

Kapiti Mana Forest and Bird Newsletter - March 2021



The white line from the road up the hill is an irrigator and the semicircle tracks on the hill are its wheel tracks.

Chairs Opinion - The benefits of oil

Pene and I are currently on holiday in the lower half of the South Island. These are some of my impressions.

Farmland is beautiful in its way. The rectangular or increasingly circular paddocks so green with contented sheep and cattle, paddocks of sunflowers or kale, and the occasional farmhouse.

It's not like it was. In the past there were more people in the landscape and towns. Farmers now require very few strong hands to do the work and little town support. You can see this in the derelict buildings in the towns and around farms. Most towns have suffered a loss of income and they are now fairly derelict with many of the shops and houses abandoned. The farmers have often moved from an old house to a new bigger one, sometimes multiple times, leaving the old house to fall apart.

Farm machinery has increased in number, in size and in complexity - taking the place of the human labour force that once managed the land. The size of farms has also increased - mechanisation has made smaller farms unprofitable.

The use of irrigation systems is very obvious. Huge circulating machines circling around paddocks and strings of sprinklers (an understatement) watering the rest. From what we saw, many went day and night.

We stayed at an Air B&B near Kia ora. The whole farm was watered. The water supplied to the farm, came from the Waitaki River. The North Otago Irrigation Scheme, NOIS extracts about 8 cubic metres per second and supplies farmers in land bounded by Duntroon, Herbert, the coast, Kakanui, Oamaru, and Georgetown. If this was the only extraction

from the Waitaki River, that might be OK. Its normal flow is several hundred cubic metres per second, but there are huge irrigation schemes taking water out all the way from upland hills and plains to the coast.

Tractors dispensing fertiliser can be seen driving up and down paddocks. This has allowed the number of the animals per hectare to increase, and those animals are bigger than they used to be.

Machinery, irrigation on this scale and artificial fertilisers would not be possible without abundant and cheap energy.

I read an item written about Rod Carr, the chair of the Climate Change Commission. He is reported as saying “the work done by one barrel of oil (166 litres) is equivalent to 10,000 labour hours” and “If you think of us lifting and using 80 million barrels a day, it’s as if every one of the 8 billion humans on the planet had 12 workers working for them.” Apply that to farming and you can see why there are fewer people in the landscape.

The environmental consequences are:

- The rivers and streams have less water in them.

Colin Ryder

On the 9th of March, Colin Ryder died after an accident at home. Colin achieved more, for the Wellington Region, of the type of conservation that Forest and Bird does than anyone else - that is getting land bought and protected, restoring that land and implementing pest control.

For Kapiti/Mana, Colin was the person who drove the project to get rid of mice from Mana Island.

He was a contemporary of mine and volunteered in conservation as I did. We both were awarded Old Blues and were Wellingtonians of the Year finalists. He set up or helped set up many organisations, usually trusts, raised money for them, helped them sort out what was important to do and helped them achieve great things. Usually he was their treasurer but actually he was a leader. He was bold and believed in “Just getting on with it”.

Colin can take some, or most, of the credit for Zealandia, buying land around Zealandia to

- There have nitrate and phosphate levels that are much higher than in previous times.
- Oxygen levels are much lower.
- The ability of the river to dilute pollutants is much less because of extraction.

Flows in rivers are smaller in autumn, but it seems to me that some of the rivers and streams are smaller than they used to be. If the trend continues, we may have to call Shag River, Shag Creek and the Selwyn River an ephemeral Stream.

Our ability to use the world’s resources of oil and minerals, to produce labour saving devices and products that allow us to exploit the planet so successfully, have lead to a climate and a biodiversity emergency.

We need to work out and implement a way to get back to a position where the climate and biodiversity flourish, where we don’t need to use all the land and stored energy in the earth to survive.

I am often in discussions where solutions are put forward. For climate action, in NZ, we need to be able to trust the Climate Change Commission. For biodiversity action, perhaps we need a Biodiversity Survival Commission.

enhance Zealandia, (The Halo Project), buying Baring Head for a Regional Park and guiding and financing ecological and historical restoration and pest control of it, Taputeranga Marine Reserve, Later work on Matiu Somes Island, the list goes on.

He raised millions for these projects. He must have spent huge amounts of time completing applications for grants and lobbying for people to buy and preserve ecological land yet he also trapped and physically worked on the projects.

I only know a small amount of the work he did. We have so much to thank him for. A force has gone out of Wellington Region conservation. The phrase that describes Colin is Kia Kaha - Get stuck in, Keep going, Be strong. But he also thought well, planned and wrote and was bold. I will miss him. Even those who never knew him will miss him because future ecological gains that the Wellington Region could achieve, will not have the benefit of having Colin Ryder as a wise and driving force. He has made a difference in the natural world.

Climate Change Commission's Draft Advice to NZ Government

The Draft advice is an important step for New Zealand, and we will feel its impacts for decades. If you don't have time to read the 600 page document, you can use (and tweak) the Forest and Bird petition on the draft advice: <https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/petitions/go-carbon-zero>.

Take action soon, submissions close next week.

Sustainable Tourism

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Simon Upton, has released an update of his 2019 Sustainable Tourism report, recommending four proposals:

1. Departure Tax;
2. Environmental criteria for future tourism infrastructure funding
3. Tightened rules on conservation lands and waters
4. Strengthened the standard for self-contained freedom camping.

Read more here: <https://www.pce.parliament.nz/media/197087/report-not-100-but-four-steps-closer-to-sustainable-tourism-pdf-24mb.pdf>

Or listen to his interview on Radio NZ: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetoon/audio/2018784289/tourism-is-not-benign-and-must-change-environment-commissioner>

The Economics of Protecting Nature

A recent study from the University of Cambridge analysed 62 sites (mainly forests and wetlands) worldwide found the economic benefits of protecting and restoring natural sites were greater than benefits from exploitation. Most of this benefit comes from carbon regulation including sequestration. At a conservative \$31/tonne of carbon, 70% of sites were of greater value unexploited, and 60% of sites would still provide greater economic benefit if the price was just \$5/tonne.

The assessment was made using the decade-old TESSA tool (Toolkit for Ecosystem Service Site-based Assessment)

This article will mainly be of interest to those interested in the scientific/economic aspects of conserving nature and the increasing value of the ecosystem services that nature provides.

<https://phys.org/news/2021-03-economic-benefits-nature-outweigh-exploiting.html>.

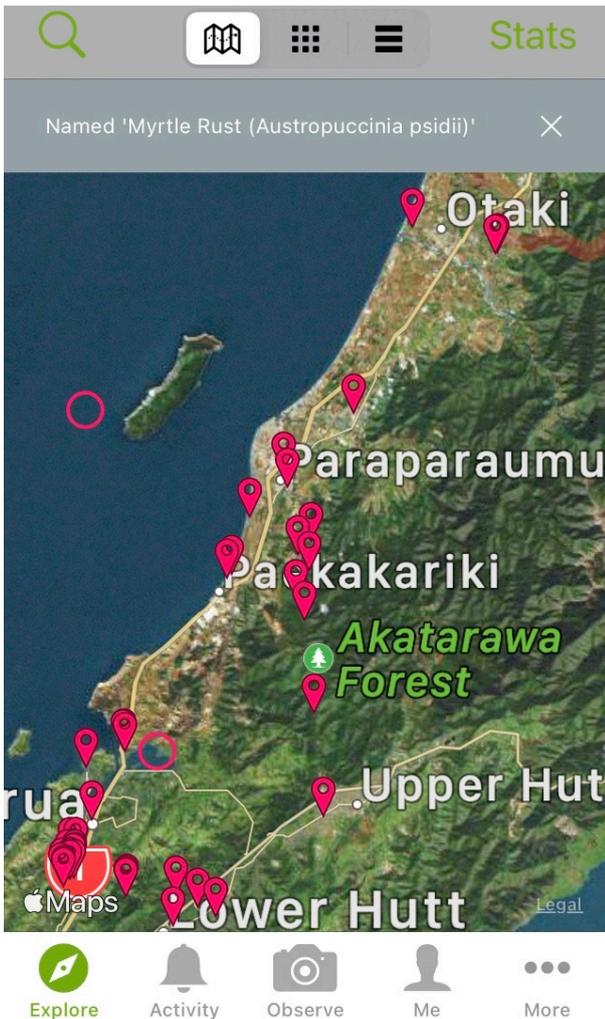
Myrtle Rust has arrived nearby

In 2019 there was quite a fuss about the arrival of Myrtle Rust in New Zealand. After a while things went quiet, but unfortunately this plant disease is still out there. Here's a recent map of where examples have been found in our branch area. Originating in guavas, this disease, which disperses fine yellow spores by wind, arrived in New Zealand having been blown from South America to Australia, where it has affected many of their eucalypts, and from there to us in New Zealand. Myrtle Rust has had a significant impact on Myrtaceae species, and has so far had the most significant impact on ramrama but also affects metrosiderous species (including rata and pohutukawa) and maire, including swamp maire (tawake) which is very difficult to successfully seed bank. On the next page there's an example of what it looks like, and a

recent map of where it's been found. Seed banking, coordinated through the team at Otaki-Wilsons Bush is a major task, and we hope to get a speaker on this for the branch later this year. Myrtle Rust is most commonly found in spring as the weather warms.

What to do if you think you see it:

- Don't touch it, or the plant (as it spreads very easily) or move plants near it
- Photograph the plant, the infected area and spores, and note your location (GPS is best). Then load these onto iNaturalist website <https://inaturalist.nz/> (or app) so your identification can be assessed/confirmed
- You can also call 0800809966 to talk to MPI
- If you know it is in a place, be careful not to spread it.



This map shows where Myrtle Rust has been found



Next Meeting April

Next meeting is 21 April, which will be our AGM. Our guest speaker is George Hobson on Forest and Bird's Youth Hubs and what drives them, so bring your young people. A Kāpiti F&B Youth Hub is in the process of being set up.

We are looking for more members for our committee, even a new chairperson. It is not an onerous job, and it's a great place to learn, and to make a difference. I'd be happy to talk with you if you want to know more.

In lieu of a March meeting, members may wish to attend the talk Greening Kāpiti's Urban Development by Dr Catherine Knight on the urgent need for the natural environment to shape our urban development. She will focus on the restoration of the Wharemauku Stream which flows through the Kāpiti Coast's main urban areas and is facing increasing development pressures.

Thursday 25th March @ 6:30pm at Te Raukura ki Kāpiti - Kāpiti College Performing Arts Centre.

Editor: Russell Bell, Email russelljamesbell@gmail.com. Phone 0212266047. Your feedback on this newsletter would be most welcome as would contributions to future newsletters.

Kind regards

Russell