

September 2017

It's been a while ...

Welcome to Chirpings. It's getting on for a year since we were last in touch and this is the first of what we hope will be a continuing series of newsletters that will keep members up to date with Wellington Branch events and other environmental news.

We welcome any feedback that we might find useful for future editions.



In June this year Colin Ryder resigned as chair and from the Branch committee. Another committee member, Mike Britton (a former general manager of Forest & Bird's National Office), has stepped into the role and we thank him for taking on what is often a time-consuming task.

Our thanks to Colin for his work in chairing the Branch committee. He gave the Branch a couple of new avenues to follow, and got us more involved with the Predator Free movement in Wellington, a project which we are enthusiastically pursuing. He also highlighted the need for better communications between the Branch and members, which had been a concern for some time.

More hands on deck

Wellington Branch is now running 5 projects (the Native Plant Nursery, Places for Penguins, Chartwell Bush, Tanera Gully, plus the Branch's involvement with Predator Free Wellington). There is administrative work associated with the oversight of these projects, although most of it is handled by sub-committees.

The committee would like the Branch to be even more active and has several initiatives in mind, especially in the broad area of communications (such as more frequent newsletters to members). To achieve a great result we really need a couple more people to join our small committee.

The work is not too demanding and we work as a team to share the workload. Monthly meetings take a couple of hours. If this appeals to you and you'd be interested in finding out what is involved, please contact the Chairperson at wellington.branch@forestandbird.org.nz or on 021 783 776.



Two meetings that may be of interest

Kevin Hackwell is Forest & Bird's Manager, Campaigns and Advocacy, and he will be speaking at the Aro Valley Hall, 48 Aro St, 7-9pm on 27 September 2017.

His topic:

Predator Free New Zealand — how practical is this goal and how might we go about achieving it?

In 1960 New Zealand became a world leader with the first ever successful rat eradication on the small Maria (Ruapuke) Island in the Hauraki Gulf. In the 57 years since, we have stayed at the forefront of predator eradication to the extent that we are now seriously planning to be predator free by 2050.

How realistic is this goal? How would we go about achieving it? What tools might we use?

For further information please contact Denis at denis.asher3@gmail.com or Julia at jbwstace@gmail.com.

Kevin will be speaking again the following night (28 September) as a panel member at an event hosted by the Royal Society. Here's an extract from the Royal Society's notice of the event:

Editing Our Genes: Promises and Pitfalls

Once science fiction, the power to engineer DNA is now within reach. Using a new genome editing technique, scientists are exploring deletion, alteration, and addition of genes to a huge variety of organisms. Perhaps most promising, but also most controversial, are the possible uses of the technology in humans.

Editing them out: The end for pests?

If gene editing technologies are to become widely used throughout agricultural production, what needs to be considered? For example, could there be other repercussions from developing crops resistant to bacterial blight, or that are more adaptable to drought, or producing animals with more muscle for increased meat yield?

Kim Hill leads a discussion by:

Bioethicist **Josephine Johnston**, Director of Research at The Hastings Centre (the world's oldest bioethics research institute); Director of New Zealand's Biological Heritage National Science Challenge, Dr **Andrea Byrom**; Group Manager Campaigns and Advocacy **Kevin Hackwell** from Forest and Bird; and Environment Director **Jan Hania** from the Next Foundation.

Where and when: 6pm Thursday 28 September | Riley Centre, Wellington High School

Public event: General Admission \$25; Friends of the Royal Society \$20; Members of the Royal Society \$15. Door sales, if available on the night, \$30.

Visit: royalsociety.org.nz/events for more details, or to book a ticket.

Rifleman transfer postponed

Early this year, there was a plan to translocate a number of New Zealand's smallest bird — the rifleman, tītipounamu, from Wainuiomata to Zealandia. However, research by DOC found that the population at the donor site was below expectation and it was decided to postpone the transfer. It's thought that greater availability of food after a number of successful forest seeding seasons has led to an increase in rat numbers. Rat predation is the likely cause of the reduced rifleman population.

The decline in the numbers of this smallest of New Zealand birds at the intended source has prompted investigation into how the species is faring elsewhere. Zealandia had done fund raising for the transfer and maintenance of this tiny green-backed bird and has set that money aside for now. It will be used for a second attempt at the transferral, or if a healthy supply population cannot be found, for another project.

Fernbirds released

From an email from Robin Chesterfield Chairman Pauatahanui Wildlife Management Reserve

In late June, 22 fernbirds were released in the central section of the Pauatahanui Reserve between the Pauatahanui Stream and Grays Road. The birds have been sighted on a number of occasions in this area, also south of the Pauatahanui Stream and north of Grays Road. Banding on a couple of birds has also been identified. The birds have been observed from the track and have been heard by people working at the reserve.



Fernbird - photo by David Cornick

In addition to rat and mustelid trapping the reserve management team is planning to use mouse bait near to nesting areas once they are known. Baits will be mounted and shielded for mouse-only access.

Over spring, members of Birds New Zealand will be assisting Forest & Bird volunteers to determine the number of resident fernbirds, and the pairs' territories.

The plan is to transfer a further 25 fernbirds to Pauatahanui from Lake Rotokare (in South Taranaki) in April 2018, assuming the first transfer is a success.

The reserve is easily accessible just off Highway 58 between Mana and the Hutt Valley. It is a great place to see royal spoonbill, kingfisher, shags, white faced heron, shorebirds, various ducks and many others. Visitors are encouraged to report fernbird sighting and locations by emailing pauatahanuireservecommittee@outlook.com.

Pelagic trips

Birds New Zealand has run a couple of pelagic bird watching trips recently. On 5 August, a chartered fishing boat took 20



Incoming

keen birders out into Cook Strait. Departing at dawn, quite a few little penguins were seen between Matiu/Somes and Makaro/Ward islands before a perfect silhouette of Pencarrow light appeared as the sun rose behind it.



Dawn at Pencarrow

In deep water out at 'the trench', fish scraps were tossed overboard to attract ocean seabirds close to the boat. Northern royal, southern royal and

wandering albatross were seen along with their smaller cousins the mollymawks, of which white capped, Salvin's and black browed were seen in numbers. There were also four northern giant petrels and lots of dainty cape pigeons darting about and squabbling over the scraps left by the bigger birds.

Rather surprisingly, no westland petrels were seen on that particular trip — they are normally present in Cook Strait. Everyone had a great day, and a billion photos were taken.



Salvin's mollymawk



Northern giant petrel



Black browed mollymawk



Cape pigeons

Places for Penguins update

The Places for Penguins team has been doing some great pest control work. Their year commences with the start of the Little Penguin/kororā nesting season in July. In the year to June 2017, their volunteers trapped more than 430 pests including 294 rats, 13 stoats and 7 weasels, about 70 mice and over 30 hedgehogs. These pests were trapped by 'Victor' traditional traps or DOC 200s, which accounted for the mustelids taken and underlined the need for a mix of trap types.

In addition to that, their 57 Goodnature™ A24 self-resetting traps recorded well over 700 strikes, or activations. Not every strike is certain to have killed a pest animal and, since the carcasses of pests killed are usually removed by scavengers, it's not possible to be certain of exactly what was killed, but it was probably a few hundred more rats and possibly other pest species. Particularly important were several stoat and weasel catches near penguin nesting areas.



Goodnature trap in situ

Forest & Bird has been supporting Pest Free Wellington by purchasing and lending traps to local pest management groups. The more traps and bait stations there are in action the fewer pests will be present in the 'burbs.

Proposed development at Shelly Bay

There is a proposal for a major residential and commercial development at Shelly Bay. Submissions to Wellington City Council closed on 14 August and about 1,100 were received. Hearings were held on 7 and 8 September.

In its submission, Forest & Bird Wellington Branch opposed the development because:

- it will be extremely difficult to mitigate the impact on local wildlife, especially Little Penguins (kororā), which nest along the coast of Evans Bay
- we think it unwise at a time when sea levels are expected to rise more and more rapidly to allow a new subdivision of about 1,000 residents to be established at sea level
- although the developers claim otherwise, there is likely to be a need for Shelly Bay Road to be widened — with severe impact on kororā nesting sites.



If you would like to see a copy of the F&B Wellington Branch submission, please reply to this newsletter e-mail with the words “Shelly Bay Submission” as the subject.

The airport runway

In August 2016, the Branch lodged a submission opposing the extension of the airport runway. Our reason for opposition to the proposal was the lack of information that the airport company had



provided to support its resource consent application. The extension would create considerable environmental impact, but the airport’s impact report could best be described as superficial and barely scientific.

The proposal has also run into opposition from the NZ Airline Pilots Association over inadequate safety areas in the proposed extension. This matter has been through the High Court and the Court of Appeal and has now reached the Supreme Court, where the case was heard on 24–25 August. The Court’s decision has been reserved — until it is known, the runway extension resource consent application remains on hold.

The Branch is a party to the proceedings under Section 274 of the Resource Management Act.

E-newsletter

Do you have any ideas for subject matter or things you’d be interested in hearing about in this newsletter? Please let us know by email to wellington.branch@forestandbird.org.nz.

Maybe you could submit articles or send in photos that would be of interest to other Wellington Forest & Bird members. If so, please contact the address above. If sending anything, please state who the author is and the photographer responsible for any images contributed, along with permission for us to use them in a future newsletter. All contributions will be considered, but inclusion is at the editor’s discretion.

