

PIGEON POST

Issue 51 November 2015

Hello folks, welcome to Pigeon Post, the newsletter of the Otatara Landcare Group. In this newsletter we bring you news of the latest happenings in our area and snippets of information about our past and ideas about improving our environment

**Your committee: Chairman Barry Smith 2131500
Secretary Chris Rance 2131161 Treasurer Glenda Graham
2131397 Pigeon Post editor Lloyd Esler 2130404**

Please contact the Otatara Landcare Group if you have questions, ideas or problems relating to the Otatara and Sandy Point areas.

Subs are due! – If you aren't a life member, then your annual subs are due - \$20 per year or consider life membership of \$50 – you will be supporting all of our projects including Bushy Point Restoration Project – YOUR Project.

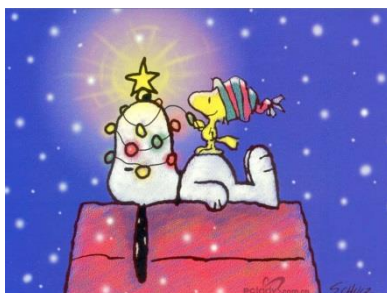
OLG Calendar of Events

Sunday 15 December – Bushy Point work day and KCC Family event – see you there!

Friday 18 December – Southland Community Nursery Christmas break-up morning – 9am-noon

The next issue of Pigeon Post will include the annual calendar of Events for Otatara for 2016.

Enjoy your Christmas from the Otatara Landcare Group Committee



Southland Community Nursery News

After a winter break, the nursery is now in full swing. Friday volunteer mornings are busy with “spring-cleaning” – weeding and sorting, ready for new stock. The nursery has an overabundance of stock to plant out in spring so if you are looking for plants to get into the ground in the next few months phone and arrange to come and see us. Plants ready for planting include cabbage trees, *Coprosma*, toe toe, *Carex secta*, broadleaf, Manuka, kohuhu (*Pittosporum tenuifolium*) and lemonwood, hebes and Olearias for shelter. Plants in PB3 sized containers are all \$5 each and are hardened off and from local stock – you won’t find plants better adapted to your windy environments than these. All need to go to make way for newly potted plants and by buying from us you will be contributing to the Nursery and Education Centre Charitable Trust. If you come along on Fridays to help you can take away some native plants for free.

The Education Centre is preparing itself for another busy school season – over 1,500 children have visited in the last year or so. But as well as school visits we also host visiting guides, brownies, SIT students, garden groups etc. Our latest event was being involved in the great kereru count organised for kiwi conservation club (KCC) by Bronwyn Graham. The day also included Bush Haven where children saw kereru (and kaka) close-up. Then here at the education centre kereru artworks were painted, and a bush walk and other activities undertaken. This is the first of many kcc activities being organised at present. If you want to find out more about KCC see www.kcc.org.nz. To see more Community Nursery events <http://www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz/news-and-events/>

The marram grass balls. The balls of marram grass on Oreti Beach have been getting a bit of attention lately with speculation as to how they are formed. There are thousands of them. I had imagined that a detached clump of roots got rounded or shaped into a ball or sausage as it was rolled on the beach but I now think the balls form while the root mass is partly embedded in the sand below high tide level and the tethered balls grow from an embryo that picks up scraps of roots and perhaps cannibalises neighbouring embryos until the rounded mass is large enough to be detached. These guys need a name. Beach bangers? Any ideas?



OTATARA LANDCARE GROUP Bushy Point Habitat Restoration Project

Sixteenth Annual Report – April 1st 2014 ~ 31st March 2015

Probably the greatest highlight for the year occurred in August 2014 when at the monthly work day we as a group effectively achieved 10,000 hours of work since we first started our planting in early 2000. We have also had some other notable achievements and milestones throughout the year, these include:

The Bushy Point habitat Restoration project has had 1,239.4 hours spent on it this past year.

This brings our total to date for the project to 10,965.1 hours. This year's total includes:

- 387 hours spent on Pest Control. This is a reduction on the previous year and reflects a change in monitoring the trap lines. For 2 months of the year during the early part of the Winter the lines are checked once a month instead of fortnightly
- 290 hours spent on Tree Planting. This also represents a reduction in hours and is due to the reduced number of plants we are planting as opposed to the peak 3 years of Living Legends
- 60 hours spent on Pathway Management. This is also a reduction on the number of hours spent in the previous year and reflects the time spent on maintenance rather than construction and realignment of the tracks. and Construction
-

The purchase this year of a Masport Crossjet (Lawn Tractor) courtesy of funding from the Southern Trust has allowed us to more effectively carry out maintenance on tracks and areas of gorse, broom and blackberry. Now that we have our own machine we are starting to get a pattern emerging of the work required behind the scenes. However this year's total of 77.4 hours maintenance has been blown out by the time used to build a shed being put down to maintenance. A more usual time would be between 1 and 4 hours per month, depending on what was required to be done. This year we had the machine for 10 months and during that time it was used for 68.3 hours.

Continued living legends funding has given us some certainty for our planting programme. This year we were down to a more manageable number of 1,000 plants. This has allowed us to catch our breath somewhat as the planting of some 11,000 ~ 12,000 plants over the previous 3 years was hard work in terms of preparation for planting days. We are ever hopeful that in times to come funding for further large scale plantings will arise.

This last year we hosted Southland Girls' High School year 7 students for 2 days of planting and weeding and there was a second visit by Tacoma School in Washington State (USA) in February 2015. This year also Mrs King from SGHS brought out two groups of Year 9&10 extension Science students to do some mapping of a 20m x 20m area within the 1st year of Living Legends plantings. It is their intention to monitor the growth of plants in this area. A subsequent work day established the area as a more permanent plot with the addition of fence posts marking the area. We have had continued income through grazing two horses and the sale of the equivalent of 150 bales of hay has given us some additional funding.

Monthly work days have been great and it has not been uncommon to have at least 10 people at some of them, well done to those people who continue to show up.

Our thanks go again to the Invercargill City Council, Environment Southland and Department of Conservation who have continued to give us support for our projects in the form of both time and some funding.

Our thanks to the committee, the volunteers and users of the area for their time and appreciation of the work done.

Barry Smith

Kiwi Conservation Club (KCC) focuses on Kereru at Otatara - 26th September 2015

KCC is a children's conservation club and Bronwyn Graham has just joined John Carter from Te Anau in coordinating some exciting activities. We started our celebration of Kereru (and the great NZ Kereru Count) by visiting Bush Haven for morning feeding time. The Kereru that have been rehabilitated and released often sit for an hour on powerlines nearby waiting for the scrumptious mix of fruit, veges and seeds. It was wonderful to get so close to kereru – the children were captivated. Russell explained the main reason Kereru end up at Bush Haven is window strike, how they go about rehabilitating those birds they are able to save, and what we can do to help conserve Kereru. It was great to hear that because of pest busting efforts in Otatara there has been an increase in Kereru in the wild. Tui and bellbirds (in addition to the kereru) flitted around us feasting in this rural haven for birds. We then viewed numerous Australian and NZ native birds including kakariki, Antipodes parrots, three Kereru getting close to release, and kaka. So special to get up and close to these NZ birds. We were also privileged to see three three-day old kaka chicks, with one egg still to hatch. Russell and May do a fantastic job and we thank them for hosting us. Perhaps kakariki are next to be increasing in numbers in the wild?

The Southland Community Nursery then became our base as we created window protectors and adorned the education centre tree with Kereru (including origami versions). Testing the depth of water in Rance's stream using a flax claddy, noticing newly planted natives and feeding the ducks at the wetland pond followed a walk through kahikatea swamp forest where we checked out a weta motel (there were three in residence), spotted pest trapping underway, and breathed in the forest. And we counted two kereru flying. Thanks to Chris and Brian Rance for the use of their wonderful venue and surrounds, sharing their knowledge and helping out. Thanks also to F&B member Edith supporting us on the day.

With a new coordinator based in Invercargill it is hoped that KCC will grow. With five families, and 10 children today it was a great start to building KCC numbers around Invercargill. Already those that were here today were talking about wanting to go back and see the kaka as they grow, and suggested other KCC outings – so watch this space! To find out more about KCC or to join and receive the 'Wild Things' magazines visit www.kcc.org.nz or phone Bronwyn Graham (2130017).

Kakariki in Otatara Two, or maybe now just the one, kakariki have been resident around the Otatara Bush Reserve for some months. The distinctive chatter is frequently heard by people doing the bush loop.



Harriers in Otatara There seems to be a larger than usual number of harriers calling. High overhead pairs and small groups – casts in the correct term – wheel and dive. It is often hard to pinpoint the whistle of hawks but looking upwards, there they are. Marshland on the fringe of the estuary and around wet areas on Sandy Point is the nesting habitat.

Slugs destroy Otatara garden! Despite trying out beer traps, oyster shell, pine needles, porridge oats and even (in desperation) commercial baits, slugs are ruling my garden!

Does someone in the Rata Road area have a wee bit of unwanted garden, (preferably in full sun and spray free) where they would be happy to let me create a veggie garden, and I could come and go without disturbing anyone?

Please phone Sally 2131403 or call in to 24 Rata Road



Winter feeding of birds

If you want to feed your birds in winter – and there is a body of opinion that says you should just let nature take its course – then dog roll is probably your cheapest option. Hang it well above dog leaping level as it's not called dog roll for nothing. Silvereyes and starlings will soon demolish it, leaving only a bit of gristle. Scraps that fall are soon cleaned up by blackbirds and dunnocks.



Trustpower Award The Otatara Landcare Group won the Environment section of the Southland Trustpower Community Awards in September. Great work everyone.

A whale on the beach In September a Sperm whale washed up on Oreti Beach. It had been dead about a month and there wasn't anything salvageable. The jaw, being heavy, dense bone had fallen from the carcass while it had been drifting through Foveaux Strait. It is perfectly legal to keep seal and whale bones that have separated naturally from a carcass, provided you inform DoC of the location and date of the find and the bits retained. Selling such objects is not legal and the occasional seal skull or whale tooth that appears on Trademe is quickly withdrawn. Ornaments made from whalebone and whale teeth are a different matter although the law is unclear about here and exporting is problematic to countries that are signatories to the CITES agreement.



Otatara dogs have clothing

The last two stray dogs on my property had jackets. I think this may show that Mahuri Road has a superior breed of vagrant animals – ours have clothing.

Starling update The starlings at 15 Mahuri Road are in fine fettle. Looks like six of the nine nesting boxes will be occupied. Some of the starlings are banded and this helps to keep tabs on the rather complex social structure. Males have elongated feathers over the breast, whereas females have short and petite plumes. Males have a bit of bluish skin at the base of their beaks, while the female has pinkish skin.

In some cases the pairs have remained intact from one year to the next, and re-use the nest box, having guarded it intermittently during the off season. Elsewhere, there are new tenants or one of the previous pair has a new partner. At present there are eggs after much bringing in of nesting material. Hatching is probably imminent. No sign of the chicks banded last year – they are probably driven well away by their parents.



Nesting at the Living Legends planting

This is the year that we should start seeing birds nesting in the original Living legends planting of a few years ago. Have a look through that block and try to be the first to spot a blackbird, thrush or dunnock nest in the shrubbery. Dunnocks nest low down. It is quite a bulky nest for a small bird, unlike the flimsy structure manufactured by a silveryeye, and there are four sky-blue eggs. In October there were no nests found but late nesters might now be on the job

Here is a dunnock nest (baby birds have red mouths)



Insectarium

An insectarium is a bit like a nesting box for birds except that instead of catering for two disagreeable starlings you are accommodating a multitude of beetles, spiders, flies and wasps. Don't be put off by the concept of wasps. Apart from the large yellow and black German wasp and Common wasp, these critters don't sting. 10% of all insects are parasitic wasps, most laying eggs in the living bodies of various invertebrate larvae and pupae as they find them, but many also collecting paralysed caterpillars and spiders and carrying them to a tunnel where an egg is laid on each. The developing wasp grubs enjoy the takeaways which are living but immobile. It was this apparently cruel act of nature that is said to have turned a young Darwin from creationism to find a better explanation of how nature functions, hence natural selection. One of these species is the Potter wasp, newly established in Southland.



Time to spruce up our lovely Otatara verges and open spaces. Although the official dates were 14-20 September, feel free to grab a bag any time from now on, from 24 Rata Road (help yourself; there are ones for rubbish and ones for recycling – they are under the car port). I will even get rid of your gleanings for you – well, maybe not car bodies and fridges or your regular rubbish!

If you could avoid the areas near the school that would be great as I expect they are organising their own collection again this year. Thanks for what you can do

UPDATE ON PESTBUSTERS

If you haven't already looked, you should see your property on our website map. www.otatara-pestbusters.org.

Please have a look and you can see the properties that are covered by pest control. If yours is not included you need to get in touch with us Wednesday afternoon 3-6pm or Saturday, 9.30 am to 12.30 pm to discuss your requirements.

Remember Environment Southland have subsidized the poison and traps and you won't get them cheaper anywhere else. Russell makes the bait stations and always has some on hand. Other traps can be ordered from ES and only take a few days for delivery.

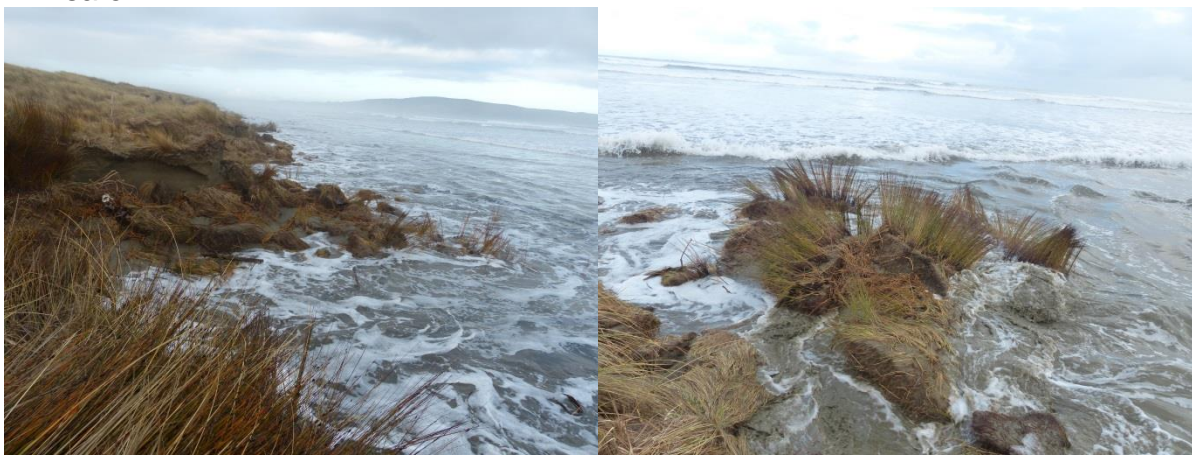
There are now over 120 fairly active members on our list, but we know there are many people in Otatara doing 'their own thing' to combat pests. We want to know who and where you are to add your property to the map so please let us know. It doesn't cost anything to get your listing done and you may be able to get your product cheaper by coming to us if you need anything. You also get a very nice decal to stick on your letterbox, to show neighbours you are part of a great group.

There are some of you who joined us early but we have not seen you recently for more bait. You don't just kill the rats in a few weeks, it is an ongoing thing and you need to keep at it..talk to your neighbours and look after the birdlife this Spring.

I'm sure you will agree there are many more tuis and bellbirds, and of course kereru around Otatara this year. Unfortunately for us that can mean more birds to care for at Bush Haven but we are still happy to see more native birds around.

Erosion along the beach

Beginning in May, the south end of Oreti Beach was subject to more eroding wave action than any other time in 30 years. It seems that a big storm then skimmed a metre or more of sand off the surface and the default high tide mark became the bottom of the dunes instead of much further out. Over the following couple of months, high seas and persistent westerlies meant that one high tide after another bit into the base of the dunes causing them to collapse and removing as much as about 50m of dune frontage. The process is still ongoing but has eased a bit. The telephone pole larking the south entrance was undermined and replanted twice but it now seems reasonably safe.



The erosion exposed a lot of plastic debris from past decades including squid lure, plastic strapping, rope, bottles and even

a few drift cards. These had been set adrift south of Africa and Australia and carry a serial number and a return address. Information about the location of recovery and time taken to drift that distance is important in establishing what the currents of the southern hemisphere are going.

On the subject of changing currents... Lloyd Esler

In the last couple of years there has been far less marine debris washed ashore on Oreti Beach. Remembering back about 20 years, a persistent westerly would bring longs covered in goose barnacles, Violet snails, ramshorn shells, Cuttlefish bone, seaweed, floats and large numbers of dead seabirds. Now there is hardly any. I suspect that a change has taken place in the current which formerly brought the flotsam and jetsam. (Technically not much of that!! Jetsam is what you chuck overboard to lighten a foundering vessel, and flotsam is what is left after it sinks anyway.) The marine debris is now being carried further east and maybe not stranding on the Southland coast at all. An old surfer mentioned to me that about two years ago he felt there was a change in the current which made it harder to gain the shore again.

UPDATE FROM BUSH HAVEN

Since our last update our four young South Island Kaka – one male bred late last year and a male and two females hatched in the middle of January, are now away to their new homes – the males to the Orokonui Ecosanctuary north of Dunedin and the females to Tasman National Park near Nelson, to an area which is being trapped for predators so hopefully our girls will be safe when they nest with the males remaining up there. In years past there was major predation of females and chicks on the nest and as we now know, the chicks sit quietly around the nest for several days after fledging so they are really vulnerable at that time as well. We can only hope the predator control keeps them safe.

On to this Spring. On 24 September there were two chicks hatched, from this season's first sitting. The hen is very proud of her babies and hopefully will be as good a mother as she was previously. It remains to us to keep up the variety of food she and her mate require to rear the chicks.

Photo shows the pair several months ago.



Our long row of aviaries at Bush Haven has undergone a major refurbishing, thanks to Southland Community Trust for a grant towards this, and local builder, Greg Barlow for carrying out the work, many hours at his own cost. We have painted the row, and should also thank our new trustee, Rex Fox for the paint. Russell has also been tidying up feed hoppers and making new nest boxes

for our pairs of Red-crowned Kakariki which we hope will breed and maybe in the future join the few birds that are surviving in Otatara, thanks to everyone who is 'pestbusting'.

Have you noticed a lot more Bellbirds, Tui and Kereru lately? We believe there are many more than in the past.

Remember if your group wish to come and visit the rehabilitation centre and look around the other birds, you can do so, school and preschool groups no charge, but a small donation is welcome from other groups and members of the public. We also have good window transfers available at \$12 each to put on the inside of problem windows. As we move to double glazing in many instances the birds are more at risk of injury, especially as we build more houses around the bush areas.

Bushy Point 2015 Planting



In September 1,000 new plants were put in in an area formerly pasture. Most of the site is a sandy hummock and there is a damp hollow into which we put a number of flaxes and sedges. After a couple of months, things look a bit battered by the gusty weather and the impact of bunny but like the other plantings, things green up soon enough and the survival rate makes it worthwhile continuing planting.

Go and have a look from the Bryson Road access to the walkway.

Dealing to broom

Here is Barry Smith taking one of the last broom bushes from the original plantings. By regularly pulling seedlings, grubbing and cutting larger plants off close to ground level, you can control a small broom problem.



Did you know paradise ducks

sometimes roost at
the top of old, tall
kahikatea? I mean
right at the TOP!

How do they do that
with webbed feet?

Well, they manage
somehow because
we saw them.

The excellent foraging
workshop & two day
Jo Ogier drawing class
held recently at the St Hilda
Community Nursery

both focussed on IDENTIFICATION
as a key skill. I attended both, &
will be back for more. Thanks Chris!

