



Centennial Park Bush Society Newsletter



Newsletter No. 77

April 2014

'War on Pests' – Are You On Board?

A recent *Herald* headline read *Grassroots war on pests. Royal Society wants ordinary Kiwis to get involved in ecological battle to protect NZ* – which is exactly what Bush Society volunteers and some park rim residents are doing. The park's 79 bait stations have been in operation for more than eight months and it is usual to rest the rebaiting of stations for a period to prevent rodents becoming bait shy – but we have found no evidence of this, so our bait-line monitors will continue baiting through winter. This should ensure the rat population is at a minimum when spring nesting starts. On average it takes an hour to check the stations along each bait-line. Since set-up, some lines have been checked 20 times. The hours add up. In total, line monitors have already logged over 100 hours in the bush. We think the effort is worthwhile and all the lines have some stations which are regularly visited by rodents. All this is being recorded on a growing database telling us when each station was checked, how much bait was eaten, how much damaged or decayed bait was removed and how much new bait added. Our records show rats migrate into the park from nearby properties, so we would like to extend the grassroots war on pests into the community. The Bush Society can lend traps or bait stations (and sell bait at a competitive price) to residents who would like to help us make Centennial Park, and eventually the whole bay, as near as possible pest-free. While no possums have been caught in the park for the past year, they are in the neighbourhood and given time will move into the bush unless stopped. We are grateful to several residents who have borrowed possum traps – in one case with spectacular results ridding Campbells Bay of four possums in a very short time.

Peter Aimer

Traps and Bait Stations for Loan

If you are keen to help control rats or possums on your property please contact us.

**Contact Dick Downing dick.d@xtra.co.nz
478 3737**

- For secure bait stations and discount rat bait

**Contact Peter Aimer p.aimer@xtra.co.nz
478 8252**

- For rat traps and secure rat trap tunnels
- Timm's traps for trapping possums

Full instruction and training offered

Passiflora Passion

Last November we were treated to a prolific flowering of *Passiflora tetrandra* (NZ passionflower, kohia – photo above) at the entrance to the nature trail. I have been aware of this particular vine for some years but never witnessed it flowering so well. I did not see any fruit -- normally small round and orange -- so maybe it's a male? In mature bush the passionflower vine can be huge with leg-width stems reaching high into the canopy. There is a large swinging specimen near the start of the Okura bush walk. The other common flowering native vine in the park is *Clematis paniculata*. Look for its massed white flowers in the canopy near the bottom of Sandford Street and Asbury Crescent paths in spring. **Richard Hursthouse**



New Weeds To Watch For

The Oxford dictionary defines a weed as a "wild herb springing where it is not wanted" and unfortunately the National Pest Plant Accord and regional lists of these wild unwanted continue to grow -- like the plants themselves. Recent additions include phoenix palm (Canary Island date palm) and *Cestrum nocturnum* (queen of the night), both of which are established in Centennial Park. The phoenix is at seedling stage but seedlings of the bangalow -- an emergent, as yet unlisted, problem palm, still sold by nurseries -- are even more prevalent. The bangalow is a quick-growing Australian which is staging a takeover in the bush. Gardening with palms is fashionable and fast-growing exotics are preferred to slower native nikau. All palms have fruit attractive to birds -- so, in urban environments, bush areas are under constant attack from these garden invaders. We also endlessly remove loquat and guava seedlings.



Bangalow palm (Photo R Hursthouse)

Dracaena draco (dragon tree), also from the Canary Islands and popular for landscaping, is now seeding in the park, as are cherries -- particularly *Prunus campanulata* (Taiwan cherry), which has beautiful deep pink flowers and small fruit, beloved by tui and rosellas. In earlier, more innocent days, the Bush Society actually planted cherries. The various wattle species are a familiar problem. The large *Acmena smithii* trees, now renamed *Syzygium smithii* (monkey apple), have all been removed from the park and the golf course, but North Shore has hundreds of monkey apples and fresh seedlings constantly pop up.

Suburban native bush blocks are oases where people can enjoy natural native landscapes and birds. So, a heads-up to gardeners: consider what you are planting, or already

have in your garden. Is it a listed "weed" -- or likely to become one? **Joe Greig**

The Dairy Garden

One morning in September last year the scrap of land outside the dairy, on the corner of The Esplanade, was given a makeover by the Bush Society's Wednesday workers. We swooped in and dug, tugged, planted and mulched, disposing of vast quantities of aristeia and big clumps of agapanthus. We then replanted with a selection of hardy New Zealand natives, purchased with donations to the society.

It is not the first time the corner has received such attention. Some 30 years ago Ron Wilcox instigated and oversaw the development of a beautifully landscaped area of raised beds bounded by drystone walls -- with a path meandering through an imaginatively planted garden. In the intervening years the garden fell into disrepair, the only survivors being a pohutukawa, a fine stand of cabbage trees and a prostrate spreading conifer.

The site is not easy -- a dry windy corner affording marginal growing conditions. But with careful selection and ongoing care we are confident the dairy garden will once again become a work of art. It's a work in progress...so watch this space.

Liz Goodwin



Dairy Garden crew -- photo - Richard Hursthouse



The Mysterious Long-tailed Cuckoo

The long-tailed cuckoo or koekoea is a mystery bird to Aucklanders. It is one of only two migrant passerines (perching birds) summering in New Zealand -- both cuckoos. Both are also brood parasites, meaning they lay eggs in the nests of other species. Long-tailed cuckoos winter in the tropical Pacific and as they parasitise either whiteheads or yellowheads, do not breed in Auckland but pass through in spring and autumn. They are more often heard than seen – hence the mystery -- and their call is more of a shriek and quite distinctive (see <http://nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/long-tailed-cuckoo#bird-sounds>). They crash into windows sometimes and are found stunned.

As an indicator of rarity we are in the seventh year of monthly bird counts in Centennial Park and saw our first ever long-tailed cuckoo on 13th March. It was fleeing from a tui and flew past us twice, offering excellent views. Suzi Phillips reported hearing one calling persistently in October 2009 and Doug Booth saw one in November 2011. Still, if you learn the call and keep alert in spring and autumn you may well encounter this fabulous addition to our somewhat meagre land bird list.

Alan Emmerson



Photo – Long tailed cuckoo juvenile being fed by foster parent whitehead Blowhard Bush Hawk Hawkes Bay – image C Adam Clarke

New Nature Trail Guide

Regenerating bush is dynamic. Plants get shaded out, trees die, paths get moved. So the nature trail guide has been rewritten and awaits reprinting. Meantime, though old copies are still useful, the new guide can be downloaded from our website. Smartphone users can bring up the guide in real time via a QR code at the start of the nature trail – complete with pictures.



Pest Control Expert At AGM

Craig Knapp, Auckland Zoo's pest control co-ordinator, is guest speaker at the

Bush Society AGM on

Wednesday June 11, 7.30pm,

Campbells Bay School Hall.

Craig will talk about pest control in difficult situations and give a presentation on how the Zoo controls pests while simultaneously protecting its unique animal species. He will also offer practical tips on controlling the rodents and possums which are harming Campbells Bay's birdlife.

Craig has worked in pest control since 1986. He was with Manawatu/ Wanganui and Waikato Regional councils and was the Department of Conservation ranger in charge of controlling pests within Marpa Scenic Reserve kokako recovery area, Mahonui giant weta and Archies frog reserve in the Whareorino forest. He has controlled numerous aerial 1080 programmes -- the largest, in 2002, of 32,000ha in the Northern Pureora Forest.



Planting day 2013

This photo is of our major planting day last year near the 15th green of the golf course. Volunteers prepared the site, moved 1200 plants into position and then planted all of them in a few hours. Now our weeding team is making sure they get a good start out by making sure they are not smothered before they grow too big. Growth has been spectacular despite the dry summer.



Get Involved

Have you time to spare to help your local community? The Bush Society runs regular work groups in the park on Wednesday mornings – controlling weeds, maintaining tracks and planting in season to help make Centennial Park one of the Shore’s best. There is work for all abilities and full training is offered in weed recognition and control techniques. This is not gardening! We focus on the invasive plants which are a constant threat in bush reserves. We also run weekend work days on the first Saturday of each month. To stay informed please email: bushsoc@gmail.com, or sign up to follow our blog at www.centennialparkbushsociety.org.nz, or phone Richard 410 5339 or Joe 475 6943

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Contact Us

Chairman: Richard Hursthouse 410 5339
Secretary: Jenny Chamberlain 478 6385
Treasurer: Max Thomson 479 1681
Committee: Cathy Roughan, Jan Knight, Liz Goodwin, Joe Greig, Bruce Rogers, Bob Fairbairn and Dick Downing.

Centennial Park Bush Society Inc

P O Box 31 677, Milford 0740

Email bushsoc@gmail.com

Find out more and **sign up to follow our blog** at www.centennialparkbushsociety.org.nz

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