

**THE FRIENDS OF MANGEMANGEROA SOCIETY INC**  
**Summer/Autumn Newsletter 2009**



**Chairman's Ramblings**

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The news is mainly good, but with one low point with which we are still coming to grips. The low point is further spray damage to some recently planted areas in the Reserve.

Manukau Parks have released the Turbott report to the Friends for comment. It is the latest concept plan for development options at the Mangemangeroa Reserve.

Two new planting areas have been fenced and are about to be sprayed before planting commences in May. We should have in excess of 8000 eco-sourced plants to plant out this season - from May through to July. This is thanks to our seed collectors and growers, individuals and schools and benefactors, and this year with two new growers in Dave and Cath Walley .

**Turbott report:**

The report shows development options in the reserve. These have been considered by a Friends subcommittee and their observations and recommendations were discussed and endorsed at the Friends meeting in February. It is good to get some thoughts from ZCity parks tabled and further discussions should take place with Manukau Parks before the AGM.

The Turbott report provides 'development' options which focused on two sites. The barn area on Somerville Road and, below and slightly north of Archie's Lookout

In brief, the committee do not support the siting of any buildings deep inside the Mangemangeroa Reserve, such as below Archies Lookout. Structures should be kept to a minimum both in scale and number and, be relevant to current and future visitor needs.

Any development of structures including an entry point to the reserve and enlarged parking should be kept close to the road and within the area of the barn. There are many reasons for this which can be discussed at the AGM, or by contacting Allan Riley or Graham Falla. Some members have asked – why have buildings at all?

The plans will be available at the **AGM on Thursday 23rd April**. Graham Falla will speak briefly to your committee's views on the concept plan.

**New planting areas:**

We recently met with Shona Fisher and her Manukau Parks associates to review progress in meeting the objectives of the Mangemangeroa Restoration Plan. Agreement was reached to open up two new planting areas for 2009. Both are now fenced and ready for contractors to spray in site preparation. This year, we will cover most of area N in pioneer species.



Looking up the valley showing prepared planting site. Looking toward Archies Lookout showing new fencing. The drainage work in progress to ensure access behind the barn in winter months

Congratulations are due to Manukau Parks and their fencing contractors for the high standard of fencing in Areas N & P.

Between Archie's Lookout and the Somerville Road fence-line is a small gully suitable for children (with adult assistance) to plant. This is now designated as Area P in the revised Plan.

The second area continues the F&B planting (in Area N) along the fence-line escarpment towards Archie's Lookout. This is a seriously eroded and slip-prone area overdue for planting.

A third area will be fenced and the site prepared for 2010 planting. This is a large section of the valley below the barn, now known as Area Q. It is seriously slumping and a consultant's report suggests the diversion of run-off from the barn roof and hard-stand parking and yard areas, together with planting of the valley as a part solution. It is likely that the future fence will follow a contour below the timber slab seat. Planting Area Q will be a challenge. Along with Forest & Bird's completed Area C, it will be our largest single restoration site for the next few years.

### **Spray damage - an unnecessary setback:**

Our ramblings took us off to assess reported damage in Areas J and O, where schools and Friends planted last year. Prior to planting two years ago, the area was not properly prepared for us. Kikuyu was cut, not sprayed. Trees were planted and soon smothered. Despite marking most of the trees with stakes, a large number have been killed in the past two seasons by an unknown sprayer, possibly one of the contractors employed by Manukau Parks.

Having seen one sprayer emerge from Area O we have a fairly good idea which company is most likely to be responsible. Our estimate is that we have lost around 1,000 one or two year plants this year alone.

At a site meeting with a Parks Officer and a representative from each of the four contractors, it was finally agreed that the worst of the loss could fairly be attributed to spray damage. Other losses would be from the lesser plant survival rates when children are not well enough supported with adults to dig the holes for them.

So what are some of the solutions for avoiding this unnecessary damage?

- Parks staff and contractors to take more responsibility for the actions of their staff.
- Ensure proper supervision or monitoring at all stages of the contracting activities, both by parks officers and by the contractors of their own staff.
- Contractors to maintain records of their daily activities in the reserve, with copies to be available to, and be retained by Manukau Parks.
- Timely site preparation before planting to reduce re-emergence of undesirables.
- Better education of pupils prior to them going out on planting days.
- A higher ratio of adult supervision - Parents and Friends to dig holes & generally assist pupils to enjoy their Mangemangeroa experience.
- The Parks Education Officer could offer to provide assistance by visiting schools and demonstrating with pupils the various aspects of growing, caring for and planting their trees before they go on their planting days.
- After planting has been done in any area, no further spraying to be done in there by any contractor's staff.
- The only exception may be where a request is made by Manukau Parks to a nominated representative from the Friends who would need to decide whether to agree to the request. If in agreement for this specific activity to proceed, the Friends Society would be given the option of having a member present when the work is to be carried out.
- Vegetation control in the planted areas to be limited to digging or pulling out undesirable weed species. Or cutting them close to the ground and then immediately painting the stumps.
- Plant 'release' should be at the discretion of the Friends, but with annual weeds that is not considered essential.

These points will form part of our next discussions with the Manukau Parks team. Meanwhile, thanks to all members and supporters and to Manukau City for your support, in each and whatever way. These contributions to 'bush restoration in the Mangemangeroa' will be appreciated by many others for years ahead.

Allan Riley: Chairman.

#### **Planting days for 2009:**

The first large-scale plantings this year will be on;

**Saturday 6th June**, Arbor Day 9am meet at the barn in Somerville Road - Forest & Bird and Friends

**Saturday 13th June**, 8am meet at the barn in Somerville Road - Friends and any 'friends of friends'

There will be many more opportunities to get your hands in the soil, some on the popular mid-week morning plantings.

**2009 Plants.** From the species below, it is estimated that there should be approx. 8,000 plants which will be ready for the various planting groups. This number is made up as follows -

Jim Duckworth has 1750 plants and some specimens (800 manuka, 600 mahoe, 250 cabbage trees, 50 kahikatea, 25 tarairi, 25 nikau)

Dave Wally has approx. 1,200 plants (mainly manuka)

James Lee has approx. 950 plants (244 coprosma, 164 mahoe, 80 manuka, 450 manuka seedlings)

Warwick Kitchen has approx. 1400 plants (650 mahoe, 550 manuka, 250 coprosma)

Somerville Intermediate has approx 1500

Star of Sea has 700

Graham Falla has approx. 1500 plants, maybe more (1000 manuka, 100 rata, 200 mixed broad leaf, 50 kahikatea, 100 karamu), with 1000 manuka being grown in the Hunuas.

Specimen trees are also being grown for us at Naturally Native, Ramarama from funds donated by the Rotary Club of Howick for both 2009 and 2010 seasons.

This follows the 8000 or so trees planted last season.

### **Liberte Palms donate Nikau to Friends**

The Friends are pleased to have been offered 200 Nikau Palms by Liberte Palm's director, Don Stehr. Don is a stalwart supporter and a former Howick Rotarian. These plants have been eco-sourced and their acceptance has been endorsed by Manukau Parks.

When Area Q below the barn is fenced for the 2010 planting season, many of these will be planted in the low damp areas of this valley. Meanwhile Jim Duckworth will care for them at his planting unit.

A visit to Liberte Palms at 76 Kimpton Road, Brookby would be an interesting experience for anyone planning some landscaping or needing internal feature palms. Phone first to check their opening hours - 530 8267.

Liberte web site <http://www.liberte.co.nz/Outdoor-Palms-38.html>

### **Membership:**

We really do need new (and some younger) members who are interested in the restoration work we do. There are many opportunities to assist, and it's not only with a planting shovel or spade. If you know of some keen 'recruits' please ask them to contact Deborah, Sally, Graham or me, or just turn out for one of our remaining planting days. A great way to see a little of what we get up to in our leisure time!

### **Local Conservation Group Social Evening**

An excellent evening, organized by WECS was held recently in the Hassler Hall. About 60 people attended enjoying a very "down to earth" talk about the effects of introduced species on the more endangered birds within New Zealand. Mike Clout spoke of his work (and that of his students) in the research into the effects that pest control has both on the introduced species and on the native species. A summary of his excellent presentation is attached to this newsletter.

### **Ros Nicholson (by Graham Falla)**

Many of us who knew her were saddened by the death in January after a short illness of Ros Nicholson. As a foundation member of the Friends Ros pursued an active interest in the progress of restoration work at Mangemangeroa. She saw this as something closely related to her sustained efforts over many years as a leading member and latterly Chairperson of the Tamaki Estuary Protection Society.

Other related causes that benefited from Ros's strong support were the Forest and Bird Protection Society, Auckland Bird Rescue, working with school groups and Manukau Parks to revegetate the Pakuranga Stream banks, and over recent years The Auckland Tree Council. Those in our community who care about the world of nature have lost a tireless advocate and we extend sincere sympathy to Doug and the family.

### **Off his own bat!**

*Flying for a living made Dave very aware of just how demanding travel is on the fossil fuel resources.*

*Along with his partner Cath, Dave set about developing a unit to raise and then plant a thousand plants a year. With help from Graham Falla Dave and Cath converted a patch of their backyard (under the clothes line) into a "nursery". Weed mat covered the existing chips, root trainers, frames and growing medium were all purchased and with eco-sourced seeds Dave and Cath were in business.*

*Last year over 1000 plants were planted by Dave and family in the reserve. This year their "nursery" contains over 1600 plants now ready to be planted out.*

*When Dave begun this project his knowledge of plant raising and planting was limited. By a "hands on" approach he has quickly learned and understood just what an undertaking it is to germinate, water, prick out, and then finally plant each plant into the reserve.*

## THE EASTERN ROSELLA by Bruce Keeley



Photography by: Dr Kerry Rodgers©  
<http://www.tiritirimatangi.org.nz/Fauna/EasternRosella.htm>

New Zealand's native bush birds are not noted for the brilliance of their plumage, but rather for their beautiful song and endearing tameness. We often envy the colourful birdlife of Australia, and if we were able to choose just one of its species to brighten up our environment we couldn't do better than the Eastern Rosella.

This exquisite medium-sized parrot bears all the colours of the rainbow, with its crimson head and breast (surrounding a white chin patch), yellow belly and various shades of blue and green on the wings, back and tail. It should not, by the way, be confused with the Rainbow Lorikeet which threatened to colonise Auckland some years ago, and would be a disaster if it did so.

The Eastern Rosella, naturally occurring in south-east Australia, has occupied the Auckland region since the 1920s when caged birds escaped into the wild, and from there has spread into

Northland, Waikato, Taranaki, Coromandel and Bay of Plenty regions. It is a bird of open and lightly wooded areas, but will happily reside in dense forest and suburban gardens, wherever there is a plentiful supply of seeds, fruit, flower buds and shoots. It will also take some insect prey.

In the Mangemangeroa Reserve the rosella is quite plentiful, though more often heard than seen within the forested area. The sharp 'twink, twink' of birds in flight is the most characteristic call; but there is a wide repertoire including the excited chatter of a pair or flock, and a beautiful pure bell-like note which carries a considerable distance.

They may often be seen feeding on the ground or low in vegetation, and will allow quite close observation if one stays very still.

Typically they are hole-nesters, and therefore are potentially in competition with the kingfisher and our native parakeets for nesting sites. Young birds remain in family groups with their parents for several months after fledging and are distinguished from adults by the dullness and patchiness of the red areas of head and breast.

## KARAKA *Corynocarpus laevigatus* by Sally Barclay



A large shiny leaf, a darkish trunk somewhat mottled with lichen, and the buttress footing, help to identify the karaka.

A mature specimen with its dense foliage blocks light to the forest floor. This is believed to inhibit the growth of the young seedlings which remain at a height of about 20cm. These form a "mat" as seen under the mature karaka in the reserve.

The flowers, which occur in October, provide an attractive addition to the reserve in spring. The pretty panicles of white flowers eventually fall to the ground to form a "white" carpet.



Karaka drupe (large berry) loved by rats are also eaten by the kererū. The Maori ate the drupe (kopi) but first prepared these by soaking for a number of days in water to remove the poisonous chemical karakin from the kernel. The kohekohe was used as an antidote to the karakin

Sometimes mistaken for the shining broadleaf (*Griselinia lucida*) karaka can be easily identified by studying how the leaf joins the petiole. The *Griselinia lucida* has a lopsided leaf. The karaka leaf is symmetric.

## Rats vs. Conservationists in NZ. By John Spiller.

Possibly the greatest on-going threat to the native fauna and to a lesser degree the flora, of New Zealand is posed by the continued presence of the three main introduced species of rat. Prolific breeders these mammalian pests cause heartache and frustration for members of all organizations within New Zealand who seek to ensure the survival of our remaining native species, particularly those that are threatened with extinction.

Millions of dollars have been spent on eradication programmes and the erection of predator proof fences around mainland island sanctuaries to keep rats, as well as other predators, away from native birds, amphibians and reptiles. In these relatively secure environments the endangered species usually thrive but constant monitoring is essential to ensure no mammalian pest incursions are occurring. Open sanctuaries demand regular rat counts being undertaken due to the very mobile nature of the rodents. Rats are known to travel large distances in search of prey, and farmland or coastal plains adjacent to protected blocks of native forest provide the ideal base for rats to move into habitat that could contain their many choices of food.



Kiore (Pacific rat)  
DOC fact sheet:

There are three main species of rat in New Zealand and all have had a devastating effect on our native creatures over a great number of years. The first to arrive was the Kiore or Pacific Rat (*Rattus Exulans*). Thought to have arrived in the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD when the first Maori came by canoe they would have had an immediate impact on NZ wildlife. The ancestry of the Kiore has been traced to various South Pacific islands, mostly the Cooks and Tahiti, using DNA testing techniques that demonstrate similar genetic characteristics. Maori considered the Kiore a delicacy and fattened them on berries and plant material including Miro berries before trapping them and preserving them in their own fat to be eaten later. The pelts were saved for use in making ceremonial cloaks and the animal was held in a kind of spiritual reverence by Maori. They are now the least widespread species of rat being mainly confined to Southland, South Westland, Fiordland and some parts of Stewart Island. They like to inhabit Beech forest, Kanuka forest, coastal scrub and tussock grasslands but are poor swimmers and not considered capable of travel between islands. Although less aggressive than the other two species the Kiore is nevertheless thought to be responsible for the extinction or reduction of native species such as flightless beetles, Giant Weta, land snails, frogs, skinks, gecko and Tuatara, bats and some small seabirds. They also compete with native species for the natural food supply thereby creating an even greater problem.

The Norway Rat (*Rattus Norvegicus*) is the largest rat in NZ having a body weight of up to 5-600gms and a heavy tail that is slightly shorter than its body. It is the best swimmer of the three and known to be able to cover distances of up to 600 metres hence also known as the water rat. It has grey/brown fur and is not a particularly strong climber, preferring to prey on the eggs and chicks of ground-nesting birds as well as some lizards. A study in Stewart Island showed that the Norwegian rat was most common in sub-alpine shrub land and liked damp sites best. Probably introduced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century from a European sailing ship, in all likelihood one of Captain James Cook's.



The third rat is the Ships rat or Black Rat (*Rattus rattus*) and is of medium size fitting between the other two. Darker in colour it can weigh up to 170gm and has a tail that is longer than its body. An interesting characteristic of the Ships rat is that it holds its tail erect when it walks rather than dragging it like the others. It is easily the most common rat in NZ and is dominant in Podocarp broadleaf forest and riparian shrub land. This rat is by far the biggest threat to our native birds as it is an excellent climber and can scale the tallest trees with ease. Rat bait stations are typically placed a metre or so off the ground in areas where pigs may find the lure attractive too, and these rats have little difficulty accessing the bait in these situations. They will prey on birds, chicks, eggs, insects, lizards as well as berries, again competing for a finite food source. It is thought that Ships rats were introduced to the mainland of NZ sometime in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Unfortunately, the best efforts of conservationists are not always enough to keep all rats away from protected sites. Earlier in the year rat footprints were found in tracking tunnels on Motuihe Island

after 15 years of being rat free. Luckily a specially trained dog was brought onto the island and able to track down the offending rat which was subsequently caught before any damage was done. It is hoped that Kiwi may be released on this island in the future so this occurrence was a set-back in that it showed that rats could still access the island, probably coming from a passing ship or pleasure craft. Similarly, there was a similar incident on Motuora Island in the Hauraki Gulf where ARC staff noticed rat footprints in the sand on this predator free island. Four hundred traps were set in an effort to catch the intruder, which was eventually trapped and proved to be a large male. A third incident occurred in the Tawharanui open sanctuary near Kawau Island where evidence of a rat was recently found and a trapping and monitoring regime put in place. Each time it was thought that the last offending rat had been caught a further catch was made in a trap on the perimeter of the monitored area necessitating an expansion of the trapping boundary. After nearly half of the entire reserve was baited and monitored at a cost of \$80,000 it was finally deemed that all offending rats had been accounted for. DOC and ARC staff, as well as volunteers and interested conservationists alike, try to encourage all boaties, walkers and trampers to ensure that their equipment is totally rodent free before they set off for vulnerable destinations where the damage caused by one pest incursion can be quite immense and very costly to rectify.

Mainland islands that are unfenced can be protected from predator incursion to some degree; however the need for constant vigilance and on-going control is never-ending. Over the past six months I have spent over 10 days working in the Hunua ranges with the Kokako Recovery Programme volunteers, ably led and managed by Rosemary Gatland. Rosemary is employed by the ARC and is extremely dedicated to her work, not only accompanying the volunteers into the bush two or three times a week, but living close to the protected area on weekdays and spending nights in the bush when required to do monitoring of nests, chicks and fledglings. Rosemary tasks the volunteers with checking rat bait lines and stoat (Fenn) traps within the recovery zone over a considerable network of tracks and lines in some of the remotest parts of the Hunuas. The aim is to cover all tracks at least once a month and replace bait that has been eaten, and remove dead rats and stoats from the Fenn traps. A fresh raw hen egg is placed near the trap in a tunnel and although primarily set for stoats, more rats are generally caught in these, especially in the early part of the (Kokako) breeding season. Poison bait is placed in (Philproof) bait stations that are mounted low on tree trunks at perhaps 50m intervals. As rats move into the forest from the outlying farmland they easily find the bait and are quite capable of climbing the short distance up the tree to enter the station. One feed of bait is usually enough to kill a rat and although few carcasses are found depletion of the bait stock is taken as evidence of success. Possums will also take the bait but would need a larger intake for it to be a fatal dose. The bait is in pellet form and pre-packed in plastic bags to make handing easier and protect it from mould, a major problem with bait longevity in our moist forests. The bases of the stations are removable and the bait is placed in such a way that the bag cannot easily be dislodged; rats will simply chew through the plastic bag to eat, but possums use their long reach and sharp claws to wrench the whole bag out before consuming the contents. Empty plastic bags found on the ground nearby are usually an indication of possum activity, not rats. Generally, more rat activity is noticed closer to the perimeter of the controlled area, as this is the first line of defense. Rat counts are done periodically to give an indication of whether numbers are trending up or down and the results will determine if more or less control is needed at any given time during the breeding season. A count of 5% or less is considered essential for bird populations to thrive, and in the Hunuas the count has been around 2% over the past few months. This is excellent news for the birds but nothing can ever be taken for granted. About a month ago I covered a particular network of baited tracks and found that very little bait had been disturbed and no rat carcasses were found in the Fenn traps. A week ago I did the same network and put out 22 new bags of bait and found three rather decomposed rats and one stoat in the traps. This was somewhat disturbing in that the tracks were well within the monitored zone and indicates rats must be breeding within the protected area. Nonetheless, control mechanisms are working and as long as the tracks are regularly baited our endangered birds have a better than even chance of expanding their populations. I have heard and seen Kokako several times in the Hunuas over recent months and it never ceases to thrill me when I hear their beautiful yet mournful call, or see a bird in the treetops. (I would like to point out that in the Hunuas the volunteers usually work in pairs for safety and have radio contact with the team leader on the day).

Across NZ I believe the battle against mammalian pests is being fought very successfully on many fronts. There are many projects involving both fenced and unfenced mainland island sanctuaries, as well as on offshore islands, where government and local body initiatives are supported by teams of dedicated volunteers. Rats, as well as other pests, are being largely eliminated through regular baiting and trapping programmes and the fauna and flora are thriving as a result. Rat indices can be maintained at a low count of around 2% if the correct programmes are applied, particularly during the breeding season of our native birds. Although there can never be total pest eradication the many successes now enjoyed are stimulating new groups and landowners to work collaboratively and co-operatively with government agencies, funding bodies and Iwi to further increase the areas of native bush and specialized habitat under protection. This augurs well for the longevity of the very special flora and fauna that makes NZ so unique and will enable it to be enjoyed by many generations yet to come.

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Link to other conservation groups in  
the Auckland Region:  
[www.manawa.org.nz](http://www.manawa.org.nz)

See also [www.arc.govt.nz](http://www.arc.govt.nz) for  
upcoming events in the Auckland  
region