



February 2022 Newsletter

President: Gary Beecroft gary.beecroft@extra.co.nz

Secretary: Geoff Mills secretary@tawabush.org.nz

Monthly working bees: 2nd Sunday and 4th Tuesday

- **Coordinator Sunday:** Richard Herbert: herbert.r@extra.co.nz
- **Coordinator Tuesday:** Andrew Liley: acfhilley@gmail.com

Website: <https://tawabush.org.nz>



1. Thanks to our volunteers

Although the Covid-19 Delta outbreak from August 2021 onwards curtailed many of our scheduled activities, the 'Friends of Tawa Bush Reserves' committee wish to thank our many volunteers for their work. These included the Willowbank Reserve Care group, our nursery workers, the pest control, weeding and planting teams, those who have monitored the reserves, as well as those who have contributed to the upgraded FOTBR website. The health of the Tawa reserves would not be the same without your efforts. With Omicron with us in early 2022, we trust that the sterling volunteer work undertaken last year can continue as we implement any government operational restrictions.

2. Capital Kiwi - guest speaker



This year we are excited to have **Paul Ward**, founder of Capital Kiwi, as our AGM guest speaker at 7.30pm at the Tawa Union Church on Wednesday **9 March 2022**. Paul is the driving force behind Capital Kiwi, which aims to re-introduce kiwi to Wellington's West Coast. The catchment area for this project spans 23,000 hectares from Red Rocks in the south, including the hills behind Tawa to Whitireia Park. The area contains 4500 stoat traps, making it the largest community-owned stoat trapping network in Aotearoa. Paul will provide an update and the next steps on the Capital Kiwi project and provide ways our members can assist in helping introduce kiwi to the Tawa Reserves. Please put the date in your diary.

3. Valuable addition to the FOTBR website

Liz Bouda has created a useful addition to the website by providing a location for recording birds sighted in the bush reserves. If you are in any of the reserves and had a sighting, please make a record. The screenshot is what you'll see when you go to the link and scroll down. <https://tawabush.org.nz/tawa-native-bush-reserve-birds/>

Note that once a sighting has been recorded, the email address will not be published.

4. Information evening 30 March 2022

Would you like to find out more information about the Friends of Tawa Bush pest animal and planting programmes? Would you like to meet other members from the teams? Then please come along to our information evening on the **Wednesday 30 March** at 7:00pm at the Tawa Union Church. Members of our trapping and planting teams will be on hand to share and also answer questions.

5. Fallen falcons spark changes to park's power poles

Source:

'Independent Herald' Thursday,
25 November 2021, p6.

A pair of native kārearea (New Zealand falcons) found dead in Whitireia Park have evoked a significant infrastructure adjustment to the park's power poles.

One of the coordinators of the Whitireia Park Restoration Group (WPRG) and former Greater Wellington biodiversity advisor Robyn Smith, recounted the events that led to this change. "Wendy Barry, a member of our group, discovered the kārearea under a pole on the hill in the park. An email to Radio New Zealand voicing my concerns made its way to the lines company, Wellington Electricity (WE), who were very concerned to hear that the kārearea had been electrocuted".

Kārearea electrocution is a common problem throughout Aotearoa as they like to perch on high vantage points to find their prey and defend their territory. The power pole in question is the highest one in the park.

Conducted by Nick Fox and Colin Wynn, a 5-year radio tracking study of kārearea on the Wairau Plain, Marlborough identified the cause of death in 21 birds, with 47% dying by electrocution.

"It may be a common problem but it is avoidable. "We were devastated by these deaths and prevention would allow these beautiful birds and any young falcon, looking for their own territory, to live and breed safely in Whitireia"



A pair of native kārearea (New Zealand falcons) found dead in Whitireia Park have evoked a significant infrastructure adjustment to the park's power poles.

added Smith.

In the New Year, alongside regular maintenance to the park's poles, an innovative solution devised by WE will be installed across the park's poles. When completed, the risk for these precious birds will be greatly reduced allowing them to breed and thrive in the park once again.

"It goes to show the strength in community voice, backed by the ongoing support of Greater Wellington's biodiversity and parks team. The support they've shown our group, it's as if I never left!" remarked Smith.

Gratitude for the upcoming work by WE was echoed by Kim Broad, Greater Wellington's Biodiversity Advisor "We are extremely thankful for the action taken by both groups. It's comforting to

know there will soon be mitigations in place".

WPRG's work in Whitireia Park predates even any Greater Wellington involvement, with pest control and revegetation starting back in 2006. As Kārearea nest on the ground, the group's efforts are critical to maintaining the birds' safety in the park.

A herculean effort we're incredibly grateful for acknowledged Broad, "With the group managing pest control and community planting projects, we can put more resource in to large scale weed control in the park. It's about working together but to each of our strengths.

Kārearea numbers in the park are being further supported with members of WPRG planting tōtara for future roosting places.

6. New trail camera records pests at bait station

A recent addition to the monitoring of pests has been the establishment of trail cameras near two of the bait stations in Redwood Bush. In November 2021, this resulted in the recording of a rat taking brodifacoum pellets from a station. (See photo).

Positioning of further trail cameras will be useful to accurately monitor the species and numbers of pests taking bait, though finance will be required before this can proceed.



7. Puriri moths – an extreme life cycle



Kohekohe tree trunk with holes caused by puriri moth larvae.

Pūriri moths (*Aenetus virescens* or pepe tuna) are New Zealand's largest endemic flying moth. Larvae hatch on the bush floor and feed on fungi. Then they climb tree trunks such as pūriri (hence their name) and burrow into the trunk where they live for several years. Pūriri trees only have a northern distribution in the North Island. However, pūriri moths will instead use kohekohe trees to complete their life cycle.

In Redwood Bush, a large kohekohe trunk is perforated with holes caused by pūriri moth larvae. When moths emerge, the holes in the trunk are about a centimetre in diameter. Females have a wingspan up to 15cm, but have no mouthparts and cannot feed. They live for about 48 hours, mate, lay eggs and then die.



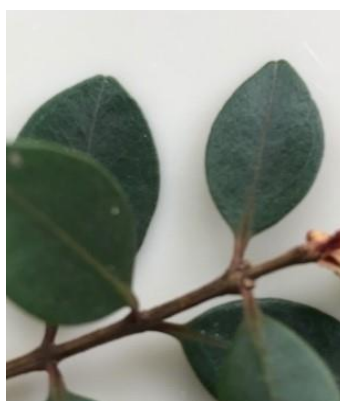
Photo: Eric Edwards, DOC

8. Northern rātā flowering in Woodburn Reserve



Northern rātā flowering in December 2021.

Metrosideros robusta, (northern rātā) is endemic to New Zealand and grows naturally in the Wellington region. The best example in Tawa, is at the south end of Woodburn Reserve and can be viewed from Takapu Road where it is spectacular when flowering.



Leaves are glossy on both sides with a distinctive notch in the tip.

Crimson flowers.



9. Tentacled stinkhorn fungi in Redwood Bush



Previously recorded in Redwood Bush in 2019, these were observed by the Editor in December 2021. The stinkhorn/starfish/sea anemone saprotrophic fungi are seasonal and usually reddish-orange in colour. They grow on rotting wood and emit a foul-smelling odour to attract flies which enables dispersal of their spores. The slimy, brightly coloured fruiting bodies emerge from an egg sac that contain the spores at the base of the 'arms'.

Flies eat the spores and then spread them to enable further growth of these fungi.



10. Heavy rain and strong winds in early December 2021



These conditions resulted in a heavy fall of kahikatea and matai seeds in Redwood Bush and Larsen Crescent Reserve. Subsequent seed germination below these trees has been evident.

Two kahikatea trees (left) with two small seedlings (right) growing nearby among the leaf litter.



Matai seeds (left) [old are brown and immature are green] cover the ground with two young seedlings nearby (right).



It is very heartening that with the increased pest control in these reserves, the potential growth of such seedlings into bigger kahikatea and matai trees is significantly enhanced.

11. North Island little brown kiwi on the increase

After years of decline, these kiwi numbers are now increasing, thanks to intensive efforts by volunteer groups and the Department of Conservation. Of the five species of kiwi, the North Island brown kiwi is faring the best.

Numbers have grown to more than 20,000 that has seen it re-classified from 'at risk – declining' to 'no longer threatened'. DOC chief science adviser **Hugh Robertson** who has been working with kiwi for over 30 years, said: *this is hugely encouraging even though there is still a big battle to be fought.*

Being flightless ground dwellers, stoats, rats and ferrets actively prey on kiwi nests and young hatchlings. If left to their own devices, kiwi chicks only have a 5% chance of surviving to adulthood in the wild. Robertson went on to say: *activities such as 'Operation Nest Egg', where eggs were taken from wild nests, hatched and raised in captivity before being released back into the wild, increased their survival chances by up to 30-50%.* This work has been supplemented by intensive pest trapping and other breeding programmes. These efforts of predator reduction have had a flow on effect, helping other species to also increase in numbers.



Photo source: Wikipedia

12. Knowing the native trees in the Tawa reserves

Melicytus ramiflorus, māhoe, whitey wood

This is one of the most common sub-canopy trees in the Tawa native bush reserves.

a. Source of names

Genus *Melicytus*. From Greek 'meli' = honey and 'kytos' = hollow container. It refers to the staminal nectaries of the flowers. ('honey cave'). **Species** = *ramiflorus* meaning flowers are borne from branches. **Māhoe**. 'Ma' = shame, 'hoe' = paddle, meaning, don't use the wood for paddles.

Whitey wood refers to the light-coloured bark.

b. Recognition features

- produce white, brittle wood
- dark green leaves with finely serrated edges
- aromatic cream-coloured flowers grow out directly from the wood (termed 'ramiflory')
- violet-coloured fruit are consumed by tūī, kererū and gecko lizards
- distinctive leaf skeletons adorn the leaf litter below the trees.



Māhoe flowers.



Māhoe fruit.

c. Skeletons of dead māhoe leaves



Clump of dead māhoe leaf skeletons in litter.



Individual leaf skeletons.

d. Leaves infected by fungus

Commonly, the surfaces of māhoe leaves are infested by a mycorrhizal leaf spot fungus. While the spots look unsightly, it is considered that this fungus does minimal damage to the tree.



e. Epicormic shoots in māhoe

Some native trees, such as māhoe, when they become stressed by drought, browsing, or damage caused by wind or fire, the tree sends out epicormic shoots from buds underneath the bark. This is especially evident in some of the māhoe trees near tracks in Redwood Bush.

f. Uses of māhoe by Māori and early Europeans

- wood was used for the friction method in fire lighting, rubbing it with a piece of harder wood such as tōtara or kaikōmako
- brittle timber used for firewood
- liquid from boiled leaves was used for rheumatism, scabies and to help menstruation and diarrhoea
- berries were mixed with kauri gum to create a pigment for tattoos
- early Europeans burned māhoe wood to produce charcoal for gunpowder.



Epicormic shoots of māhoe tree.

Gil Roper, Editor
FOTBR Committee

