

Dawn Chorus



Bulletin 67

ISSN 1171 - 8595

November 2006



(Photo: John Staniland)

Boys will be boys!

Kokako bachelor brothers, Zephyr and Chinook, are well-known on Tiri for their antics around the Visitor Centre. These photos catch them investigating some of the man-made features of their territory.



(Photo: Anne Rimmer)



(Photo: Steve Dodds)



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From the Chair

With only a handful of shopping days left to Christmas, it is again a wonder where the year has gone and what a year it has been! 2006 will mostly be remembered for the "changing of the guard" and the many resulting challenges. It is only through the efforts of dedicated volunteers and our partners at DoC that we have been able to meet these challenges.

Tiri will always have issues and one that is facing us right now is the accommodation issue. There has always been pressure on the bunkhouse but the demand is now even greater. Bookings are heavy in the short and medium term.

This demand not only comes from the traditional sources such as visitors, volunteers and researchers, but there are a number of pending works projects for which bed spaces have been allocated to contractors. Most notably, these projects include the repainting of the lighthouse and upgrading of the power supply.

While the bunkhouse is managed by DoC, we have provided input that has resulted in a balance when allocating beds, so that this facility can be enjoyed by visitors from all walks of life. Longer term however, this situation needs to be addressed by an upgrade of the accommodation facilities.

Also, on the same subject, DoC, SoTM & university representatives are in the process of formulating a set of guidelines for bunkhouse use. While most guests understand the requirements of communal use of this facility, there have been a number of instances where the actions of some have impacted on the enjoyment of others. It is hoped that this document will not only serve to minimise the risk of such incidents but will also provide useful information that will enhance the visitor experience for all.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank a couple of members for their efforts. First, thanks to Suzi Phillips for her efforts as Dawn Chorus editor since last year. Suzi took over the role at short notice and has done a great

job producing what is the most important communication medium for SoTM. Also very deserving of thanks is Sally Green. For many years, Sally has done a tremendous job as guiding co-ordinator, essentially defining this role from scratch. Sally's tasks have included organizing training for guides as well as the comprehensive weekly updates, tasks that are now undertaken by our Guiding and Shop Manager, Megan Wilson. Thank you Sally and we are delighted that you have chosen to continue your role as SoTM "Webmistress". **Simon Fordham**

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The opinions of contributors expressed in Dawn Chorus do not necessarily reflect the views of the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi Inc

Stop Press

Geckos and skinks

Tiri will get a boost to its reptile population in December with the arrival of 20 Duvaucel's gecko and 40 shore skink. This will be a low-key public release. Details will be advertised through the guiding network and on the island when available.

**Deadline for
next issue:**

22 January 2007

Conservation Excellence Award for Ray and Barbara

Tiritiri Matangi's recently-retired rangers, Ray and Barbara Walter, took top prize in the Auckland conservation awards this year.

They were awarded the Stella Frances Award for Conservation Excellence for their work spear-heading Tiri's transformation into a native bird sanctuary.

"Over the last 20 years Ray and Barbara Walter led the transformation of Tiritiri Matangi Island from a scrub-covered farm to a sanctuary for endangered birds," said DOC Auckland Conservator, Sean Goddard.

In 1985, on being made redundant from the lighthouse service after 30 years of duty, Ray Walter was offered the opportunity to retrain as the nurseryman for the Tiritiri Matangi ecological restoration project.

Before long, he and his wife were driving the project, establishing the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi in the late 1980s, he said.

While Ray put his newly-discovered green fingers to work in the plant nursery, Barbara motivated and cared for the volunteers and inspired the community to get involved.

Under the couple's guidance, volunteers have planted 280,000 trees on the island and built many of the walking tracks.

"Ray and Barbara's passion for conservation and gentle encouragement has touched many lives, inspiring people to get involved in their own projects and take up careers in conservation," said DOC Warkworth Area spokeswoman Liz Maire.

Ray and Barbara were among five groups and individuals to receive the Department of Conservation-nominated awards for "outstanding conservation work in the Auckland region".

Other winners were the honorary wardens at Cape Rodney Okakari Pt marine reserve, Tony and Jenny Enderby; Little Barrier Island/Hauturu Supporters Trust; Chris Keenan; and the Motuihe Trust.

DOC Auckland Conservator Sean Goddard said the awards recognised significant efforts and achievements in conservation.

"These groups have all done major work, through community education, nurturing threatened species, and restoring native habitat," he said. "Collectively they



Winners of the Stella Frances Award for Conservation, Barbara and Ray Walter with DOC's Auckland Conservator, Sean Goddard (left).

have greatly improved our conservation heritage and people's appreciation of it."

"In making these awards, I would like to acknowledge the wide range of community groups and volunteers around Auckland and the Hauraki Gulf whose work is essential to the conservation of this special part of the world," Mr Goddard said.

The Auckland conservation awards are handed out each year during Conservation Week, which this year has as its theme "everybody's business".

"The theme reminds us of the broader value of conservation to the economy, from tourism and recreation, to the provision of fish and game, improvement of water quality, and reduction in flood risk," Mr Goddard said. "Equally, the contribution of the public to conservation is valuable and important."

Situations Vacant

Editor of Dawn Chorus

A passion for Tiri and reasonable editing and computer skills are required. Assistance will be provided as necessary. Interested?? Contact Simon Fordham, phone 274 1828 or email chairperson@tiritirimatangi.org.nz

Two plants that look tropical and exotic

By Jan Velvin



I can feel the warm weather arriving so in this issue we will look at two plants with a remarkable tropical and exotic look ; the flowers of Rewarewa or *Knightia excelsa* ; and the leaves of Whau or *Entelea arborescens*.

Rewarewa or *Knightia excelsa* is from the plant family, Proteaceae, and is also known as the New Zealand Honeysuckle.

In recent times my work has led me to a love of many of the Proteaceae family and their varied exotic flowers and foliage. Among these are the Protea's, Grevillea's, and Leucospermum.

We have two members of this plant Family in the NZ flora, the other being Toru or *Toronia toru*.

The Rewarewa is a majestic tree especially when reaching full size. They rise like a slender spire to heights of 30 metres, dominating the skyline.

It is found throughout the North Island and the north-east tip of the South Island.

On Tiri many Rewarewa can be seen on Ridge track especially between the top of Kawerau and the Du Pont sign area.

At present the Rewarewa flowers are just breaking out of bud and forming their amazing clusters of flowers, which are a deep wine and very Grevillea like.

These flowers are a favourite of the nectar feeders, such as Tui. The alternate leaves are long, stiffened and with an edge which gives a serrated look.

Last year's hard brown seed cases can still be seen on many trees and if you look closely at these you will see they are damaged.

I suspect this is the work of Kakariki as when trying to collect Rewarewa seed on the mainland it is a race with the "parrots" who always seem to get there first! The seed is winged for wind dispersal.

The early settlers sometimes called it "The Bucket of Water Tree", because it is so slow of combustion! And of course we can't forget Rewarewa Honey....YUM!

Whau or *Entelea arborescens*, is from the family Tiliaceae. It is the leaves of the Whau that catch everyones attention.

They are an attractive light green, soft and heart-shaped with toothed edges and by New Zealand standards are huge leaves ! Often measuring 10-15cm long and 10-15cm wide. When guiding we are invariably asked "what's that !"

At present the Whau are carrying clusters of white flowers with yellow stamens enhancing this already attractive shrub or small tree.

Don't be fooled though, it can grow to six metres. An example of a tree this size is on the Kawerau Track right beside the board-walk at the top seat (below the feeders).

Whau was common along the coastal and inland areas of the north to the Bay of Plenty, and in some very northern areas of the South Island.

It has been referred to as the New Zealand Mulberry because of the leaves and " the cork- wood tree" because of its light wood.

I have read that "it was used by the Maori in the construction of floats for their fishing nets and for small rafts."

It is about half the weight of cork."

The trees are also still carrying seed pods from last year. These are brown and prickly reminding me very much of thistle heads.

A plant such as Whau with its distinctive leaves and attractive flowers could be used more in gardens in sheltered locations.



Research looks at Whitehead behaviour

By Nora Leuschner

Probably everybody who has been on Tiri has seen - and certainly heard - Whiteheads (popokatea). Nevertheless, this charismatic little bird has not been the focus of research lately. I am about to change that. These small, endemic birds are usually found in groups, of four to eight, constantly chirping and twittering adults.

Groups consist of the breeding pair plus several helpers, usually male offspring from previous years that have not gone off to find a territory of their own.

Helpers can be seen feeding hatchlings and fledglings, and defending the territory against intruders.

Another interesting fact about these agile birds is that they are host to the brood parasitic Long-tailed Cuckoo (koekoea). This migratory cuckoo is an obligate brood parasite, which means that it always lays its eggs into other species' nests, leaving incubation and care for its young to the foster parents.

This critically impairs the host's reproductive success in three major ways. Parasitic females typically remove one host egg from the nest before laying their own egg thus decreasing the potential breeding success.

In most cuckoos hatchlings evict host eggs or nest mates, becoming the only hatchling in the nest. Finally, even if they do not evict nest mates, cuckoo chicks often out-compete foster siblings for parental care by hatching earlier than their nest mates and by begging louder and more persistently.

In order to avoid parasitism, potential cuckoo hosts have evolved different defenses. Specific behaviour towards adult parasites can be observed in most species that have been or are currently parasitized, and the responses are often different to those towards other threats such as avian predators.

Cuckoo specific behaviour includes behaving inconspicuously or hiding, so as not to lead the parasite to the nest, sitting on the nest to prevent the cuckoo from laying, or mobbing the cuckoo to chase it away.

I intend to use several bird models to elicit these different responses in breeding Whiteheads.

Stuffed specimens of a long-tailed cuckoo, a morepork (ruru; representing an avian predator), and a song thrush (being a non-threatening control species) will be fastened to a pole and placed in the immediate vicinity of the Whiteheads' nest.

I expect that whiteheads will recognize the models as potential threats and respond with respective behaviour. A previous study on Little Barrier Island by Ian McLean (1986) has shown that Whiteheads are very responsive to mounts of Long-tailed Cuckoos, so I am keen to get started to find if the same results hold on Tiri.

There are four specific aims to my study:

- * Gain knowledge of the behavioural repertoire of Whiteheads in their translocated ranges.

- * Investigate host-parasite interaction in New Zealand birds.

- * Evaluate the efficiency of anti-parasitic behaviour in a communally breeding host

- * Gain insight into the absence of cuckoo parasitism on Tiritiri Matangi Island.

During the last few weeks I have been on the island colour-banding Whiteheads to be able to tell the individuals apart, and with the start of their egg laying activity I will commence with the model presentations all through the summer. So now, when you see a cuckoo on a stick, you know what it is for.

Nora Leuscher is a Master of Science student from the University of Auckland.



The Fellowship of the Wing

By Peter Lee

Working weekend? If you haven't been on one, it may sound like a lot of hard work. It can indeed be that - but it is so much more... (and part of me is not sure I want to spread the word!) While there's a working party there most weekends, they get only one night in para-



dise. The Supporters have the big, juicy ones: Anniversary, Queen's Birthday and Labour - and in recent years, Easter. Sundays are the special days: you wake up and go to sleep on the island.

On and off, I've been coming since 1990. Of course, there's been a few changes, but the heart of a Supporters' weekend is exactly the same as it's ever been.

Getting to the island

In the early days, and up to the mid 90s, our transport was a small vessel named the Seaway, captained by a taciturn man named Harold. Harold was a man of few words, doling them out as if each was a rare gem. If you got three or four in a row, it was time to buy a Lotto ticket. After a trip which could take up to ninety minutes, we disembarked at the Tiri wharf, unloaded our bags, and were greeted by the resident rangers. Things improved immeasurably when Gulf Harbour Ferries came on the scene, taken over some years later by Fullers - though this meant we did have to share the boat with the bemused daytrippers - who must have wondered just what we needed so much gear! Early on we learned that each person trying to take their own gear on and off was a recipe for (watery) disaster, so we invented the famous "chain gang", stretching from wharf to ship, and calls of "this one's



heavy" or "I wonder what's in that?". One thing remained constant, until June at least: Barbara's most famous phrase on arrival "Go straight to the bunkhouse!"

What to take

It's only three days, but you'd be amazed what is regarded as 'essential'. Officially it's a sleeping bag, pillowcase, food to cook & share, and (hopefully) a change of clothes, but...

You can always recognise newbies. They're the ones with small packs, carefully loaded with the bare minimum of clothing, enough food to barely keep an anorexic budgie alive. Once you've been on a couple, though, the little luxuries of life start being added in - an extra T-shirt or three, snorkelling and fishing gear, the odd bottle of wine (or two), chocolate, plunger cof-



Life on a Working Weekend

fee,till you get the stage where you look as if you're about to open a Woolworths on the island and you have bags enough for a six-month trip. We regulars certainly believe that a hard day's work requires relaxation in style!

Where to sleep

Ah, the bunkhouse! Officially 17 beds in four rooms, but on a balmy summer's evening the odd person (me, usually!) is to be found sleeping outside. It's the rustling of those plastic-covered squabs that does it, combined with the hard-to-place snorer, and of course the room-mate who comes in after a late-evening ramble and hasn't got their gear out. The rustle of plastic bags can drive a normally-sane person mad... Seriously, it's a lot of fun sleeping there, and



those of us who sleep elsewhere enjoy a little taste of freedom, hearing the dawn chorus up close and personal (the birds, that is, not my fellow workers!). The focus is on the kitchen/din-

ing area, with its large dark-brown particle-board table and invariably people reading or chatting. At dinner time it does get crowded, but with a noisy, excited and lively group it's a lot of fun.

What we do

Despite impressions to the contrary, DoC staff aren't seized with an unholy glee to work us dawn to dusk. Ray, Shaun, Ian, Jennifer: each ranger has had their own way of working with us. What astonishes me is that we're basically a bunch of enthusiastic amateurs, but the rangers seem to have had the knack of giving us just enough help that we can do the job yet letting us feel we 'own' the outcome. Over the years we've demolished things (cow shed, old nursery and the tool shed), built things (the bridges along the eastern track, northeast bay, the interior of the implements shed), dug things (tracks, cesspit holes, foundations), and generally chopped, carried, concreted, boardwalked and gravelled our way all over the island so now there's barely a square metre that hasn't felt



the shoes - or blood and sweat! - of a volunteer. There's always sweeping to do, too, and water troughs to fill, birds to be monitored...

How we relax

The highlight of each evening is dinner. When I first started going one person took charge of the food and someone else cooked it; but in the 90s this changed to a pot-luck barbecue - usually with Simon wielding his spatula. Somehow, around this time the Food Mountains started appearing - bowl after bowl of salad and couscous and kumara to accompany our meat, with fruit salad and ice-cream to follow... a veritable feast that leaves nobody starving. Then comes the 'entertainment': Simon and Jim and Olga competing to tell the worst jokes they can remember (or we can put up with). After that, after dark there's only one thing to do: go for a wander, hoping to see tuatara or kiwis or penguins (or, last Anniversary weekend, a bunch of people frolicking in the phosphorescence off the wharf....) and all within sight of the Sky Tower.

When I say to my workmates "I'm off to a working weekend" they probably pity me. 'Working weekend?' If only my working week was half as special as my time on Tiri with my fellow volunteers: the Fellowship of the Wing...





Rhabdothamnus

(Photo: Simon Fordham)

Flora and Fauna Notes

Compiled by Jan Velvin and Morag Fordham



Brown Teal

(Photo: John Staniland)

Flora

Looking back over last years photographs, October 2005 I can see we have a much later season this year, plant wise.

The 2006 Cabbage Tree (*Cordyline australis*) and Flax (*Phormium tenax*) flowers are a long way behind last year's growth with the flower stalks still developing, whereas last year I have photographs of Cabbage Tree flowers fully out at this stage.

Having said that I have noticed the Cabbage Tree flower stalks far more this year, and in some cases they make an impressive sight heading skywards.

During September, October, and November there is lots to see as many of our plants are spring flowering and autumn seeding. In some cases this takes a full year, as with *Pseudopanax* sp.

The Hangehange (*Geniostoma rupustre* var. *ligustrifolium*) is flowering and filling the air with its spicy fragrance.

Flowers are also on Karo (*Pittosporum crassifolium*). They are an amazing deep red that would make wine makers happy. Some plants are already setting grey seed capsules.

The Karaka (*Corynocarpus laevigatus*) in the courtyard behind the Ray and Barbara Walter Visitor Centre is in full bloom.

The Rewarewa (*Knightia excelsa*) and Whau (*Entelea arborescens*) are mentioned elsewhere as selected plants in this issue on page 4.

The Kowhai (*Sophora* sp.) have nearly finished their flowering, although a few can still be found. The new seed pods can be seen developing at present and look like grey strands hanging from the trees.

By the Hihi feeder in Wattle the two *Rhabdothamnus solandri* plants are carrying flowers. The one on the left is a red/orange, the one on the right is a yellow - the more unusual colouring.



Male Karo flowers (Photo: Simon Fordham)

I have to mention the Manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*). It is at its best right now with the flowers giving some areas a look of "snow cover."

In the more "unusual plants" the Kaka Beak (*Clianthus puniceus*) along the roadside and at the top of Kawerau Track are still flowering their brilliant red.

I am thrilled to see that the Haekaro (*Pittosporum umbellatum*) are setting good quantities of seed, so that is a good sign for the future of this important plant. Lots of Karamu and Taupata (*Coprosma robusta* C. *repens*) in fruit, but the fruit is mostly still green.

The Five Finger (*Pseudopanax arboreus*) is carrying large maroon bunches of fruit. It will be ripe about February / March 2007.

Take a close look at the Pohutakawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*). It is in new growth.

The vegetative buds are mainly singular/pairs and are pointed. The flowering buds are in bunches like small grapes and are rounded. Good to see some trees are setting lots of flowers!

As always it is an interesting time to visit Tiritiri. Take your time and observe the seasons offerings.

Speaking of seasons next time you notice a Pohutakawa in flower, spare a thought for what a display it must have been for Captain James Cook and his crew as they sailed the East Coast of New Zealand passing through the Hauraki Gulf on 21st November and arriving off North Cape on 19th December. 1769.

Fauna

Takahe

With the start of the breeding season the birds have been approaching each other with their wings up and there has been the usual bouts of fighting.

Whakama at NE Bay is looking rather scruffy which is probably the result of a fight.

Whetu disappeared towards the end of August and is now presumed dead.

Blackwatch has paired up with Mahuika who is now thought to be nesting. His son Lou is limping and is still around the lighthouse area.

Kristina (and Rossie) is nesting and their son Poncho is still around the visitors centre.

Tiri has paired up with Mungo and is nesting.

Greg and Cheesecake are together but as yet there is no sign of her nesting.

Cages have had to be put around the Poor Knights

Flora and Fauna Notes - Continued from page 8

Lilies planted behind the visitors centre to protect them from the Takahe who seem to think that they are there for them to eat.

Stitchbird/Hihi

118 birds were seen in the pre-breeding census (50 of which are female).

Four nests were laid in the last week of September. Unfortunately all the females abandoned these shortly after, perhaps due to the very cold snap in early October coinciding with a shortage in natural food.

All birds are back in action now, with lots of "activity" being seen by guided groups in the Kawerau!

We currently have four nests with chicks (the first chick hatched on 14 October) and seventeen nests completed and waiting for the females to lay.

All other females are busy building while the males are busy defending them and their territories.

Brown Teal/Pateke

Although Jemima and Ossie (wharf dam) had two ducklings in mid October, one looked weak and has since died.

Blue Bonnet (emergency landing dam is now a first time Mum having produced three ducklings at the end of September of which two are still alive. Of course, the father Finn the Philanderer has left her for Solita (bunkhouse dam) who now has ducklings too!

At NE Bay Connie appears to have disappeared and Rose has paired up with Ralph.

Daisy and Ruan are still on Fishermans Bay dam.

Kokako

Recently the unbanded Kokako was seen in Bush 3 and Quaver was seen at the top of Bush 22.

North Island Robin

There are 71 robins but only 24 pairs as there is a shortage of females so lots of lonely males.

To date 25 chicks have fledged and 18 of these have been banded. Some nests were too high to reach safely so the unbanded fledglings will shortly be caught and banded. There are still three nests with chicks and two nests with eggs.

Saddleback

At Labour weekend there were nine nests with a total of fifteen chicks and eleven nests with eggs.



*Variable Oystercatcher on Hobbs Beach.
(Photo: Suzi Phillips)*



*Tui feeding on Rewarewa
on Ridge Track.
(Photo: Suzi Phillips)*

Little Spotted Kiwi - Some people have been seeing up to four Kiwis on an evening walk.

Other Birds

A pair of Paradise Shelduck had six ducklings but over Labour weekend they lost them all.

At the beginning of October a Long-tailed Cuckoo was seen being mobbed by a flock of Whiteheads on the corner of Grahams Road and Wharf Road.

In the same week Kaka were seen on the island.

The Penguins have started nesting.

A couple of Bellbird chicks have already fledged and many Bellbirds are now incubating.

Morepork chicks have been sighted and Fernbird also nesting.

One juvenile Bar-tailed Godwit (migratory wader) was seen at Hobbs Bay in late October, along with a NZ Dotterel in breeding plumage.

A pair of Variable Oystercatchers are resident around the southern side of the island and often seen feeding along the shoreline. They are nesting in this area again this season.

Tuatara/Gecko

There are regular sightings of Tuatara. One Common Gecko was seen in mid September and again at Labour weekend at the Arches.

Marine Mammals

In late September a pod of Orca with a baby was seen from the Kawau Kat between Gulf Harbour and the island.

Just before Labour weekend a pod of Bottlenose Dolphins was seen everyday at Gulf Harbour to the delight of all the school children coming out to visit.

Supporters' Events 2007

| | |
|-------------|------------------------|
| Jan 27-29 | Working Weekend |
| Feb 3-4 | Non-working Weekend |
| Feb 6 | Waitangi Picnic Day |
| March 10-11 | Non-working Weekend |
| March 12 | Annual General Meeting |
| April 6-9 | Easter Working Weekend |
| April 14-15 | Families Weekend |
| April 22 | Tiri Kids Day |

Supporters' day trips and weekends

Ex Auckland Adult \$38 / Child \$20

Ex Gulf Harbour Adult \$22 / Child \$14

Bookings with SOTM Guiding and Shop manager, Megan, by email manager@tiritirimatangi.org.nz or by phone on 476-0010.

Young film-makers win awards

A team from Northcross Intermediate who entered the Panasonic Schools "Kid Witness News" earlier this year came first in the primary/intermediate section, and second overall nationally.

They were one of eleven winners of the video storyboard writing competition on the theme of the environment.

They won the school \$3000 of video making equipment which they brought across to the island last August to film their story. Part two of the competition required them to produce the film, adhering as closely as possible to the original script.

The team's scriptwriter, Jennifer Hutchison, had not written in any specific birds, but her team were lucky enough to capture some great footage.

Copies of the 7-minute DVD have been given to those involved in the making of the film, including Ray and Barbara, Jennifer Haslam, the Supporters and DOC.

School Visits

Birkenhead Primary x3
Gulf Harbour Primary
Chelsea School
Rutherford College x2
Ohaupo School
Glendowie College
Maunu School
Bay of Plenty Polytech
Gladstone Primary
Waihi Beach School
Ngahinapouri School
Northcote College
Papatoetoe Int. x2
Rotorua SDA
St Kentigerns
Unitec students
Tauwhare School
Huntly College



*Saddleback feeding on kowhai.
(Photo: Simon Fordham).*

**Full page PDF of Tiri Kids
page to be inserted here**

Nominations for 2007 Committee

Nominations are sought for Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and between four and nine ordinary committee members.

Nominations, moved and seconded, need to be received in writing by 31 January. Please include a brief resume of the nominee for inclusion in the February Dawn Chorus.

Please forward nominations to:

Julie Cotterill

Secretary

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