



Chairman's Ramblings

So much has happened since the April AGM.

Thank you everyone who came along to hear John Spiller and Max Grant present the proposed Environmental Educational Centre, for the Mangemangeroa Reserve on Somerville Road.

John is leading the project as the Howick Local Board (HLB) representative. Bruce Keeley and I represent the Friends on the Project Planning Group which the Board has set up. Elsewhere in this newsletter you will find an update on the status of the project. It is proceeding well with early indications of support from most HLB members.

- A survey of reserve users over two days in the May school holidays resulted in around 86% support for the concept of an Environmental Education Centre. The other 14% was a mix of outright opposition and conditional or partial support/approval. This was much as expected. The major benefit was gaining names of people interested in working in the reserve or in some way assisting the Friends in the voluntary work we do there.
- Action is promised by the HLB for removal of the dangerous trees on the Rotary Loop estuary section of the track.
- Approvals have been received from the Historic Places Trust for seating within the new southern walkway, now formally called the **Kowhai Walk**. Seating for groups of 30 or so walkers is funded by the Friends. A separate table and seat set, below Hayley Lane, is being funded by Howick Rotary. Installation of both should be completed by Council contractors in November.
- Planting days are now completed. We had excellent support from the Friends, Rotarians, Howick Tramping Club, schools and churches, other community groups, the general public and Council's Parks South staff and their contractors. Around 6000 plants went in this year, pioneer species as well as canopy species- kahikatea, titoki, pururi, totara, pigeonwood etc.
- Liaison with local schools has strengthened this year and their contributions have produced reciprocal benefits. Some initiatives were sparked by the Environmental Education Centre discussions, others through the work of our committee members and community approaches to us through the excellent media support and publicity, in particular the Times Newspapers.

We are looking at strengthening the core volunteer groups within the Friends. We feel it's now time to renew the call for 'enthusiasts and advocates' to share in our various activities as we enter new phases of development in the Mangemangeroa Valley Reserves. This could include increasing committee numbers with members willing to participate in some of the organisational work. It is envisaged that the Environmental Education Centre will provide additional opportunities in planning, marketing, tour guiding, planting, plant care and, liaison with community and schools.

We invite you to learn more of these opportunities, in the first instance by contacting Friends secretary, Deborah Grant to discuss your interest.

Allan Riley, Chairman

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Latest news from the Howick Local Board

The Howick Local Board recently 'signed off' on its Parks works programme of scheduled works for the 2013 / 2014 year. I'm pleased to say that among the body of work there are a number of items that will impact positively on the Mangemangeroa reserves area for the benefit and safety of those who use it.



Two walkers taking "time out" below the macrocarpas

The board has approved funding for the removal of the two large pines and one macrocarpa that are in the vicinity of the waterfall below the Rotary Loop track. These trees have been shedding branches in the recent past posing a danger to track walkers. There is further potential for significant damage to the track and bank structure should these trees fall in a storm event. Because of their large size and proximity to new plantings, it is appropriate for helicopter lifting techniques to be used in their removal. This will add some cost to the exercise but in view of the collateral damage that would otherwise be done to the surrounding bush the cost/benefit analysis stacks up. This work should be carried out over the drier months coming up.

The track extension that has been sought by track users, as well as some local folk, in the esplanade area of the walkway by Shelly Park is being progressed, and further consultation with neighbouring residents is planned before the works take place. The preference seems to be for a shell or gravel surface to make the track 'all weather' and although the walking strip will be well defined the plan is to keep the surface nearly flush with the surrounding topography to allow for easy passage of dinghies, kayaks and the like that locals launch in the nearby estuary.

The most recent section of the walking track, from the intersection of the Rotary loop up to Hayley Lane, was recently given its formal name. It will be known as 'Kowhai Walk', the name preferred by the FOM committee, and ultimately endorsed by the Howick Local Board. Local Iwi were also consulted on this and had no objections to this name being used.

The board has approved funding for signage throughout the reserve and this is long overdue to replace the now ineffective temporary signage that had been installed in some areas, and for new signage to better indicate direction, and interpret aspects of the reserve for users. There are around 18 new signs being designed and constructed at the current time with installation to take place in the near future.

Work is continuing 'behind the scenes' with regard to the potential for an environmental/educational centre to be built in the reserve. The logical and preferred site for this is on the plateau to the South East of the barn by the car park, and geotechnical studies support this site being the most suitable. Late last year the Howick Local Board approved funding of up to \$50 k for the purposes of a feasibility study on the proposal and a Project Planning group (PPG) was formed. A series of meetings and site visits to a number of other centres with an environmental focus have taken place this year. Max Grant, a local architect and Rotarian, has been engaged to work up some concept plans and has been integral to the process in terms of his knowledge and willingness to work with the group, and present more detailed concepts throughout the process as the design brief was distilled. It is likely that if the centre ultimately goes ahead there will be significant potential use by schools throughout the region for environmental and scientific studies, tertiary institutional use, community group use, visitor centre and information function, cafe and viewing deck, office space and possible 'men's shed' basement area. There could also be a place for quiet contemplation or study. Ideas are still coming to hand but the next step is to secure funding for stage two of the development, the detailed design and consenting phase, so approval to construct can be sought. Max Grant and John Spiller (PPG), and Malcolm Page (council parks), have variously met on three occasions with representatives of the Somerville Foundation to seek their approval in principle for the project and to invite them on board as project partners. I'm pleased to say that their response has been extremely encouraging with a tentative commitment to assist with some funding for stage two of the project. A recent workshop with board members and PPG group members was also positive and it is hoped that after the October elections the new board will continue to show support for the concept so that the PPG can continue to work productively with the Somerville Foundation and council officers.

This is an exciting and worthwhile project, and whilst the final design outcomes are still being determined, council view the facility as being 'regionally significant and desirable', because it would satisfy council's evident desire for an environmental centre in this part of the greater Auckland region.

John Spiller

Howick Local Board member

September 2013

Plantings for 2013 by Graham Falla



Sunday planting group from Howick College

I can report an outstanding season of planting for 2013: the ground was well-watered, site-prep generally good, we had plenty of plants, fair weather on most planting days, good numbers of volunteers and excellent co-operation from the Council contractors.

Successful planting took place along the track to Haley Lane, the Upper Paddock is now completely covered with pioneer species except for the section taped off to avoid the heritage site. About 300 kahikatea were planted to more than replace those lost in last summer's freak drought; and further infilling with mahoe was completed. A large contribution to these plantings was made by Warwick and his helpers.

The Somerville Intermediate nursery now houses healthy numbers of taraire, kahikatea, titoki and kowhai of various ages. Many of these will be ready to plant in 2014 but meanwhile there is very little room there for new seedlings when they are pricked out in the coming months.

In 2014 we can expect to carry out pioneer planting to cover the Lower Paddock down to the Whitford Road Bridge. There are major weeds here to be blitzed in advance, especially giant bamboo that is steadily encroaching from the adjacent road reserve.

Snippets



Escapees and Druggees

A garden escapee this rose gave a wonderful display draping over the fence. Unwanted though was the marijuana crop grown among some of the pioneer plantings.

Bloomin' and Disappointments

Last years kowhai and kahikatea plantings have been most disappointing but the blossoming manuka are making a wonderful show at present.



Morepork

Deletions

This ruru was found on the side of the track, just after poison had been laid for mice and rats. Unfortunately it was a healthy adult but the reduction of mice and rats may well be offset by the loss of one ruru. Photo taken by John Spiller on his phone at the counter of Hammer Hardware Howick.

Storms have played havoc bringing down both a kowhai and pigeonwood. Both these trees were well laden with seed and it is hoped that although they were not ripe that some time on the windowsill has encouraged them to germinate and form stock for planting in a couple of years.

Pigeonwood (*Hedycarya arborea*) by Sally Barclay



Pigeonwood forms a part of the pigeon diet through the production masses of bright orange/red berries hence its name. Pigeons become quite sleepy when indulging in a feast of these drupes.

This species is easy to recognise by its dark (almost black) petiole (stem) and paired serrated leaves. Possums feast on these leaves and as a consequence a number of the pigeonwood are only now becoming more plentiful within the reserve. The older pigeonwood have a quite dark bark often supporting a variety of lichen. These mature trees may reach a height of 12m. Unfortunately a mature pigeonwood came down in the recent storms.

A very pretty flower with a sweet smell, faintly of honey is seen in the reserve during October and November. The male flowers are larger than the females and are born on separate trees.

SAVE BROOKBY Kauri grove! By Lyn Murphy



Wairoa residents will be aware of the Save Brookby campaign fighting an application to dump waste soil from other parts of Auckland using some 240 trucks daily up Twilight Road. Twilight road is a popular cyclist route and is not designed for double carriage trucks so there is an obvious safety danger for them and other road users.

“Ngaheretuku reserve is a 15-hectare reserve is set on a steep tract of land that contains magnificent stands of secondary growth kauri, kahikatea, totara, rimu, taraire, puriri and tanekaha. Ngaheretuku means “bush gift” or “a gift of native bush”, a name which recognises the gift of the land by Hugh Alexander.

It is only metres away on the doorstep of the entrance to the proposed dump site and has some of the most significant stands of Kauri across the Pohutakawa coast region.”

This poses a significant risk of Kauri Dieback if the dumping proposal goes ahead

Due to risks associated with kauri dieback, this reserve is closed to the public

Monitoring

Once again the trees have been measured and their girths recorded on the database as a part of the global warming study being undertaken. As well, four year 9 students from Howick College undertook to research the “invertebrate” life within the reserve and photographed and recorded their findings for access via the net.



The Shag Family by Bruce Keeley

Anyone who has watched birds in Australia will have soon discovered that where NZ has one of something, Australia has three or four, or more. We have one fantail – they have six; we have two cuckoos to their twelve! But when it comes to the shags (or cormorants) we can hold our heads high, with rather more species than the Aussies.

There's a downside to this position of superiority - shags are a very confusing lot until you get to know them and just to add to the challenge, one of them is variable in its plumage, .

Four species will possibly be seen in or near the Mangemangeroa Reserve, the most likely being the **Pied Shag**. This elegant black and white bird, with yellow bill and bare lemon skin around the eye, will often be seen perching in trees overhanging the water, or on moored boats. It is a gregarious species and, usually, where there is one there will be others nearby.



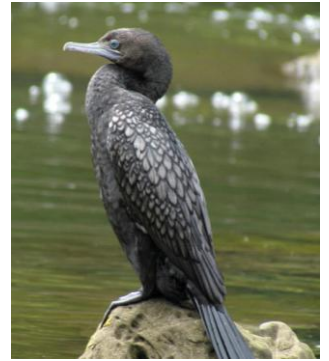
Pied Shag



Black Shag



Little Shag



Little Black Shag

The larger **Black Shag** (Kawau, or Great Cormorant) is more solitary, away from its breeding colonies, though it can be seen in twos and threes at favoured roosts. It is entirely black, except for white cheeks and throat, and yellow skin round the eye. In breeding plumage it has a white patch on the thigh.

Now, here's where things get complicated. The **Little Shag** (called Little Pied Cormorant in Australia) is a smaller version of the Pied, with its black-above/white-below pattern.. In Australia that is the end of the matter, but in NZ our bird can also be more like a miniature Black Shag - all black, apart from a white throat. And then...there can be intermediate birds mid-way between the two! Look out for the shortish yellow beak and 'crew-cut hairstyle', as an aid in identifying this species.

But wait, there's more. Occasionally we may also see the **Little Black Shag**. It is slightly larger than the Little Shag, the only all-dark species of the four, and has a slender lead-grey bill. It is a very gregarious bird which loves to pack-hunt when it is fishing.

All this confusion aside, there are some unifying characteristics which hold the family together. Shags are generally silent, away from their raucous breeding colonies, though occasionally one hears some unmusical expletives from a group of roosting birds. They are all wonderfully adapted for their fish-eating aquatic lifestyle: the long hooked bill is ideal for catching and holding prey, the short legs and large webbed feet make for superb agility in the water (though an awkward gait on land); and the long necked, streamlined build makes for speed in the water and in flight.

Pests



Buckthorn

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

- Evergreen shrub, less than 5m high.
- Glossy green leaves with serrated edges.
- Small green fragrant flowers (May to November).
- Red-black glossy berries.

HOW TO REMOVE IT

The plant should be cut off 50 to 100mm above ground and the stump treated with Vigilant gel to prevent re-growth.



Red-vented bulbuls

WHO TO LOOK OUT FOR

- medium-sized bird about the size of a starling (20 centimetres in length – body and tail).
- generally dark coloured with a lighter chest and rump.
- small crest on their head.
- distinctive crimson-red patch beneath their tail.

HOW TO REMOVE IT

PHONE: 0800 80 99 66

Take a photo!

Newsletter Changes

With the digital age well and truly now on us we are looking at setting up our own website, using a program such as “mailchimp” for emails and putting the newsletter out in a responsive (mobile phone friendly) manner. Helping to drive these changes has been the Council who provided a free webdesign course for volunteer groups wishing to move into the digital age. I was offered a place on this course. This course has proved extremely informative and networking with other groups within various communities has been of considerable benefit.

This newsletter is the first put together with this in mind but in future the idea is to email individual articles which have a catching title in the subject, a short precis of what is in the article within the body of the email and an attachment of the full article.

Sally Barclay

Planting photos from 2013



Giving orders



Receiving orders (some of the 80 odd people who turned up for our first planting day)



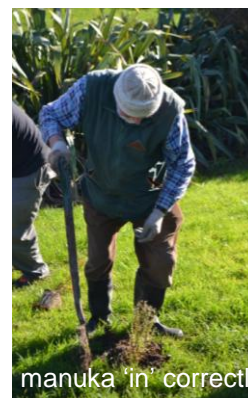
Heading off with spades correctly carried



Rotarians planting the bank,



Indian group planting flax in the wet



manuka 'in' correctly



A proud group at the end of a planting day (note the hungry ones in the background with their sausages)