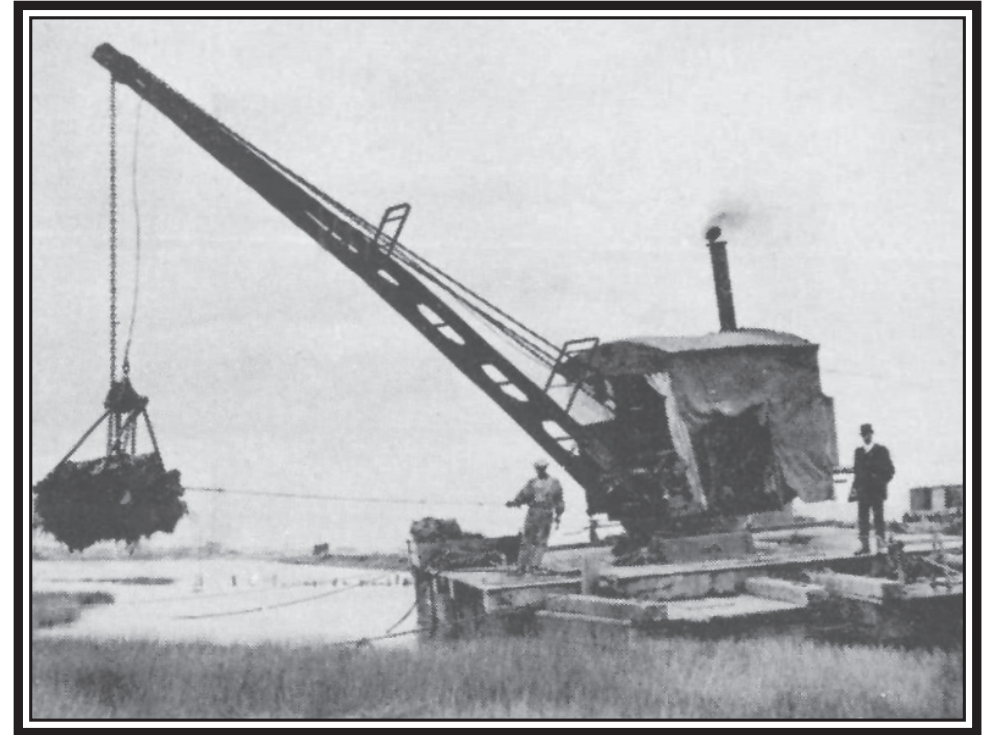




OTATARA PIGEON POST

NUMBER 39

AUGUST 2009



A dredge doing channelling work around 1910, about where Co-Bakker Street is now



Mission Statement

To focus attention of Otatara residents and others on the natural features and ecological values of the Otatara environment, especially native forest and wetland flora and fauna. To promote and where possible facilitate the protection, restoration and creation of such features in the interests of scientific appreciation and intrinsic worth and to encourage community appreciation of these values.

Objectives

- To act as a liaison forum for Otatara landowners, with the ICC, SRC, DOC and other agencies, in issues of land use and management of natural resources.
- To provide information to Otatara residents and other landowners on how best to manage and enhance natural areas, including weed and pest management.
- To advocate for the preservation and enhancement of forest remnants and other natural values of the Otatara area (including New River Estuary, Sandy Point and Oreti Beach).
- To promote increased use of native plants in gardens and on properties in Otatara.
- To improve the habitat for native wildlife in the Otatara area.
- To run a programme of activities which will include bush walks, field days and talks to improve knowledge of the local environment, and working bees to help individuals and organisations with their environmental projects.
- To promote Otatara's natural areas to local people and visitors through publicity (newsletter, leaflets, e.g., Gamble's Educational Boardwalk).

Your Committee

Please contact any of the committee members if you have questions, ideas or problems relating to the Otatara/Sandy Point area.

Elected Committee Members 2008 – 2009

Barry Smith – Chairperson (ph. 213-1500)	Chris Rance – Secretary (ph. 213-1161)
Tracey Langmuir – Treasurer (ph. 213-0790)	Lloyd Esler (ph. 213-0404)
Linda Jackson (ph. 213-1271)	Brian Rance (ph. 213-1161)
Randall Milne (ph. 213-0851)	Cathy MacFie (ph. 213-1267)
Jill Warhurst (ph. 216-6234)	Clair Leith (ph. 213-1148)
Deidre Francis (ph 213-0957)	



I Want to Help Care for the Birds, the Bush and Wetlands at Otatara and see them Prosper for Future Generations to Enjoy. I can Help by Joining the OTATARA LANDCARE GROUP.

Membership

First Name/s
Last name/s
Address
.....
.....
Contact phone/email

I enclose an annual membership fee \$10 per household \$
Ten year membership \$50 per household \$
Lifetime membership \$100 per household \$
I wish to make a donation \$
Enclosed Total Payment of \$
Tick if receipt required ()

Activities

I want to (please tick):
() help with restoration, weed control or growing plants
() help with or attend local Otatara walks
() help with bird surveys
() help with liaison with local councils

Send to:

Otatara Landcare Group
32 Taiepa Road
Otatara. Phone 213-0790

Bird of the Month – White Heron

You have probably seen him, or is it a 'her' on the edge of the tide, by the Stead Street Bridge, up the Oreti River or in the Sutton Lagoon. It's just the one bird doing the rounds as it has done for the last decade or so.

You might wonder why nobody has nobbled him yet! A heron learns the whereabouts of fishponds and a single visit can wipe out a population of goldfish. Alas, goldfish are not bred for camouflage and they can't run far in a hurry. I usually advise people to get a guinea pig instead or get a netting cover for the pond or just keep restocking – a heron can't live forever and eventually the pond will be safe. The heron likes to park up on suburban roofs as well and he is often reported from rooftops around the lower Waihopai River.

In breeding season, which is September to December, all the White herons return to Okarito where they were hatched, to mate, nest and raise their chicks. For the rest of the year they are solitary. There is one at Milford Sound and one on Stewart Island but possibly no more than three in Southland. Fortunately they are so conspicuous they are hard to miss. They can be confused with two other birds, the spoonbill and the Cattle egret. White herons, or kotuku, are regarded as a New Zealand icon, along with the kiwi, but they are cosmopolitan, being one of the world's most widespread species. Their small population and single breeding colony at Okarito are a bit of a mystery as they are often abundant over-



A heron on Chris and Brian Rance's pond in Grant Road.

seas, and a similar bird, the spoonbill, now has a population in the thousands and dozens of nesting localities despite being a recent migrant to New Zealand. Perhaps the heron is at the extreme limit of its habitat here, but that doesn't explain why one would choose the Southland winter when a couple of days flying could take it to much warmer water at the top of the North Island.

This newsletter has been produced by Lloyd Esler, Julie Campbell and Chris Rance

Otatara Issues

There has been bit going on in Otatara recently with the Invercargill City Council Representation Review and also the Otatara Issues and Options (I&O) paper both out for comment. There was a local meeting at the Otatara Community Church to discuss the Representation Review and although only 10 residents attended, it was the highest turn out they had experienced! Hopefully you took the opportunity to comment on the submission form and make your views known. If there was not a strong response it is very unlikely that we will get either a Community Board or some other form of local representation.

The Otatara Issues and Options paper discussed some of the key issues that the council have picked up on including the area (boundary), Open space and lot size, Significant vegetation, Outstanding landscapes, Natural hazards, Activity status and other issues/ services. Again the level of feedback will indicate the urgency to look at future issues in Otatara. I certainly hope that there will be some action from the council on at least some of these issues. The protection of the special natural features of Otatara (including indigenous vegetation, birdlife and outstanding landscapes) as well as the change in the character of Otatara (particularly the loss of open space and farmland) all need to be addressed.

Earlier, the Otatara Community Group had distributed a questionnaire which asked residents for their views on the special features of Otatara. The full results are on the website www.rd9.org.nz.

The 10 most frequently mentioned reasons that people said they choose to live in Otatara were:

	Reason	Number of People
1	The Bush	150
2	Quiet/Peaceful/Tranquil	128
3	Birdlife	92
4	Privacy	83
5	Close to Invercargill	79
6	Large Sections	74
7	Open Space	51
8	Semi-Rural	42
9=	Rural Outlook	36
9=	Close to Beach	36

In relation to significant forest, the ICC commissioned Wildland Consultants to assess indigenous vegetation in Otatara as a follow-up to an earlier assessment undertaken in 1998/1999. Their report was completed in December 2008 and identifies issues affecting significant vegetation and makes recommendations to council. This 2008 report offers some strong advice and direction that the Council should consider in terms of better protecting indigenous vegetation – it also raises very strong concerns about the current state of this precious resource. The key conclusions of this report are:

1. There has been a loss of significant vegetation in Otatara since 1999.
2. Resource consents conditions are not adequately compensating for loss of significant vegetation.
4. The major threats to sustainability of significant vegetation are clearance as a result of residential development, weeds and grazing.
5. Only a small amount of privately owned forest is legally protected.
6. The long term persistence of significant indigenous vegetation is by no means assured.

The Wildlands report also discusses future management, with some clear recommendations for Council. These include:

- A vision for Otatara
- Avoid further clearance of mature forest.
- Preserve existing ecological gradients
- Promote indigenous corridors between existing areas of forest.
- Promote legal protection of indigenous forest areas.
- Foster community involvement in vegetation restoration and management.
- Work with other parties.
- Lead by example.
- Land purchases.
- Monitor the condition of vegetation.

Their comment that ***'the long term persistence of significant indigenous vegetation is by no means assured'*** is of great concern.

I think that Wildlands have picked up on the key issues and that generally they have 'got it right', however the Council needs to act in a proactive rather than negative way to the recommendations and encourage all landowners to take pride in their Otatara property.

One year a native tree enthusiast gave a prize for the child who collected the most different kinds of native tree leaves; That was a lot of fun for us.

Sometime after 1945 Taiepa Road was formed right through to Marama Avenue South by one man with a horse and cart. Grant Road was just two wheel tracks amidst the manuka scrub crowding in on each side. There were plenty of up and downs along the track which were great fun when riding our bikes.

March was blackberry time. After school we'd grab a billy (a large golden-syrup tin with a wire handle) and go and find a good blackberry patch along the roadsides (no sprays used then), or in some vacant paddock. Mum would make delicious jam or blackberry and apple jelly and an aunt in town would sometimes buy any surplus. I think the most we ever got was one shilling and sixpence per pound but it was a welcome bit of pocket money.

In those days we could bike along Oreti Road and right down to the water's edge of the Oreti River and we sometimes went swimming there. Walking home from school we would sometimes nick a swede turnip from a farmer's paddock – delicious fare for a hungry school-kid – and in summer we'd walk along the bottom of the, then dry, ditches which lined the sides of the roads. What happy memories I have of Otatara in the 1940s.

Mary Thomson (nee McCurdy)

The editor encourages everyone to record their stories in this way. Got a good Otatara story?

Elephantine Adventures with Linda Jackson

When the circus last came to town they brought their usual menagerie and set up in Queens Park alongside Gala Street. Most passersby would have noticed the elephant but how many took stock of those huge piles of elephant poo?

According to his keeper I was the first person to enquire where it all went. "Straight into the skip and then to the landfill," said the friendly guy with the big smile. He gave me permission to bring sacks and a shovel any morning before 8am, and said just to tell anyone who asks the 'Elvis' said it was OK. Now my sandy Otatara soil has a liberal dressing of elephant poo in the vege patch and the first crop? Elephant garlic of course.

Editor's note: Linda can now move on to Elephant grass and Elephant's ear.

Otatara in the 1940s

It all began when some committee members heard me say that I was passionate about Otatara. "Well, give us your ten dollars and you can join the Otatara Landcare Group," they quickly replied, so I did.

For about my first twenty years Otatara was my home. Our family lived on a hilly three acre section (sandhills covered with native bush) at the corner of Grant and Taiepa Road. In those days Taiepa Road wasn't formed right through to Marama Avenue South but there was a winding track through the bush. To get to our place we had to go a short way along Oreti Road, along Black Road, then along Taiepa Road to the corner with Grant Road.

My Grandfather had bought the property about 1909 and when my father took it over in the 1930s he levelled the top of the highest sandhill, thinking it would be a good place to build a house. There were great views of Bluff Hill and Stewart Island, but it was a terribly windy spot and any house there would just about be blown away, so the house was finally built in a more sheltered spot beside some tall gum trees which Grandad had planted. The spot was named Robin Hill – there were plenty of tuis and bellbirds but not a robin in sight – so one of my younger sisters was duly named Robin.

Dad worked in town and due to the petrol restrictions of the Second World War, he biked into work every day. I can remember following him around as he planted trees for shelter, each with its skirt of rabbit netting, as there were plenty of rabbits about. There were also plenty of mozzies; the windows had to have mosquito netting to keep them out at night.

Winter frosts were much harder then, with ice on all the piddles and oh, the pain of chilblains on small fingers and toes. We all had to endure a large spoonful of cod-liver oil each morning before we set out on our 1½ mile walk to school. The school building was much closer to Dunns Road then, just two rooms and a corridor along one side with rows of coat hooks for our coats and schoolbags. If thirsty, there was a tin mug tied to the tankstand near the school entrance. We all helped to plant and weed the school vegetable garden which was just inside the gateway on the left-hand side.

Being the only public building in Otatara then, the school was used for dances (desks all pushed to one side), send-offs for soldiers going off to the war, and even for church services. In the mid 1940s an old army building was shifted from Bluff to the corner of Dunns Road and Ruru Avenue, becoming the first Otatara Hall. It was well used for dances (Dad would play his violin), balls, concerts, card evenings and spring and autumn flower shows.

Everyone can help increase native vegetation in Otatara by protecting existing mature forest, planting native shelterbelts and native plants to attract birds, and by controlling weeds and animal pests. The Otatara Landcare Group intend to give a 'Welcome to Otatara' pack to new residents with information and contacts for those who want help and advice on identifying weeds and native plants. It would also be beneficial if developers were innovative in their designs and made native areas a feature of the subdivisions or used landscaping to create native forest/habitat areas within each subdivision.

Let's all help keep Otatara the 'Bush Suburb' – it is the main thing that makes the place we live so much different from any other place within the City boundary.

Brian Rance

Protecting Wildlife In Your Own Backyard

Otatara is a capital for birdlife – on many occasions we have had guests marvelling at a dawn chorus in Otatara that is sadly lacking from other areas. However, we can't be complacent – the three year Department of Conservation study showed that even in Otatara a very high percentage (as high as 70%) of chicks in tui and pigeon nests were being predated. Recently I saw photographs taken in a different part of New Zealand graphically showing two of the main culprits. In this photo a possum is eating one chick while a rat is eating the other! Of course all this happens during the hours of darkness so most of us are oblivious to it happening but we can all do something about it.

On your own property you can set possum, stoat and rat traps. You can do this in a way that doesn't affect pets. There are possum traps available that can be attached to trees and rat and stoat traps contained within boxes so that family pet cannot be caught. While Sherman Smith from Environment Southland has now moved to Wellington, his replacement at ES, Tim Riding, is available to help. You can contact Tim to discuss your pest issues and access traps.

The Otatara Landcare Group and its main trappers Ian Gamble and Len Diack service traps every two weeks over a 90 hectare area at Bushy Point. This is a massive effort and it is paying dividends with big increases in fernbirds and sightings of juvenile tui and bellbirds. However, Otatara is a big place and if every landowner did their little bit the birdlife would be even more fantastic.

Chris Rance



especially where there is no pest mammal control and the female is responsible for most activities at the nest - for example it has been evident in robin, kaka, kokako and blue duck populations.

I look forward to receiving any sightings of colour-banded tui. If you need a record sheet for observations, please get in touch (postal and email addresses below).

*Ralph Powlesland Research & Development Group. Department of Conservation
P.O. Box 10-420 Wellington 6143 Email: rpowlesland@doc.govt.nz Ph: 04-4713226*

Otatara in the Old News

The Southland Times is now online from the 1860s until 1904. This opens up a huge field for researchers. The paper is searchable which means that you can put a word into the search and up come all the matches. There are several hundred references to Otatara, many of the places being hogged by more than one racehorse of that name. You can follow his career as he grew in popularity, got a few placings then presumably turned into pet food...

"The opening event served to introduce us to an uncommonly good jumper in Mr. G. P. Donnelly's Otatara, an immensely big and powerful gelding, who much resembles his dam, Waitio. Seeing that this was his first appearance in public, his performance was a most meritorious one, and, all going well with him, he is sure to earn high distinction between the flags when his time comes. Apart from Bravest, who did not look so bright or muscular as he has done formerly, they were a well-conditioned lot, and right from the outset the pace was made solid, fixed by Bandalero and then by Golden Loop. The last-named led up the Hack from Sleacombe, Otatara and Faunus, but Otatara, whose fencing was most proficient, went to the front half a mile from home, and there he stayed, winning decisively by two lengths. Strathmoira, who never looked really dangerous, was fourth, and Master Stead fifth."

On-going Study of Colour-banded Tui in Southland

Ralph Powlesland is very keen to continue to receive observations of colour-banded tui during 2009/2010 in order to contribute to our knowledge of tui longevity and movements.

In the table below is some information about the number of colour-banded tui seen during 2008 and previously.

Year of capture	No. banded	No. seen in 2004	No. seen in 2005	No. seen in 2006	No. seen in 2007	No. seen in 2008
Male						
2003	11	9	6	8	6	4
2004	25		20	13	8	6
2005	18			13	7	7
	54			34	21	17
Female						
2003	6	3		0	0	0
2004	2		0	0	0	0
2005	4			4	2	1
	12			4	2	1

Here is Ralph's report...

In 2008, of the 66 tui captured during 2003-2005, just 18 were seen, 27% of the original tally, 8% of females and 31% of males. Of the birds seen in 2008, two had not been seen in 2007, and the only sighting of a third was when it was found dead. A coarse method of determining longevity suggests females in Southland have about half the lifespan of males. There are at least two reasons I can think of why females have an apparently shorter lifespan than males. The larger males (average of 131g) dominate the smaller females (average of 96g) at rich food sources, such as at sugar-water feeders when there are few other nectar sources available. Thus, we may not see some females because they may prefer not to visit sugar-water feeders when there are bossy males present that regularly chase them away. Another possible reason, and the one which I think is most likely, is that female tui are more likely to be killed by predators. Only female tui sit on the nest to incubate eggs or brood chicks, and so are vulnerable to being captured by a predator, particularly at night when they are asleep or if they attempt to defend the nest. An excess of males in a New Zealand forest bird population is not unusual for some species,

Geckos in Otatara?

In July Rod Morris, former TVNZ Natural History Unit photographer and writer, visited Invercargill to give a talk. He is most interested in photographing geckos and a report of a sighting at Bushy Point by some weed contractors in 2008 was exciting but they couldn't be relocated to see what species they were.

If you have you ever seen a gecko in Otatara? If so, even many years ago, contact Chris Rance 2131161 or email rances@ihug.co.nz

The difference between geckos and skinks

There are two kinds of lizards in New Zealand – geckos and skinks.

Geckos have broad heads with large bulging eyes, clearly defined necks, and soft, velvety-looking skin that is covered in very small, granular scales. Skinks are more slender with narrow heads and small eyes. Skinks have smooth, shiny, fish-like scales on the surface of their skin. Both groups can lose their tails, which can distract predators while the animal escapes. There are about 80 different species of skinks and geckos in New Zealand, although this figure will change as more species are discovered and more

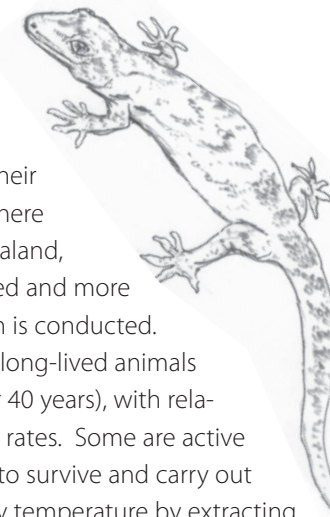
research is conducted.

They are long-lived animals (some over 40 years), with relatively low breeding rates. Some are active



Skink

at night while others only come out during the day. In order to survive and carry out their daily activities, skinks and geckos have to raise their body temperature by extracting heat from the sun's rays and from rock surfaces. For more information visit the DOC website <http://www.doc.govt.nz/conservation/native-animals/reptiles-and-frogs/lizards/geckos/facts/>



Gecko

Community Nursery News

Wetland Creation – what you can do with a naturally wet area

Wet areas are very difficult to revegetate as most plants do not like to have their roots submerged for any length of time. In Southland there are many such areas and they lend themselves to working with rather than against nature. It is a case of setting aside the wet areas and either excavating a pond to give open water with planting around or planting wet areas with appropriate wetland plants.

When we moved to our Grant Road location, a very wet sheep paddock adjoined the kahikatea forest – not surprising really as the paddock is on wet peat and though drains had been put down, they were struggling to cope with the high water table and very wet conditions in winter – the sheep didn't like it much either!

We decided early on to turn this wet paddock back into a functioning wetland ecosystem including open water, regenerating shrubland and eventually its return to kahikatea swamp forest (we won't see the benefits of that ourselves!). How much easier to have left the swamp forest there in the first place.

The Southland plants we would recommend for very wet areas are as follows – flax (*Phormium tenax*), Carex species (*Carex virgata* and *Carex secta*), toe toe (*Cortaderia richardii*), mingimingi (*Coprosma propinqua*), Weeping mapou (*Myrsine divaricata*), Red tussock (*Chionochloa rubra*), Cabbage tree (*Cordyline australis*), kahikatea (*Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*). The usual restoration species of Pittosporums, broadleaf, wineberry etc do not like wet feet and will happily turn up their toes if you put them in that situation. In a pond excavation situation the spoil from the pond spread around the edges will provide



Newly excavated pond



higher ground for those and other riparian (riverside) species such as lowland ribbonwood (*Plagianthus regius*) and kowhai (*Sophora microphylla*). Most of the species listed above provide good food sources for native birds such as tui, bellbird, kereru and waxeye, and open water provides habitat for kingfishers, herons, stilts and waterfowl and if you are near the estuary the rare fernbird may pay a visit. The addition of

perches around wetland areas and the proximity of tall trees for perching are good features to attract birds to your area.

We will be having an open day on Saturday 7 November 2009 focussing on wetland creation – look out for details. All the species listed are available at the Community Nursery which will open again on Fridays from the end of September.

Chris Rance



Pond after revegetation planting

Weather Events

Do you have any memories of major Southland weather events such as blizzards, floods, lighting strikes, snowfalls, violent winds or big waves? I am compiling an account of Southland's weather and would appreciate any such stories. Please email your stories to esler@southnet.co.nz

Spring?

I'm writing this on 1 August 2009 which I regard as the first day of spring. This morning I saw the first lamb, I have my first daffodil and this afternoon I saw the first female blackbird carrying nesting material into a tangle in the Muehlenbeckia. What's that if it isn't spring? I have seven months of summer, from the vernal equinox to the end of April – the other three seasons may fight it out amongst themselves as they share those five off-months, but I have May as autumn, June and July as winter and August and most of September as spring.

We often hear about the official start to a season, but who has the right to set the official dates?