

What to watch for in the bush:

Picture in your mind the flowers of pohutukawa and rata, the Australian eucalyptus, monkey apple (or lilly-pilly as it is known in Australia), bottlebrush and melaleuca/paper-bark species, and the edible fruit trees feijoa and guava. What do they have in common? They all belong to the same family, the Myrtaceae, but in particular, although the flowers characteristically have inconspicuous petals, they have instead masses of often brightly coloured stamens to attract insects and birds to the nectar in the cup at the base of each flower. The massed stamens give the flower a rather 'fluffy' look.

New Zealand boasts 3 species of tree rata, one of which occurs in the Waitakeres: northern rata (*Metrosideros robusta*), and 7 vine species, four of which can be found growing naturally in the Waitakeres: *M. diffusa*, *M. carminea*, *M. fulgens* and *M. perforata*.

In the coming month or so, you will notice two of the very common rata vines in full flower all around the Waitakeres. One has white flowers but the flowers of the other grade from dark red through to orange. Sometimes you will see vines

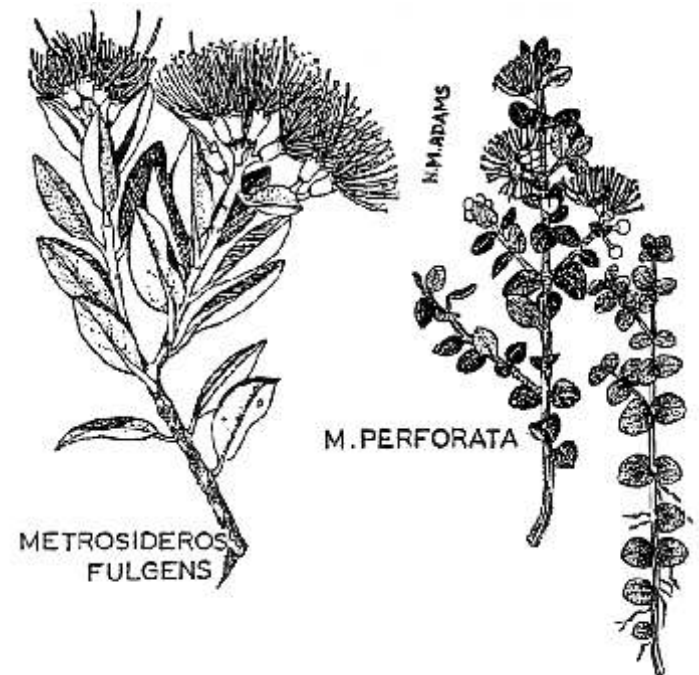


Image: Pool & Adams

With different coloured flowers growing in quite close proximity. Neither the white nor the red/orange flowering rata has a very imaginative common name and the Maori names can apply to more than one species. They are not parasitic (or even semi-parasitic); they are just hanging out, doing their hosts no particular harm.

The 'small white rata' or 'clinging rata' (*M. perforata*), with its masses of small white flowers, has a relatively short flowering period of about three to four months, peaking in February. There are always swarms of tiny insects buzzing about the flowers so they must have tasty nectar. In its juvenile form, the small round leathery leaves, which have obvious oil glands dotted all over the back of them, cling flat against the trunk of the host tree (or sometimes on rock) as they climb towards the light. As the vine matures and is ready to flower, the branches spread out to form a little tree-like rounded canopy of its own.

The red/orange flowered 'rata vine' (*M. fulgens*) on the other hand has little respect for the changing seasons. Although its peak flowering is in March, you can generally find a flower somewhere or other in any other month of the year. The leaves are not particularly remarkable and compared with the clinging rata vine, it has a very lax growth habit. At ground level it is often noticed as just another scrambly vine, looking for something to support its climbs upwards. At this age, its one distinguishing feature is the broken fringe of short aerial rootlets that often form along the branchlets.

Help eliminate weeds

Information on weeds and a calendar of weed control events you can join is now available online at www.weedbusters.org.nz

Weed related information can also be found at the Weedfree Waitakere website at www.weedfree.org.nz

Meet your committee - Anna Fomison

Anna Maria Fomison has lived in West Auckland for the last 24 years. Born in Christchurch and used to the flat, open spaces of Canterbury, the landscape and bush of the north made a huge impact on her. "I remember the mixture of awe and sadness I felt on seeing the northern landscape. I was amazed to see the lush bush and horrified to see the huge scars left by our pioneering ancestors. How did we manage to change the nature of the landscape so much in such a relatively short time?"



Anna currently works as an editor for CCH NZ Ltd, publishers of law and business-related material. She has an MA (Hons) in English from the University of Canterbury and trained as a secondary school teacher in Christchurch. Her main interest is in the role of public advocacy and Anna sees her contribution to the Society in organising events and displays, presenting and communicating with the community.

For the last 15 years she has lived in Sunnyvale on the sunny side of the Waikumete hill. The creek that runs through the bottom of her property is part of the Twin Streams Restoration Project and she has been involved with the replanting of the riparian margin with native plants to assist the bird corridor.

"Last year I flew back into Auckland and as the aeroplane did the big sweep over the Waitakere Ranges and I saw them from that bird's eye perspective, I was once again impressed with what a treasure they are but how vulnerable! It is a responsibility to future generations to do whatever we can to protect this wonderful remnant of the great forests from the current climate of short-sighted vision. It's an honour and a privilege to be able to contribute to helping protect such a wonderful landscape."

Your Committee:

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Duffy Road Tip update

Since July last year the Society has been investigating an informal land-fill site on Duffy Rd, Waitakere, Rodney District. This tip was operated in the mid 1980's to 1990 and used to dump treated wood waste and other materials. This site is in the catchment of the Waitakere River and the Society has had a long term interest in this area.

In November 2004 we had a letter in response to our request for an update from Rodney District Council on monitoring of the site.

The letter explains:

"A routine inspection was carried out 5 October 2004. There was no activity on the site that day and the gates were locked. To date, it would appear that progress has been limited to completion of stage 1, which has been top-soiled and prepared for grass seed.

"From what could be seen from the access and gateway, we are satisfied that the conditions for the consent have been satisfactorily complied with."

Rodney District Council's letter notes the next inspection will be in February /March 2005.

We are concerned the October inspection was completed without access to the site and we will continue to monitor the situation.

Botanical illustrations or kids' designs!

These cards are a great way to support the Society. You can choose:

A set of five botanical cards, with envelopes, featuring flowering plants of Spragg Bush, or



A set of five postcards featuring winning entries in the Waitakere Ranges Postcard Competition, including this one by Jeremy Roberts of Henderson Valley Primary.

Please order your cards and T-shirts on the form on the back of this newsletter.

New Committee Members

At the November meeting of the Waitakere Ranges Protection Society, the executive, in accordance with the powers it holds under the Society's constitution, co-opted Denise Yates and Greg Presland onto the committee.



Denise and Greg were both extensively involved in the Waitakere Ranges and Foothills Protection project whilst Waitakere City Councillors. They bring with

them a history of staunch advocacy for the Ranges and a wealth of expertise and experience. The Society is already benefitting greatly from their involvement and would like to take this opportunity to welcome them on board.

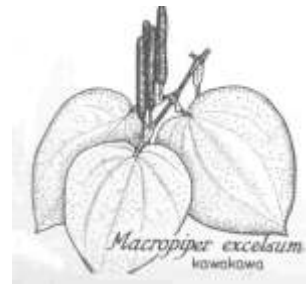


Image courtesy of Alan Esler, 2002 and ARC

Time for a new T-shirt!

At this stage of summer, a new T-shirt never goes amiss! So why not order a Waitakere Ranges Protection Society T-shirt?

Printed front and back they are NZ made in striking turquoise cotton. T-shirts cost just \$30 each (including postage & packing).



The Hon Judith Tizard with a T-shirt!

Turtle alert!

Aucklanders are being asked to look out for red-eared slider turtles after ARC Biosecurity Officers caught one near Bethells Beach in November.

ARC biosecurity manager Jack Crow says the popular pets become pests when they are released into the wild and have the potential to impact on native plants and animals.

"They have established feral populations in countries with temperate climates like ours so there is a real possibility they could establish here," Mr Crow says. "This species has been nominated as among 100 of the world's worst invaders and has been banned from importation into many countries."

The red-eared slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*), also known as the red-eared terrapin, is a native of the Mississippi Valley area of the United States. Bethells Beach residents notified the ARC when they spotted one of the turtles, about the size of a rugby ball, basking beside a stream in Bethells Valley.



Mr Crow suspects other red-eared sliders may have been released into the wild around Auckland.

"Because the turtles grow quite big, they sometimes outgrow their appeal as pets and people are tempted to release them into the wild," he says.

"I would strongly urge people not to release them and I would ask anyone who sees a red-eared slider in the wild to call the ARC immediately.

Red-eared sliders get their name from a broad red stripe behind their eye and their habit of sliding off rocks and logs when startled. They mainly feed on aquatic plants, small fish and decaying material. Average adult size is 12.5 - 20cm with a life span of 15 - 25 years. They can carry the disease salmonella and adult specimens can inflict a painful bite. Sliders have poor hearing but are very sensitive to vibrations, which make it hard to sneak up on them.

The red-eared slider rarely ventures out of the water except to lay its eggs or to migrate to a new water body. It is commonly seen basking in the sun, on logs or masses of vegetation. They are at home in quiet, freshwater systems that have a muddy bottom and abundant aquatic vegetation.

Natural Burials - a new opportunity for restoration

Waitakere is poised to adopt a new concept - natural burials. With natural burial, instead of a headstone and conventional cemetery set-up, the body is left unembalmed and buried in a biodegradable casket at 3 feet, rather than the usual 6 feet, where the soil is active and breakdown is quicker. A native tree is planted, and in time the entire burial area is flourishing native bush, forever.

Natural burial sites are already popular overseas and a site will be opening in Wellington soon. Waitakere City Council are supportive of the concept as Waikumete will reach capacity in the next 15-20 years. Soil testing is about to commence at a possible site in Shaw Road and members are invited to suggest other suitable sites in the Ranges and Foothills. Steep contours are not an issue.

For more information - or to suggest a site - contact Deb Cairns - a committed Westie, conservationist and owner of Phoenix Organics - on 817 8220. Information on the Wellington project is at www.naturalburials.co.nz

Dunes in Thailand

A first-hand report from Dave Pattemore, Auckland Forest and Bird Society.

“...I decided that I would go on a little tour of the west coast... The first beach, of course, was Yanui. I was unprepared for the scale of the devastation: it was absolute. Where all those little bungalows once stood (and the neat little houses and that great little restaurant), was all just piles of rubble and sand. Unbelievable. Where before the beach would have been crowded with naked Europeans, there were now just piles of broken coral. Everything was flattened, I mean literally flattened. There was such an eerie silence in the place. Spooky. It was a place of death (I think around 30 people died at Yanui). One or two Thai guys were very slowly raking debris and burning piles of rubbish. One look at their faces told me they were still in shock, and not handling it well. I certainly haven't seen any of the usual Thai smiles along that west coast. I think the whole island is in shock, the same stunned look on people's faces as they try to go about their daily lives. But it's not the same. This place is a ghost town.

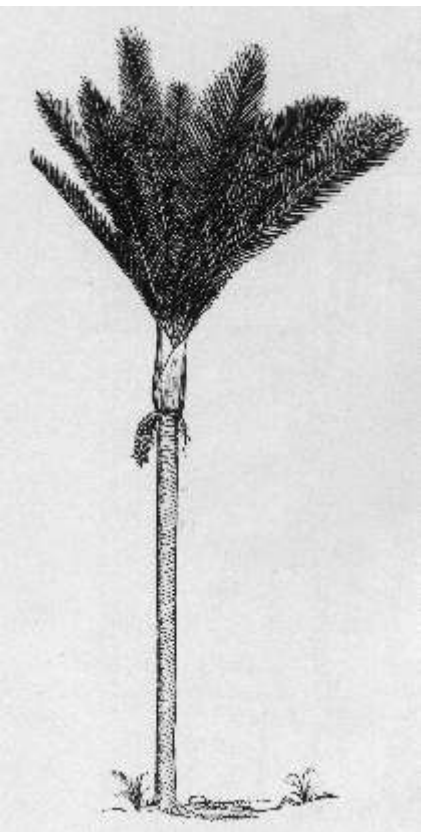
“Karon was interesting, but not quite as clear cut case as I thought it would be. At a number of sites, the sand dunes had been taken out since I was last here. The areas where the dunes have been removed or reduced certainly got hit much harder, but the tsunami did obviously come right over the top of dunes. The difference is that when the tsunami went over the dunes, they dissipated all of the wave's energy, and there was no obvious damage to hotels that were behind them. Patong looks so beautiful. It is the most beautiful I have ever seen it. Not a SINGLE umbrella or deck chair or jet ski. Unbelievable. And yet, it feels like death. Virtually no one is talking, you don't hear any happy sounds. All heads bow down, or if they do look at you it is with such a blank look of despair that it is frightening. Again, almost 90% of the people are Thai; the tourists and therefore the economy have gone. All the waterfront buildings are trashed, virtually unrecognisable. An amazing lot has already been done to tidy and clean up, but it still has a long way to go. The chains like Starbucks and McDonalds are getting repaired very quickly, but

the little locally owned stores are not going to simply bounce back. This place is not going to recover in three months!!

“Yesterday, I spent most of the day at a special seminar being held at one of the big malls here. It was about how to move forward in the future for Phuket. It was encouraging to hear many speakers mention that it is crucial to learn lessons from what has happened and change the way things are done. There are already plans to tightening planning rules for the Beaches on Phuket, including enforcing an 80 metre setback rule from the high-tide mark. It was also noted that the sand dunes protected Karon beach, and it will be necessary to consider rebuilding sand dunes and replanting coastal vegetation along the whole coastline. I hope NZ learns from Thailand's experience, and that we don't have to wait for a tragedy like this to improve our coastal management!”

Dave Pattemore was in Thailand helping the village where he grew up to heal and re-establish after the tsunami.

Image courtesy of Alan Esler, 2002 and ARC



Cornwallis development designs

The Auckland Regional Council in conjunction with the local and regional communities has been developing a concept plan for Cornwallis, which forms part of the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park.

Background

An open day held on 26 June 2004 gained feedback on various design options for the park. Feedback gained was used to draft two proposed concept plans, one for the entire Cornwallis peninsula and the other for the area around Cornwallis wharf. These were reviewed at an evening in December 2004, with feedback requested by 28 January 2005.

Proposed Concept Plans

The proposed concept plans for Cornwallis and the wharf area identify vehicular access, parking and circulation, visitor facilities and enhancement of recreational opportunities, while maintaining natural and cultural heritage.

This approach for developing Cornwallis provides a long term vision for the future management and development of the park, while maintaining its intrinsic character. Monitoring of park usage by the



Families fishing at Cornwallis Wharf

Image courtesy of ARC

ARC and the community will determine each phase of development based on:

- Demand patterns for car parking
- An analysis of how areas of the park are used
- Level of use of existing facilities

Developments will be phased to occur in the next ten, twenty or twenty plus years and include sealing existing roads, constructing new sealed roads, further developing toilets, car parks and footpaths, widening the boat ramp and installing a footbridge to the wharf area at an estimated cost of \$2.63 million.

Where to from here

Feedback received on the proposed concepts will be used to revise the plans before they are presented to the March meeting of Auckland Regional Council's Parks and Heritage Committee for endorsement.

For more information please call:
Sally Sheedy, ARC Parks Project Leader,
09 3662000 ext 8288 environment.



Art on the beach

Organised by Lopdell House Gallery this year's Art on the Beach at Piha will feature John Palmer, creating a light sculpture on the beach as night falls and the tide recedes. Sunday 6 March, 2pm to 8pm at Piha.

From Lone Kauri Road

Artist and Society supporter Dean Buchanan has a show of his vivid and intense depictions of Waitakere landscapes at the Corban Estate Art Centre, Henderson until 13th March, 2005.