



Newsletter No. 76

Centennial Park Bush Society Newsletter



November 2013

Simply The Best

You could say 2013 has been our best year yet – but I believe it's been the culmination of 35 good years, during which volunteers (some no longer with us) have honed skills and gained confidence in improving this wonderful habitat. It seems there's no limit to what our workers are prepared to take on -- success *does* breed success.

The Centennial Park Bush Society has the support of local community boards and Auckland Council Parks and Reserves staff. Credibility enables the society to source outside funding to cover contract work beyond the scope of volunteers -- such as spray control of resilient weeds and large weed tree removal.

Activities are planned ahead – weeding in dryer months, track work in winter, and planting in time for spring. The society cut its teeth on the seemingly impossible Park Rise to Kowhai Road Track creation but for projects beyond routine we consult Auckland Council park officers. Track work – rebuilding tracks and creating detours away from muddy areas – is important, as is, where possible, replacing deteriorating stairs with user-friendly graded tracks.

The park is now much more capable of regenerating and being self-sustaining. The need to control weed plants and trees should diminish as native regeneration continues. Earlier native tree plantings are becoming dominant and natural regrowth is widespread -- lessening the requirement for additional planting... hush, we have a future forest growing. For wildlife and bush to thrive, pests must go – read the item on our new bait

station grid. The Bush Society planted 2,560 plants and trees in the last 12 months. Major sites include a previously kikuyu-infested bank just off the 15th fairway and Greville Reserve -- now an important bush restoration site where hundreds of weed tree seedlings - - mainly wattles and acmenas – have been removed.

Major funding successes include: \$1,500 from council's Environmental Initiatives Fund to control tradescantia; \$6,000 from the Lion Foundation for large wattle and acmena removal; \$10,000 (over three years) from Devonport Takapuna Local Board for removal of large weed trees from Greville Reserve. Our sincere thanks to all our funders.

At the society's instigation, plans are afoot to control storm-water run-off and erosion in the catchment. See the item on the Asbury gully site, near the large kahikatea – the park's oldest and most magnificent tree. To protect this tree and restore the hopelessly muddy track, we persuaded Hibiscus & Bays Local Board to spend \$16,000 on a wonderful new board-walk.

A 2013 milestone was the demise of the park's last five large acmenas – not devoid of controversy, but the society makes no apology. Acmena seedlings continue to be a problem in bush areas. Also gone is a large phoenix palm. Why? As the only female in the row it bore innumerable fruit whose seeds were sprouting in the bush.

Centennial Park can only get better and better, as its trees mature and regenerate...a legacy for the future.

Joe Greig



A Taste of Kiekie

Centennial Park's kiekie vines have flowered magnificently this year. According to Pat Morton's notes, this vine only flowers every five to 10 years -- so to see multiple flowers this year has been a treat. One kiekie patch on the Kokekohe Track had 15 flowers. Kiekie (*Freycinetia banksii*) is a many-branched woody vine with tufts of long leaves, highly-valued by Maori for weaving. The spectacular flowers appear at the ends of the tufts. Fruits form later and are prized rat and possum-food, so our fruiting kiekie show pest levels are declining.



Kiekie is dioecious -- an individual plant has either male or female flowers. Male kiekie produce beige-brown stamens, enclosed by whitish, succulent and fleshy bracts called tāwhara. Sweet-tasting tāwhara were a highly desirable food. Female kiekie develop fruits called ureure which have green remnant flower parts on the surface. **Richard Hursthouse**

Walking The Lines

Our campaign to reduce rats and mice in Centennial Park has moved to a new level. In the last *Newsletter* I lamented the 'huge gaps' between our peanut butter-baited trap-lines, 'and large areas of bush where rodents still run free'. That has changed. Now, six lines of bait stations - 79 stations in all - thread through the park and Park Rise Bush.

The lines are about 100m apart, with bait stations at about 50m intervals. The line and station system was set out by Te Ngahere (under contract to Auckland

Council, see www.te-ngahere.co.nz), who also trained our volunteers in the safe use of the stations.

Bait stations -- small black boxes wired to trees -- are opened using special keys. The baits (Ditrac) are eight solid blocks secured inside each station and protected from slugs and snails by plastic sandwich bags. Hungry rodents have no trouble gnawing through the plastic to access baits.

We have been monitoring stations weekly, on average, though intervals will extend to fortnightly and longer, depending on how quickly baits are taken. When volunteers check lines, they record the date, the amount of bait taken and the amount they replace. This information is entered into a dataset, which will tell us where, when and how much rodent activity there is in the park. **Peter Aimer**

Fascinating Finches



While the primary purpose of bird-monitoring in Centennial Park is to track the status of native birds as their habitat improves, we note all species present. One group of exotics that cause both joy and frustration are the finches. When we talk about finches, we mean chaffinches (pictured), goldfinches, greenfinches and yellowhammers which all look similar with their stubby, seed-eating bills but which are, taxonomically, a mixed bag. Chaffs, goldies and greenies are true finches, although the chaffs are in a different subfamily to the other two. Yellowhammers are buntings, a different family altogether. We find them all frustrating because they are small and can be difficult to identify, unless seen closely. Their calls take time to learn and most are silent outside the breeding cycle. But there is joy when, from nowhere, a mixed flock descends onto the open grass of the golf course to feed on seeds, affording us unrivalled views and the opportunity to appreciate their



true beauty. Maximum counts have been 300 for goldies, 200 for greenies and 80 for yellowhammers. While the chaffs are not so numerous (maximum count 20), they are easiest to identify, have the most distinctive calls and are heard all year. Finches may be European introductions -- but we would miss their presence in the park, were they to disappear.

Alan Emmerson

A Huge Thank-you!



On 4 September a 10-member Bank of New Zealand team worked alongside Bush Society members for the bank's Closed For Good volunteer day. Due to their tremendous effort we completed a detour on the Kohekohe Track -- where the old track had become muddy and unusable. The detour was retained, levelled and metalled – a major task, finished in one day. Thank you BNZ. The new track is much appreciated by all its users.

On 7 September, we had the services of 10 volunteers from DHL Highbrook (Canon) Supply Chain, East Tamaki, as part of DHL's Global Volunteer Initiative. They helped with maintenance and repairs on the Mamaku Track -- digging drains and barrowing track metal significant distances. These young men made it look so easy! Their effort was kindly given and we enjoyed having them with us. Thank you DHL. We'd love you back one day.

Bob Fairbairn

Erosion Progress

Erosion in Campbells Bay's gullies and streams is a familiar worry which came to a head in the gully below Asbury Crescent, when a winter deluge poured clay and silt into the stream and out to sea. Bush Society has received a comprehensive council assessment of the catchment's numerous erosion issues – together with suggested solutions. Your committee is digesting and supplying feedback on these suggestions and will continue to advocate solutions which keep the bay's stream and beach waters as clean as possible.

Traps, Bait, and Bait Stations Available

Centennial Park now has a comprehensive bait station network in most bush areas. Now's the time to expand the predator control programme into park-rim properties and eventually the whole bay. When pest levels become really low we can truly call the bay Campbells Bay Urban Sanctuary.

The Bush Society can provide rat traps and bait stations for rat poison on a long-term loan basis and can demonstrate their use. Residents choosing bait stations can purchase rat bait at cost (\$12 per 20 blocks). We also have possum traps for short-term loan. We ask people hosting a trap or bait station to keep good records of results. If you would like to help rustle rats -- and are happy to keep records please contact us.

For traps – Peter Aimer 478 8252. For Bait stations and bait – Dick Downing 478 3737 or email bushsoc@gmail.com. **Richard Hursthouse**

Community Volunteer Award

In June, Centennial Park Bush Society received a Community Volunteer Award from the Hibiscus & Bays Local Board for the many hours spent maintaining Centennial Park and environs. Our plant man Stan Knight received the award on behalf of the society from local board member and park supporter Lisa Whyte, at a ceremony in Browns Bay. Treasurer Max Thomson also received an award in his own right for his consistent work for the Campbells Bay Community Association.





Max Thomson, Joe Greig, Stan Knight and Richard Hursthouse at the awards night

Peter’s Patch

Peter Bioletti joined the Bush Society crew in 2004, bringing with him knowledge gained from years tackling Australia’s pest plants. His particular bête noir was boneseed or *Chrysanthemoides monilifera*, a South African plant which smothers native plants and destroys habitats. Peter’s personal quest was to keep this nasty out of the park – and we soon became boneseed exterminators too.

Peter was a dedicated volunteer and regular Wednesday worker. He supervised lads with compulsory Corrections hours to do, press-ganging them into digging pampas and other undesirables. Peter worked in his own time on a plantation next to the 4th fairway – which we named Peter’s Patch. Peter’s health declined over the past year and he passed away peacefully in September. He was a quietly determined, gentle committee member and is sadly missed.

Wednesday & Weekend Workers

Volunteers carry out weed control, track maintenance and planting in season to help keep this park one of the best on the Shore. There is work for all abilities and full training can be given in weed recognition and control techniques. We focus on the invasive plants which are a constant issue in bush reserves. If this sounds like you please contact us.

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