real personality, and at this time of year can be heard along the forest fringes giving its loud, penetrating 'tseep' call. With the onset of the breeding season, its warbly song 'weeso –sissy-weeso – sissy-weeso – sissy-wee' is delivered from the top of low shrubs or dead branches. While preferring to feed on the ground, the Dunnock is never far from dense vegetation to which it quickly retreats, unless approached very carefully.

The nest is a neatly constructed bowl of plant material lined with wool, hair, feathers, tree fern scales etc, located in dense foliage, and containing up to 5 deep blue eggs.

While the Dunnock is a common bird through much of New Zealand, including suburban parks and gardens, in the Auckland area it declined markedly during the 1970s and is now largely confined to coastal vegetation. Being a bird of scrubland and forest edge it is unlikely to be seen under the forest canopy.

In Mangemangeroa, a good place to look for it is the vicinity of the 'kissing gate' below the Somerville road carpark.

Tree of the Season: Rimu by Sally Barclay

Dacrydium cupressinum also called New Zealand's red pine is a rain forest canopy tree and may reach a height of 55m. It belongs to the gymnosperms which produce their seed in a cone or stobil rather than a flower.

Although there is a rimu in the upper part of the reserve there are no juveniles present hence the gift from the Williamsons (see article in this newsletter) hopes to redress this.

Foliage of the rimu is a little like a fine bottle brush (see diagram). Very young rimu tend to be bright green in colour but in winter this brightness gives way to a bronze colouration, often appearing "dead". As the tree matures the untidy form changes to the pyramidal shape and the pretty light green open-branched foliage make a most attractive tree. The mature tree has a more dense yellow green foliage as seen in the ancient specimens in the Central North Island and Westland; some of which are believed to be over 1200 years old. These have become towering giants with tufts of green foliage at the ends of massive branches. These trees are the home to a variety of epiphytes.

A rimu tree may be male or female. The male cone produces small yellow structures which shed pollen while the female tree bears very small structures which curve upward at the end of a branchlet to catch this wind dispersed pollen. The development of this structure takes about eighteen months. The fully mature female cone, a receptacle of bright orange/red and the seed, a deep blue-black, are a little over 0.5 cm high. The rimu seems to have a cycle of good and bad reproductive periods. Native bird populations are critically affected by this. Our refugee colony of kakapo on Codfish, breed successfully only when rimu fruit is plentiful.

The wood of the heart rimu, a deep red, is beautifully patterned and has been used extensively for furniture doors and paneling. The strong durable nature of the timber made it particularly suitable for house framing and as weatherboards but it is not as durable as kauri and totara.



Planting 2006

A most successful planting season has been underway. Our local schools have contributed both through raising seedlings and by planting these plants out in the reserve.

Seedlings for this work are gathered by authorised seed collectors in the reserve in May. These seeds are then germinated in seed trays and given to the schools for pricking out and raising by their students. Our Lady Star of the Sea, Somerville Intermediate and Bucklands Beach Intermediate all raised seedlings for the current season.

Before the planting out of these seedlings Manukau City Council contractors scythe the area to be planted and ensure that weeds such as gorse and blackberry are removed.

This year the schools have worked on both the newly fenced paddock area near rotary walk and also the zig zag below Archies lookout. Howick College senior students worked hard one Sunday morning planting both manuka and kanuka



seedlings in this zig zag area too. As well Forest and Bird, and Friends of Mangemangeroa, have held very

successful days planting in the Forest and Bird Area on the steep bank below the trig and in the newly fenced paddock near the rotary loop.

All told about 6000 plants were grown and planted this year at a saving in excess of \$20,000 to the Council.

Next year a similar number of plants for revegetation work is planned.

"Friends of the Mangemangeroa"

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web address:
www.aerolink.co.nz/mangemangeroa/main.html

Link to other conservation groups in the Auckland Region:
www.manawa.org.nz

See also www.arc.govt.nz for upcoming events in the Auckland region

Chairmans report continued

The Mangemangeroa Reserve Bush Restoration Plan is closer to being approved. A few hundred hours of the Friends collective time has gone into work on the Plan in its various stages. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the Restoration Plan. The result may prove to be a 'restoration blue-print' and an example to others across Manukau for what can be achieved through genuine community consultation.

Allan Riley