

## Chairman's Ramblings

Since the AGM in April it has been a busy time in the Mangemangeroa Valley Reserves. With the opening of the walkway extension southwards to Hayley Lane the overall length of the Mangemangeroa Walkway is approx 5km. The extension, since the opening last year, has been well used and we have received many favourable comments. The car park at the top of Hayley's Lane is finally completed. Signage remains an issue but we are advised by Council that this should happen early in the year. As an aside, a further walkway extension south to Mason's Lane will complete the link to Point View reserve. Having been actively promoted by Austen Gate, this is stalled at present due to funding not being considered for this in the current HLB budget

Seating is planned for the new track extension to accommodate groups of up to 30 people. Four thick redwood slabs have been purchased and will be used for this purpose. The archaeologist has approved the site. We are keen to see this project completed during the summer months.

The planting season saw the completion of the planting of pioneer species in the areas below the barn. Again a great effort from so many individuals and groups. Jim Duckworth (Rotary & Friends) and Graham Falla (Forest & Bird, & Friends) led the two major planting days. Further days involving Howick Tramping Club (John Spiller), Guides and Brownies, the Chinese Conservation Group team (James Lee) and a number of schools saw almost 8000 plants go in. This season the pioneer species will be for the Hayleys extension.

The newspaper articles prior to plantings continue to attract members of the public to come along and help us. However, without helpers with their many plant-raising units in the community, there wouldn't be much to plant. So a big 'thank you' to everyone involved - from collecting eco-sourced seeds to providing the young trees ready for planting.

The big initiative has been to promote the concept of an Environmental Education or Resource Centre at the Somerville Road entry to the reserves. The Howick Local Board (HLB) in its 5 year plan, (Auckland Council in its 10 year plan) signalled an environmental centre to be sited within the HLB's area.

Howick Rotarian and architect, Max Grant freely offered his time to help develop an initial design concept proposal for the Friends to take to a HLB working group. It incorporated comments on various subjects including: Is there a need for a visitor/environmental/interpretative centre; educational emphasis; school curriculum; toilets; café or minimal café; drinking water; viewing platform; enclosed play area; trees & landscaping; outdoor play area; display by local artists; farming display; nursery/growing unit; picnic area; the barn; north facing facility; meditation/meeting area; chapel; dog walking etc.

Such a centre has been a long-term ambition of the Friends but restoration and walkway development have taken priority.

The Board considered the concept proposal at their November meeting and confirmed a six point resolution - Number HW/2012/259:

The most significant of the six points were:

- a) *That the Howick Local Board endorse the concept of an Environmental Education Centre at Mangemangeroa Reserve presented at the 30 October 2012 Workshop by the Friends of Mangemangeroa, as a starting point.*
- e) *That the Howick Local Board supports the formation of a Project Planning Group which should comprise representation from the Friends of Mangemangeroa, council officers from relevant departments and the Howick Local Board Environment portfolio lead.*
- f) *That the Project Planning Group works with the relevant council officers to develop a sound business case that considers the costs, benefits and operational aspects of the Environmental Centre*

We are looking forward to working with John Spiller, (the Howick Local Board Environment portfolio lead) and Council staff as part of the project planning group. At the first project planning group meeting Max Grant was confirmed as Project Manager for Stage One.

I join the Friends committee in wishing you and all our supporters good health and happiness for a rewarding 2013.

## Two large pines and a macrocarpa



Below the Rotary Loop Walkway and beside the water fall two pines and a macrocarpa have been of concern to the committee for a number of years. Repeated requests to remove these brought little response from the Council until recently when a large branch fell just as a local was about to proceed along that part of the track.

The Council arborist and contractor both report that if the pine which dropped its branch on the table and seat is removed, then the two neighbouring trees should also be removed at the same time. The second pine has problems of its own and the macrocarpa which is on the flat but whose root system extends under the walkway and bridge is likely to topple and bring with it the steep bank. There was no cheap option available, so the use of a helicopter to assist in removal of all three trees is the Friends preference.

## THE PARADISE SHELDUCK by Bruce Keeley



One of our most distinctive and widespread native birds is the Paradise Shelduck. It is one of our 'endemics' - meaning it is found nowhere else - though it has a close relative in the Chestnut-breasted Shelduck of Australia. Shelduck are a distinct group of waterfowl, somewhere between typical duck and small geese.

Like many duck species, the Paradise exhibits a marked difference between the sexes, but what is very unusual is that the female is more strikingly plumaged than her mate. She has a pure white head contrasting with mainly chestnut body; while his head and body are more uniformly dark. Both sexes in flight have conspicuous white patches on the wing. At close range - which this wary bird rarely permits - there are beautifully subtle plumage details including

fine barring and flecking on back and sides, and a metallic green panel on the trailing edge of the wing.

Even when the birds are not within sight their presence is often given away by their loud, unmistakeable calls: the male's a deep nasal honking, and the female's a higher wailing. One might guess it is this feature which gave the species its Maori name *Putangitangi*.

Paradise Shelduck have benefited from the widespread replacement of forest by pastureland, and may be seen over much of the country from sea-level to high country tussockland. Nesting in spring is mostly at ground level but can also be high up in a hollow tree. In late summer birds flock together to moult, and large congregations can be seen at ponds and coastal lagoons etc.

A pair or two will often be seen or heard on or near the Mangemangeroa reserve, on surrounding farmland and even on city parks.

# Rata's of the Mangemangeroa by Sally Barclay



Within the reserve we are privileged to have a number of species of the rata. The three climbing (lianes) species; the scarlet (*Metrosideros fulgens*) and white (*M. perforata*) are quite common while the carmine (*M. carmine*) rata, a rare climber has been nurtured by Graham Falla and can be seen climbing up a ponga fern below the barn.



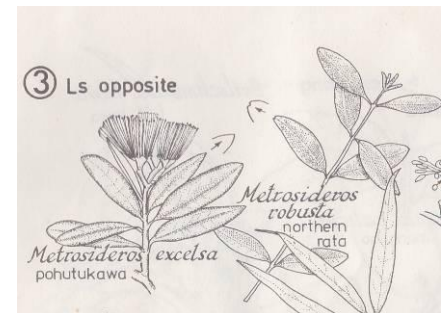
The scarlet rata flower autumn/winter time while the white rata produces a mass of white flowers during summer to attract, in particular, the bumble bee. Carmine rata flowers in the late winter and provides a very colourful display. (see photo below)



In New Zealand there are two main types of tree rata, the northern and southern. In the reserve we have a huge northern rata toward the northern end of the track. It is recognisable by its stringy bark and evidence of its early life begun as a seedling high up in the host tree. Northern rata (*M. robusta*) roots grow down to the ground, eventually forming a massive trunk.



Both rata and pohutukawa belong to the myrtle family and have similar leaf and flower structure. This is really appreciated when rata produces a swath of red flowers in summer above the canopy of the neighbouring large rewarewa, titoki and puriri trees. This display can be seen from the "Three sisters" point below Archies Lookout.



"Common Trees and Shrubs from the Waitakere Range" prepared by A E Esler: Leaflet 16

## Awards

At the Sustainable Environment Awards held at the Town Hall the Friends of Mangemangeroa were one of 12 finalists for the Sustainable Community Award. The winners were Sustainable Paremoremo, who had an amazing spread of activities within that community.

<http://www.parempublisher.co.nz/community-groups/sustainable-pare/>

We were recipients of one of the two Highly Commended certificates.

## Kauri Dieback

It is particularly relevant out South as the Hunua Ranges are free of the disease, and we want to keep it that way, as well as raise awareness about the disease in general and how people can help.

The website is a great start – [www.kauridieback.co.nz](http://www.kauridieback.co.nz)

## Walks

Maungatautari Wildlife reserve in the Waikato now offer a variety of guided walks; follow the link for more information:-

<http://www.maungatrutrust.org/Online-Bookings-plus.cfm>

## Contact details for

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**AGM: Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> April, Haseler Hall, details to follow soon.**



## Kapiti Island Trip Anniversary Weekend 2013

After a rodent 'self check' of luggage at the Kapiti boating club I boarded the alloy power cat, along with ten or so others, for the 15 minute hop out to Kapiti Island.



My two night visit gave me time to visit Rangatira, the point roughly mid island where you can access the high point, Tuteremoana (521 m) and have a relaxing lunch before making your way back down to catch the afternoon ferry to North End, where the overnight accommodation is situated. The Trig track (my choice to ascend) and the Wilkinson track (descent) both have feeding stations located on them, mainly to provide guaranteed food for the Stitchbirds (Hihi) as they are often bullied away from natural food sources by the more aggressive Bellbirds and Tuis.



This excursion soaked up around 6 hours and then we arrived at North End to be greeted by our hosts, the local Maori family who have maintained ownership of sections of the Island for their own use, and to run the business known as Kapiti Island Adventure Tours. I was shown to my lodgings and took a cold shower (the gas water heater wasn't running) but this was refreshing after the toils of the morning.

A walk around the lagoon (Okupe) at the Northern end of the island took us to where a Black-Back gull colony was nesting, as well as a colony of Royal Spoonbills. The zone was out of bounds, but we were told that as

long as we kept strictly to the blue poled route markers, and were quiet, that we would be fine to go.

There was plenty of activity, and as we neared the nesting zone, the gulls became raucous and starting 'strafing' runs over our heads. A soft 'plop' on my shoulder indicated a direct hit with a rather nasty looking evacuation from an agitated parent, however I couldn't blame it I suppose; only doing what a good parent would in the circumstances! The spoonbill colony was confined to quite a small area atop some springy looking undergrowth, and although we couldn't get too near to them, the wind ruffling the collar feathers behind their necks made a pretty spectacular sight.



After dinner the overnights had a briefing before heading out under the cloak of darkness to try to find a Spotted Kiwi. There was a very full moon, and we hardly needed torches, so our guide, Manaaki, used his red lensed torch to lead the way. Coming into a small clearing we paused as Manaaki, pointed to a Morepork (Ruru) perched on a low branch, apparently watching the forest floor for any Geckos that might stray into view.

Later there was some commotion, out of my view, as a Spotted Kiwi burst from the scrub on the low side of the track to try and reach the comparative safety of the hill on the high side, where its nest would have been located. It ran straight into the legs of my companion of earlier in the day, bounced off and scurried away before I could get a glimpse!

Next morning I arose at 5.00 a.m. we made our way along the dimly lit track and soon heard scuffling on the hilly side. Hopeful of a Kiwi encounter we paused and finally made out the shape of a reasonable sized bird that our over active imaginations conjured into the distinctive shape of a small Kiwi; unfortunately as it worked its way foraging down the slope we came to realise that it was a mere Weka. Never mind, the chorus was starting up and small shapes were flitting through the canopy. Rounding a bend I looked at a



fallen branch by the stream and spotted something that looked incongruous. Slowing my pace I saw movement and the gorgeous face of a young Morepork turned in our direction. I put my finger to my lips as the ladies caught up and we all had a chance to admire this beautiful little feathered predator before it took flight to a nearby tree.

After breakfast we three again took off to the Northern tip of Kapiti to walk the Okupe loop track, a pleasant saunter up a gentle hill to a vantage point where we snacked and admired the view, and shooed away pesky Wekas that seemed to think we were a soft touch for a few nibbles; they were right of course, even though visitors are not supposed to feed the wildlife!

At 6 pm I headed back to the deck outside the lodge. A small group of visitors soon gathered, as well as John Barrett and his sister Amo, our hosts, for a debrief of the days bird spotting and other activities. Kapiti blue cheese and crackers were disappearing off the table at an alarming rate, exacerbated by the arrival of eight or so Kakas who decided to join us for happy hour. Initially we were encouraged to shoo them off the tables but John relented and we were allowed to feed them crackers. This led in turn to the cheeky parrots alighting on our heads and shoulders, and it was rather unnerving looking sideways at those large hooked beaks only inches from our eyes and ears. All seemed under control though until a rogue fellow swooped in and deftly plucked the remainder of the Kapiti cheese from the dish and without dropping the morsel returned to the nearby Pohutukawa tree.



This was the signal for the others to leave our measly cracker offerings and descend on the offender who had no option but to share his booty with his fellow feathered ruffians. I'm sure this has happened before and is probably generally accepted as part of the Kapiti experience.

At 10.00 pm I assembled with a new group of Kiwi spotters wanting to make sure that I didn't miss out again. Manaaki ran over the same dos and don'ts as the night before and we were underway. Along the track Manaaki disappeared into the underbrush to try to 'flush' out a bird he heard but it was too clever and

circled around him to head higher up. A little while later I got my opportunity, along with the rest of the group. A Little Spotted Kiwi was seen just off track in a fairly open area and eventually crossed the track in full view. It seemed confused and crossed back and forth a couple of times before finally deciding in which direction safety lay. Returning to the cabins we were fortunate to have a second encounter that night so I felt well satisfied.

Along with the species already mentioned I saw Takahe, Red Crowned Kakariki, Kereru, and Whitehead (Popokatea) and heard plenty of Long Tailed Cuckoo. I've yet to see one of the latter but very nearly did. Shouts from outside the lodge one afternoon had us running as a pair of Long Tails had flown down into a Pohutukawa by the back lawn. I was too late though because by the time I got to the site they had been seen off by a Tui, wretched bullies that they are!



The third day, my last, was very relaxing and I read a bit, enjoyed the pair of Takahe with their chick mooching around the buildings, and chatted to other overnights. The ferry turned up just after 3 pm and sadly, it was time to depart. I'd just sat in my seat when another gull (perhaps it was the same one) found its range and I could hardly believe it when I was again soiled from above, this time it was my best shirt.

You couldn't say I left on a sour note though; Kapiti was fabulous, and the bird life amazing. One could only reflect on the probability that most of New Zealand would once have had birdlife comparable to Kapiti before the introduction of mammalian predators, and to a lesser extent the effects of hunting that was carried out by the indigenous people for food and decoration, and more recently by European explorers, again for food on occasion, but also in the name of scientific research and for overseas collectors.

All a bit sad really, particularly when one considers that the extinction of the superb Huia was largely down to a short lived fashion trend.

Put Kapiti on your 'bucket list'; if you can't get there go to Tiri Tiri Matangi, or preferably both. Just do it.

*John Spiller February 2013*

## Milford Track

The bus ride from Queenstown was not encouraging. Every stream we passed was full to the brim, if not spread over the surrounding farmland; a detour via Manapouri was necessary; then at Te Anau, the lakeside picnic furniture was barely visible. The locals were full of talk of the intense day-long electrical storm and torrential rain earlier in the week. And the Milford Track had been closed for several days. But good news....it would be open tomorrow.



The two-hour boat trip to the head of the lake was wonderful, with the rata-splashed bush clinging miraculously to almost vertical valley walls. As the boat slowed towards its destination we were informed that we would each have to decide how best to organise our packs and clothing for disembarking along the jetty which was one metre under water, totally invisible, and with no handrails! It was a dramatic start to the four-day walk, with the 'reassuring' welcome of a million sandflies as soon as we waded ashore.

Apart from another electrical storm during our second night and some hours of wet plodding up the steepest part of the track to the Mackinnon Pass, the weather was beautiful for most of the way.

But the rain is a small price to pay for the luxuriant forest and understorey of ferns which dominate most of the journey. The sight of *Heruheru*, Prince of Wales Feathers fern, lining the track like small tree ferns, was unforgettable. Likewise the sight of fallen mistletoe flowers underfoot, for hundreds of metres, indicating a very healthy population of this vulnerable parasitic percher in the beech canopy overhead. My only other experience of the mistletoe had been the occasional one in Tongariro National Park, carefully enshrined in possum-proof netting.



Birds abound along the track, with a potential surprise round every corner: a weka beating a hasty retreat into the undergrowth; the unmistakable rising shriek of a kiwi outside the Dumpling Hut in the dead of night; a small group of Blue Duck loafing beside the Arthur River towards dusk; a stunning eye-level view of a long-tailed cuckoo which seemed equally amazed to see us at close quarters.

Parrots are prominent, though more often heard than seen. Kakariki (parakeet) were heard in only a few locations, but the strong-flying kaka and kea spread their charms across the u-shaped valleys, and were particularly obvious in the evenings.

Riflemen are abundant once ears and eyes have become attuned to the high-pitched call and their tiny, tailless forms camouflaged against the mossy trunks.

Exotic species are also well represented by the chaffinch - probably the most numerous bird on the track - and both blackbird and thrush still in full song, though their counterparts had fallen silent up in Auckland by mid-January.

Day 3 is the Big One, with a slow zig-zag from the head of the Clinton Valley up to the misty Mackinnon Pass, and down, down, endlessly down into the Arthur Valley, past 'no stopping' avalanche zones and fantastic water chasms. The assault on the body through this 970 metre descent, with a heavy pack and unstable rocky substrate, is not to be taken lightly. A twisted ankle is the least of possibilities.

Then the final day, though a longer distance, is relatively even in elevation and over some wonderful swing bridges and thundering streams. Finally, 55 kilometres from the initial welcoming party, we encounter another dense horde of the little blighters mustering their resources for the send-off ceremony. It is a relief to get on the boat and set off for our first glimpse of Piopiotahi, Milford Sound.

Sandfly bites and sore feet are soon outweighed by deep satisfaction at the new large tick on the Bucket List.

Bruce Keeley Jan 2013



# Hollyford Track



Three days of typical Fiordland weather; rain at night, a shower or two in the morning and then a fine day ensured that we were well "waterproofed" and decked out in the requisite 4 layers of non cotton attire.

The Hollyford track goes over the lowest pass in the South Island (Homer Saddle) and was the route used by the Maori to get the greenstone out to the East Coast where it was highly valued as a trading commodity. The Maori had no metals for tool making but the edge on a greenstone adze was said to be better than that on an iron axe.

It is along this route, beside the Hollyford River that the Nga Tahu people have established the guided Hollyford Valley walks.

Day one a 17 km walk, through hard beech firstly then the taller and more light filtering mountain Beech. The track passed through a section of lowland ribbonwood/podocarp forest draped with colourful mosses and ferns.



The delicate umbrella moss and the Prince of Wales feather fern were two species not seen in the Mangemangeroa

The climb to Little Homer Saddle, gave views of Mt Madeline and Fiordland's highest mountain, Mt Tutoko (2723 m).

River crossings were over sturdy bridges, swing bridges or 4x2 where the rain had washed away the means of crossing

As we reached the saddle the change in rainfall provided the conditions necessary for the more species diverse podocarp forests including huge rimu supporting an incredible number of lianes.



Day 2 was a 12km walk and jetboat ride to visit the site of Jamestown and to appreciate the hardships that the early settlers faced before walking off the land. The last day was a stroll out to the ocean at Martins Bay and then Long Reef to see the NZ fur seals. The walk ended with a helicopter ride to Milford Sound in the rain and mist along the rugged coast line.

Accommodation was on lodges and the food 5 star. The chefs walked 13 km into work each week up the Hollyford River.

*Sally Barclay Jan 2013*



*Sturdy bridge, MP Prasad getting a helping hand over the 4X2, Hollyford River, Hidden falls, creek, me in hollow tree (possibly rata) , Lake Alabaster, Pyke River, desolation caused by 1999 floods, sand dunes at Martins Bay, Long reef seals*