



OTATARA PIGEON POST

NUMBER 40

DECEMBER 2009



Merry Christmas
From the Otatara
Landcare Group



OTATARA
LANDCARE GROUP

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)

Lloyd Esler (ph. 213-0404)

Brian Rance (ph. 213-1161)

Cathy MacFie (ph. 213-1267)

Clair Leith (ph. 213-1148)

Chris Rance – Secretary (ph. 213-1161)

Linda Jackson (ph. 213-1271)

Randall Milne (ph. 213-0851)

Jill Warhurst (ph. 216-6234)

Deidre Francis (ph 213-0957)

ChairSpeak

Christmas has come around again. What has been happening on the Bushy Point reserve since last Christmas? Firstly, our present grazer is finishing on 28 February 2010, so if you thought you'd like to play at farming then here is your opportunity... however be warned; you will be required to look after your stock so that they are healthy and presentable as the public has access to the area and people will complain about any sick-looking and daggy, unhappy sheep. But don't let that put you off, if you want to have a go then let me know. We are allowed to graze sheep and horses only so no bison, camels or wallabies.

Secondly, we are once again running our ever popular New Years Eve walk to the trig station in the forest at Bushy Point; this year we are being joined by the Southland Tamping Club. This trip is suitable for people of all ages from babies to oldies.

Thirdly, during the year we were lucky enough to receive funding to help us replace some aging fencing as well as erect some new fences to protect waterways and our plantings, so over the next year that work will start to become apparent. Merry Christmas everybody, be safe over Christmas in everything that you do, but also don't let that put you off having fun and enjoying the company of family and friends.

Barry Smith - Chair, Otatara Landcare Group

Editor's Comment

This issue of *Pigeon Post* (the 40th edition) is going out to all Otatara households, thanks to the Invercargill City Council. *Pigeon Post* is produced by the Otatara Landcare Group several times a year for members to keep you informed about local issues and progress on our major project which is the restoration of Bushy Point from pasture to bush, shrubland and wetland.

Please take the opportunity over Christmas to walk the track through Bushy Point which starts in Bryson Road. Walkers, joggers and bicycles welcome. Please respect the seats, stock, plantings and signage and be aware of the electric fence and pest traps. Dogs must be on a leash. You may have noticed the new sign directing you to the reserve from the Dunns Road intersection.

Lloyd Esler



New Treasurer Needed!

After five and a half years, Tracey is handing over the treasurer's baton. If you would like to help out in this capacity we would be very happy to welcome you. The job is not too onerous but if you do computer internet banking that would be helpful. Please contact Chair Barry Smith or Secretary Chris Rance if you can help. Thanks to Tracey for keeping the books in a very healthy state!

Otatara Landcare Group Events

New Years Eve Walk at Bushy Point

Thursday 31st December 2009 7:30pm - Sunset over Invercargill. Meet at 173 Grant Road Otatara. Barry Smith Ph: 213-1500

Bushy Point Planting Dates for Your Diary

Sunday 6 and 23 May 2010

Join Us...

If you would like to contribute to the restoration then we have planting, weeding and potting days. Membership is only \$10 a year, or \$50 for 10 years so if you would like to support the Otatara environment please complete the membership form enclosed.

Coming in the New Year

Natural Otatara – a book written and illustrated by Lloyd Esler for the Otatara Landcare Group.

A new interpretation sign and children's interactive activities on the Bushy Point Walkway situated at the pond.

A "Welcome to Otatara" pack for new residents – if you know of people new to the area who would like a welcome pack of information (including native plants from the Community Nursery) contact secretary Chris Rance, ph 213-1161.

Community Nursery Wins Supreme Award

The Southland Community Nursery, based at Chris and Brian Rance's property in Grant Road, was announced as the overall winner of the Trustpower 2009 Invercargill Southland Community Awards at the Civic Theatre on Monday 16 November.

The nursery was recognised as an outstanding facility for environmental, social and community networking as well as actively promoting and providing information and resources for the local Southland environment.

Over the last 10 years, approximately 80,000 eco-sourced native plants have been grown by volunteers and used on individual properties, farms, schools and conservation projects. The nursery was acknowledged as leading the country with their initiative and for being a brilliant community effort.

As a volunteer, I would like to highly recommend to anyone interested in helping create a green, vibrant, eco-friendly Southland to visit the nursery on a Friday morning (the morning teas alone are worth it!).

Congratulations Chris and Brian, here's hoping you also do well at the Trustpower Community National Awards in Nelson next March.

Linda Jackson



What Was The Original Pigeon Post?

In 1897 a mail service was established between Auckland and Great Barrier Island using pigeons. This was New Zealand's first airmail and the pigeongram stamps are now quite valuable. They are just one of many oddities in New Zealand's postal history.

There may be a niche market for a new pigeon post service but generally email is faster. The pigeon in question is the racing pigeon and not the native kereru although being larger, the kereru might be useful for a parcel post; forgotten school lunches, spare car keys, first aid kits, writs of habeas corpus ... that sort of thing.

Lloyd Esler



The Future of Otatara – Reported In “Southern Squall”

“Concerns are mounting about the future direction of one of Invercargill’s most picturesque areas.” About 80 Otatara residents gathered for a public meeting this week at which concerns were expressed about the rapid expansion of subdivisions in the native-bush dotted, semi-rural city area. During the meeting it was revealed that another farm in the leafy area had been sold - to an Auckland developer - who could carve it up into 2 hectare lots.

Some residents warned that Otatara’s special qualities could disappear within the next few years if increased planning protections were not enshrined in the district plan. Much of the rural land in the area had already been subdivided and more was about to go, they said.

A future vision of concreted-in ditches, street-lighting and loss of natural values was raised by some at the meeting, while others said there needed to be more of the aforementioned to allay safety concerns in Otatara. An issues and options process is underway, but any changes to the district plan in Otatara are at least a year away.

City councillor and environment and planning committee chairman Darren Ludlow warned residents the new government was moving towards a more liberal planning regime, by easing restrictions in the Resource Management Act. This will please developers, who have been eyeing up Otatara for restaurants, daycare centres (one is about to open) and the like.

Interestingly, among approximately 100 submissions on the future of the area, was one from an individual wanting a service station at Otatara.

Cr Ludlow maintained that the council had firm views on protecting the sand dune terrain running along the eastern edge of the Oreti River. He also said the city’s district plan, which was a “permissive” document at the moment, might need to become more proscriptive if the city grows, via an influx of oil and lignite-related industry to the Southland region.

Safety issues in the area focused on three key spots – the intersection of Dunns Rd and Marama Ave, the intersection of Dunns Rd and Oreti Rd and the area in the vicinity of Riding for the Disabled’s HQ in Erskine Rd. Speed limit changes were one idea (RDA has concerns about its riders/horses being hit by speeding vehicles), but Cr Ludlow also raised the idea of a roundabout at the Dunns Rd and Marama Ave intersection. “Fifty-km through the whole area wouldn’t be a bad idea would it,” he said.

One resident summed up the dilemma Otatara residents faced, stating that there was a conflict in views between one side wanting culverts, footpaths and lights versus the other camp determined to defend the area’s tranquillity”.

The meeting was organised by the Otatara Community Group.

What Otatara Residents Value Most About Living in Otatara

The Otatara Community Group 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

Rat Rubbings?

We are looking at having some small plaques embedded in posts from which children can take a rubbing. These will likely feature such locals as rats, crabs, fantails, tuis and so on. You would need to take paper and a crayon, pastel or soft pencil. Keep a lookout! Even without these you can do bark and leaf rubbings.

Take Care With Kereru

An approach has been made to the council to see if we can get a few ‘Watch out for pigeons’ signs. Low-swooping pigeons are often casualties and driving a little slower when approaching an overhanging tree on which you can see kereru feeding may save a life.

Grazing Available

From 1 March the Otatara Landcare Group will have grazing available for sheep or horses. Approx 100 stock units of grazing available. Contact Barry Smith, Ph 213-1500

Becoming A Host Family...

There has been change within the Smith family over the last year. In January we hosted a German exchange student. Miriam stayed with us for five months and she grew on us and became one of our daughters.

It was strange having three girls in the house all going to secondary school and it was a very busy time for us, but also very rewarding. She was a really neat young lady, full of enthusiasm for everything around her; everything was exciting.

When she arrived at our place she had already spent some six months with another family and her English was very good, but every now and again she would ask what a particular word meant. One morning she told us she'd had her first dream in English and a month or so later she said she'd had her first nightmare about having to go home.

She left to go back home to her parents in early July and whilst we found having three girls to deliver to after school functions a very busy time for us, it was also a rewarding time. If people do get the opportunity to host then consider it carefully.

Two months after Miriam left we bade farewell to our eldest daughter Hilary, as she departed with AFS for a year's schooling in France. She arrived there on a Friday, had a brief introduction over the weekend and was straight into secondary school in Dunkirk on the Tuesday.

School in France is different to here, three mornings a week she leaves on the bus at 6:50am to start school 20km away at 8:00am. However on Mondays she doesn't start till 10am and Thursday and Saturday mornings she doesn't start till 9:00am (yes, she has Saturday morning school). On Wednesdays and Saturdays she finishes at midday, but if you think she has it easy, think again, because on Friday the finish is at 3:40pm, Mondays 4:50pm and Tuesdays and Thursdays it is 5:45pm (and people think they have it tough here at school!).

Hilary has a very nice host family and has a one-year-old sister and brothers aged four and six.

Of course, now that we are down to one daughter things will be a lot easier....well, we thought they might, however this doesn't appear to be the case as Fiona is busy booking up all the extra time previously spent on the other two and is doing more activities. Sometimes parents just don't win I guess, or perhaps winning has to be thought of in a different way.

Barry Smith

Pest Control In Otatara

Do you have problems with pest animals, particularly rats and possums, on your property? Do you want to help maintain or increase our bush birds? Well the Otatara Landcare Group see pests as a major nuisance around Otatara as well as being a major threat to our native bush bird life. Therefore the Otatara Landcare Group is pleased to be supporting a joint initiative along with Environment Southland, Department of Conservation and the Otatara Community Group to encourage pest control throughout Otatara.

Otatara residents are fortunate enough to have areas of native bush either on their properties or nearby. The native bush and gardens in your backyard provides habitat for a broad range of native bird species, including kereru, tui, bellbirds and fantails. The abundance of these birds is a special feature of Otatara and we are lucky to have them. However, despite the apparent abundance of some of these species, many are still struggling to maintain themselves in the presence of pest animals such as rats, mice, possums and stoats.

As well as being a threat to our special bush birds, pest animals are a nuisance around our homes. Rats and mice frequently get into compost bins especially if they have food scraps they also will get into the shelter of sheds garages and our homes, especially in autumn and winter when the temperature cools. Possums will come into gardens to feed on apples and other fruits as well as roses and other plants. Stoats may predate chickens. Although you may not see these pests they will almost certainly be present!

You may be aware of pest control work undertaken by Otatara Landcare Group in the Bushy Point reserve (see article elsewhere in this newsletter). This control programme has much reduced pests within the reserve. As a result an increase in native birdlife within the reserve and adjacent areas has been observed. We would like to take pest control to the next level. Control in an expanded area and eventually throughout Otatara could build on the gains already achieved.

Look out for fliers regarding pest control programmes that are to start. These will tell you how to get involved if you are interested. There will also be a public meeting early 2010. This will involve guest speakers talking about the effects on wildlife and success at Bushy Point, control methods which are suitable for around your home, garden and bush, and also provide an opportunity to ask questions or discuss concerns about this project. In the mean time if you wish to discuss any aspect of the program, or register your interest in participating, please contact Brian Rance (ph 2131161), Russell Evans (2130530) or Tim Riding at Environment Southland (ph 211 5115 or email Tim.Riding@es.govt.nz).

Brian Rance

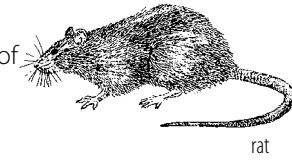
Current Pest Tally for Bushy Point

Thanks to Ian Gamble and Len Diack for servicing the kilometres of pest lines at Bushy Point over this time.

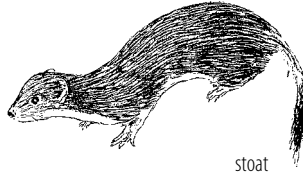
- In the 2007/8 season 77 possums, 14 stoats and one weasel were caught. A lot of rat bait was eaten.
- In the 2008/9 season 69 possums, 25 stoats and two weasels were caught and a lot of rat bait eaten.
- So far for 2009/10 only eight possums and no stoats or weasels have been caught, so maybe we are making progress! However, much more rat bait appears to be taken than in previous years.

Remember that to kill one female stoat could mean that you are killing 10 stoats as the kits are impregnated by the male stoat before they leave the nest!

Make a difference to the bush and the birds by undertaking your own pest control.



rat



stoat



possum

Frogs! What's Happened To Them?

In the 1990s a frog disease spread around the world, apparently associated with the distribution of frogs used for pregnancy testing. The disease spread from these South African clawed frogs to native amphibian populations globally. In New Zealand the native

frog species have become infected and the two introduced species, the brown or tree frog and the green frog have disappeared from some areas and become rare elsewhere. The decline is not related to the big freeze of July 1996. Fifteen years ago a drizzly Otago night was a deafening experience – now, we are lucky to get a single distant chirrup. Let's hope that resistant populations will develop.

Lloyd Esler



brown frog

Merry Christmas from Bush Haven

Russell and May Evans at 49 Bryson Road have, as most of you know, for some years been rehabilitating native birds. These are mainly kereru [wood pigeon] and most are injured after hitting cars or windows. They swoop low over roads to get to other bushy patches and we must drive carefully on Otago roads and watch for them, also tuis as they can suffer serious, sometimes fatal injuries.

Likewise, kereru frequently hit windows which reflect bush at certain times of the day. They often die from the force of hitting the window, or take many weeks to recover from chest or wing injuries. At the moment we are looking after six kereru brought to us after just such accidents.

One way to alleviate this is to hang a decoration in the middle of or outside a large window or place a transfer on the window. Bush Haven is now a charitable trust and will soon have some tasteful 'crystal' transfers to put on windows. These will cost around \$25 each and should last at least 10 years. We have one on a window if you wish to view it. Give us a call.

We noticed less fireworks in our area this year – well done! We have nothing against fireworks in general but believe they should only be in large, public displays well away from our bush and birdlife – this is because it is in the middle of the breeding season for our birds and they don't deserve to be scared off their nests by fireworks.

Over the past year about half the number of birds brought to us were rehabilitated and released. Several others died and some were euthanased as their injuries would have led to slow, painful deaths.

We have a collection of parrots and native birds at our address in Bryson Road. Next year we will be open to the public and schools one day a week and at some other times by appointment.

If you have an injured native bird please phone (03) 213-0530.

Russell and May Evans

Handy Metric Conversions For Everyday Use

- 1 trillion microphones = 1 megaphone
- 1 million bicycles = 2 megacycles
- 10 cards = 1 decacards
- 1 millionth of a fish = 1 microfiche
- 10 rations = 1 decoration
- 10 millipedes = 1 centipede
- 3 1/3 tridents = 1 decadent
- 10 monologs = 5 dialogues
- 2 monograms = 1 diagram
- 1 million stags = a roaring meg'
- 2000 mockingbirds = two kilomockingbird
- A millihelen = the unit of beauty needed to launch a single ship
- A vanilli = a unit of deception, usually measured in millivanillis

Take A Local Walk Over Christmas – The Bushy Point Walkway

You have to admit the weather's been stink. Pacing from room to room doesn't equate to a good walk in the outdoors, plus I was having an out-of-money experience, so I needed a walk close to town. On the other hand, the rain had stopped so it was on with the wellies, collected two grandkids and away we went to Otatara, heading down Marama Ave South then turning left at the bend into Bushy Point Walkway carpark.

The entrance has a newly planted area with tussock, cabbage tree, totara, broadleaf, pittosporums, mingimingi etc. It was hard to believe that 100 years ago the area was totara & kahikatea forest. Pick up a self-guided walk brochure and follow the yellow topped posts.

With a good stiff breeze whistling up our kilts we set off across the open paddock past a horse & flocks of sheep which are used to keep the grass down until planting can take place, plus they bring in a bit of cash to further the replanting. Oh, if you have potlickers they must be on a lead especially with the ewes & lambs in the paddocks.

Immediately on your left is the estuary with its salt marsh fringes jointed rush, manuka and cabbage trees, on your right is a Department of Conservation bush remnant that we will pass close to on our return journey. As you saunter along don't forget to close the gates and inform your cherubs about the pest control boxes marked by pink triangles. Wooden boxes on the ground are stoat control, black boxes on the posts are possum control, and both love to break fingers that are poked into them so keep clear.

Some may consider it a relatively boring walk through the open paddocks however there is plenty to see in addition to the little things like raindrops sparkling on blades of grass, moths, butterflies and other tiny insects, and did I mention the sheep dudu's, turn some of them over and you'll be surprised at what kids can find. What better place for the kids to burn off their excess energy.

At post number two there is a trig station on the hill. There are a number of rolling dunes here that the kids made themselves dizzy on by rolling down them staggering back up to roll down again. I was waiting in anticipation of someone throwing up. While we waited for stomachs to settle down before having a drink and a muesli bar at the picnic table a siege of white-faced herons flew overhead much to the delight of the cherubs, a tui, a harrier and paradise ducks came over for a look as well. We also heard a fernbird. From the top of this hill you can see across the New River Estuary to the tall buildings in the city, the Roger Sutton Walkway, Waihopi River and the Hokonui Hills.

Flynn led the headlong dashes from one yellow topped post to another all the while keeping up a non stop chatter, he must have been breathing through his ears, (can't think who he has inherited it from). Arriving at post number four indicating a body of water the excited kids asked if they could swim there on a hot day. The look on Monique's face when I informed them that it was an oxidation pond for sewage was priceless and would go well on a Westpac ad.

Further along we climbed over a stile to access another body of water where, according to the brochure, 700 cubic metres of material was moved to create a pond and wetland area. Continued restoration will make this a wonderful area over time with flax sedges and scattered shrubs including coprosma planted to attract fernbirds. black shags, little shags and white-faced herons are already visiting.

From the pond area we followed the *thin* yellow topped poles on a meandering loop around the pond, through the restoration area. Easily visible are the varying degrees of growth in the plants all marked by white wooden markers, from recently planted to more mature ones planted in 2000, the growth is heartening. *Pittosporum tenuifolium*, peppertree, broadleaf, totara, fuchsia et al are looking healthy and strong, some in flower. Looking south tall kahikatea, matai & rimu are visible a reminder of the original forest that once covered Otatara.

Occasional patches of blackberry and elderberry have invaded this area; actually you could do your bit for pest control if you collect the flowers of the elderberry and make some non alcoholic elderflower champagne for Christmas Dinner, (*see recipe further on*).

Underfoot it becomes a bit uneven so take care. This area was once rank grass and is now reverting to a new forest. However, Chilean flame creeper is beginning to slide insidiously over some of the immature plantings, as is the native *Muehlenbeckia*. Bracken which lines the track in places was fluffy with soft new growth and is beautifully soft to the touch..

Pink markers here indicate pest trap lines so don't be tempted to follow them you may become 'bushed'. Soon we arrived back into the more recently planted area around the pond and accompanied by a skylarks trilling we wound our way up the small rise by the fence line and tucked ourselves into the bush edge then it was a race down to the gate between posts two and three which led us back to the start.

There are a number of options at Bushy Point: a 10 min walk to the viewpoint, a 30 min walk to the pond or a leisurely hour right around not counting stops. A great area for the cherubs to run off steam as well as seek out tiny treasures amongst the grass and bush plus views and heaps of birds to identify.

Footloose



Bushy Point marker post

Make An Anemometer

An anemometer is a wind speed indicator. Here's a good project for a wet and windy afternoon. You need two plastic detergent scoops, a paintbrush and an old felt pen. Use a gluegun to attach the laundry scoops to the paintbrush, facing in opposite directions. Break the felt pen and poke the body into a hole in a place where it will catch the best of the wind. Sit the paintbrush in the tube and watch it spin.



anemometer

Daffodil Bay Undertakers

Each day millions of worms, shellfish and crabs die on the mudflat. This is good news for the scavenging mudflat whelk! Smelling decay or body fluids, the 2cm snails emerge from the mud and follow the concentration of smell until they find their breakfast. Using its toothed tongue or radula the snail rasps away at the flesh until only a shell remains. Test this yourself by dropping a bit of food on the wet mud towards the low-tide mark. Within a minute, the undertakers will be heading towards your offering.

Lloyd Esler

Following on from the anemometer... is there anyone out there with a good South-land weather story that could be included in a book on the local climate? Something along the lines of – woaaaah, that was a near miss!; duuuuuck!; I hope you're a good swimmer; ruuuunnnn!; my life flashed...; I'm never getting on a boat again; talk about brass monkeys Trev!; ... rising about a foot a minute...; No hurricanes? yeah right!

Whirlwinds, floods, frosts, lightning strikes, gales...

Lloyd Esler



mudflat whelk

Be careful what you wish for...

...especially if you like to eat what you sow!

Thinking of being adventurous in your vege garden this summer? I find it hard to resist interesting seed packets and consequently have plants appearing which have me searching for last years catalogues for identification, together with the reason I selected them in the first place!

The heritage section is cleverly targeted at consumers like myself – that is, with more imagination than experience. I

order when a variety combines an appealing name with a photograph of a vegetable of a gorgeous colour – Chicory Palla Rossa Early, Beetroot Bulls Blood, Spinach American Curled, Dutch Giant Corn Salad, Kohlrabi Early Purple Vienna and Burdock Takingogowa Long, just for starters.

I painstakingly sprouted seeds, potted up, gave away extras and transplanted my seedlings into my organically nurtured raised beds, watering with only the purest rainwater, and generally giving these "special" chosen ones every indulgence. And so I know how and why certain plants get a heritage classification – its because even if you CAN get them growing, no-one knows what to do with the harvest!

My chicory took an entire year to grow ONE beautiful deep red extremely bitter lettuce type plant without yet the beautiful blue flower spike as promised, my spinach curled and went straight to seed, my bulls blood beetroot grew only small woody clots, the kohlrabi was great for pickles if picked before becoming a woody monster and the burdock has decided to take over the garden with its huge hairy leaves and skinny white root that I have no idea what use it for at all. Ideas anyone??

Linda Jackson

Wanted – Old Mailbox

The Otatara Landcare Group would like an old mailbox to use to hold brochures at the start of the Bushy Point track. If you can help please contact Chris Rance, ph 213-1161.

Elderflower Champagne (another weed control recipe!)

Chris Rance

10 large elderflower heads	1kg sugar
2 lemons	4 tbsp white wine
10 litres of water	vinegar

Wash lemons, peel rind off as thinly as possible and squeeze into a bucket with rind and flowers.

Add sugar and wine vinegar. Pour on water, put a lid on and leave for 24 hours, stirring every 6 hours.

Remove flowerheads and rind, sieve into large jar and pour into sterilised bottles and put caps on.

Plastic bottles are best as glass can explode under pressure! Ready to drink from 2 weeks to 6 months – or just in time for Christmas!

Two Mystery Animals

Here are the answers to two frequently asked questions. The first is 'What is this funny thing I picked up on the beach?' followed by a description of a brittle, black, wrinkly thing. It is the egg case of an Elephant fish, also called a Ghost shark. The egg is known as a Mermaid's Purse. It is partially buried in the sand a little way offshore and a fully-formed miniature shark emerges eventually. The empty Mermaid's purse is then washed ashore.

Your closest encounter with an Elephant fish may be beneath the batter of your next lot of take-aways. (You are on the outside of the batter and the shark is on the inside.) The photo shows an egg case with the shark still inside.



elephant fish eggcase

Number two is the pupa of the Huhu beetle. This is the brief stage between the grub and the adult. The adult doesn't feed and only lives for a few days. The grub lives three years eating rotten wood, of which there is an abundance on Sandy Point. Collect a container full, eat one to see what they taste like and take the rest to the museum for tuatara food. The container should have rotten wood in it, otherwise the grubs bite each other and die.



huhu grub

Lloyd Esler

A Nestbox for an owl?

Yes, owls do take to nest boxes. They like a 70mm entrance hole in a box about 800mm long and 200mm width and height. It needs to be as lightproof as possible. If there are plenty of tree holes nearby the box is less likely to be used as natural holes seem to be preferred. Of course starlings will take ownership as soon as the box is installed but they will be ousted by the owl. Ousting for desirable nesting spots is quite common. Mynas displace starlings, possums oust kiwis, and starlings oust each other, chucking out nesting material, eggs and chicks in disputes over ownership. Otatara has a small owl population. My owl box – known as Owlcatraz – is owlless but well starlingised.

Lloyd Esler

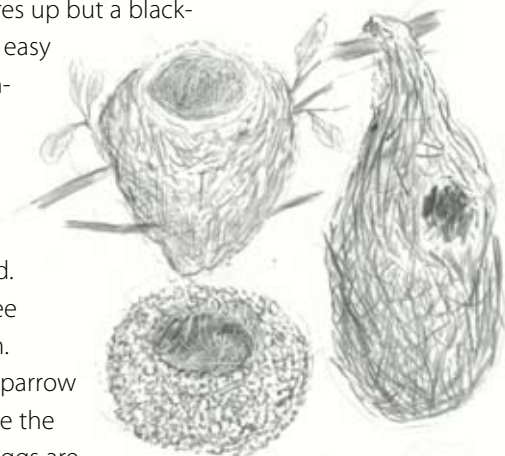
Birds Nest Soup

Take a large saucepan, add a litre of milk, a handful of salt and one used blackbird nest and bring slowly to the boil. Discard both the nest and the milk, wash the saucepan and put in a cup of water and sprinkle in a packet of dried chicken soup. Bring to the boil, simmer for five minutes and sip slowly.

This is cheaper than real birds-nest soup which is made from swifts' nests. The birds use their saliva to construct the nests which are glued high up on the walls of caves.

If you are going to experiment with birds' nest soup it may be helpful to know whose nest you are stewing. A typical garden will have four species nesting – blackbird, thrush, dunnock and silveryeye. With suitable holes, nest boxes, high trees and dense shrubbery you can add fantail, grey warbler, starling, chaffinch and sparrow. Here are some of the nests.

Blackbirds and thrushes usually nest 2-5 metres up but a blackbird can nest on the ground. Nests are often easy to find as the female birds' nest-material-gathering operations are quite conspicuous and you can easily see where they go. Blackbirds line the nest with straw, and thrushes with mud. Thrush eggs are blue with black spots and blackbird eggs are greenish and speckled. Starlings nest in a roof cavity or a hole in a tree or sometimes in a dense clump of vegetation. Their eggs are blue. The dunnock or hedge sparrow has a well-built nest, often only a metre above the ground in a twiggy shrub. Four bright blue eggs are laid. The silveryeye makes the smallest and flimsiest nest



clockwise top left – fantail, grey warbler and chaffinch nests

you will find, 1-3 metres up in shrubbery but very hard to locate. The fantail builds higher up, making a bulkier nest than the silveryeyes, and using cobwebs. Sparrows make a great untidy mass of straw high in a tree or in the rafters with a tunnel into the feather-lined nest chamber. Although they look like finches they are actually weaver-birds. Grey warblers make a hanging nest with a side entrance hole. The chaffinch nest is tidy and decorated with scraps of lichen.

Lloyd Esler

Muehlenbeckia vs Old Man's Beard

A question arose at the recent Otatara community meeting about the plant that was smothering vegetation at Sandy Point and other areas in Otatara. This climber is sometimes called old man's beard, but is actually large-leaved muehlenbeckia (*Muehlenbeckia australis*) - a native vine. While it is considered a weed in some situations, it also forms a protective barrier around the edge of bush and provides both habitat and food for native insects, which in turn provide sustenance for some bird species. Muehlenbeckia has become more rampant since human settlement as clearance of land has created disturbed areas with lots of light, which are ideal conditions for muehlenbeckia to grow and become dominant.



old man's beard

Old man's beard (*Clematis vitalba*) is a different beast. It is not native to NZ and doesn't provide the same quality of food or habitat for native insects as muehlenbeckia. Also,



Muehlenbeckia

though old man's beard is found in Otatara, it isn't as widespread as muehlenbeckia. However old man's beard is such a serious threat to the bush and other vegetation, it has been classed an Eradication Pest Plant for Southland. If you think you've seen old man's beard around, give me a call or email at Environment Southland (Ph 0800 768845 or email randall.milne@es.govt.nz).

These drawings, courtesy of Lloyd Esler, illustrate the differences between muehlenbeckia and old man's beard, and the following table summarizes some of the noticeable distinctions between the two climbers.

	MUEHLENBECKIA	OLD MAN'S BEARD
Leaves	Single heart-shaped leaves, with wavy margins	Made up of 5 leaflets (rarely 3), often with toothed margins
Stems	Round and slender with grooves. Young growth is green, later turning brown-grey	Very long, woody and with prominent ribs in young stems, furrows in older vines
Flowers	Small and greenish in colour. Found from Nov-April	Larger and creamy white in colour. Found from Dec-May
Fruit/Seed	Glossy black fruit, has 3 grooved nuts in fleshy cups	Seeds are grey with distinctive white plumes. Found in dense fluffy clusters which can stay on the plant over winter



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
 185 Grant Road
 Otatara. Phone 213-1161

