

Kāpiti-Mana Forest and Bird Newsletter

October 2024

Editorial: Who should pay for peat removed for residential development.

Last month I wrote about the problem farmers and Fonterra have from farming on drained peat soils. The RNZ article said 'Should Fonterra pay?'

Kāpiti also has peat. Much of it has been farmed and is now being built on. The residential development of North Kāpiti is an example as is the section on old SH1 just south of Paraparaumu.

Once there were rows of forested sand dunes with kahikatea and pukatea dominant peat swamps in between. They sequestered and held a huge amount of carbon.



Then the undulating sand dunes interspersed with flat peat areas were cleared and drained for farming. See below.



Until recently, that situation remained in North Waikanae but now there is a building boom and the situation has changed.

First, the sand dunes are terraced so that each house will have a flat section often a metre or so above the next neighbour.



Surplus sand is accumulated and piled up. Then the operation shifts to peat. Building on peat is always a problem because peat contains water, is not load bearing and can be unstable. In North Waikanae, about 19 ha of peat was extracted – dug up and put in huge piles awaiting its final destination.



When all the peat has been taken and the substrate below is sand, drains are put in to keep the water table low and the area is backfilled with the sand won from terracing the sand dunes.



The flat sand is compacted and top coated with peat, then the area is grassed ready to be divided into sections.

This process is called Extract and replace.



It is a very satisfactory process unless you live in a climate change world. That is because the swamp would have had its water level near ground level. No carbon would be emitted from it and the peat would be increasing by about 1mm per year. As a farm, the water table might be 400mm below ground level, leaving the surface dry which would allow the carbon in the surface peat to oxidize to atmospheric carbon dioxide.

To build a residential area, the once soaked peat has been dug out, trucked around, put into piles, then shifted back as a thin layer on top of dry sand sections. It will be exposed to atmospheric oxygen and produce a lot of carbon. Some of the peat may be sold. Whatever happens to it, it is fairly certain that it will not be rewetted so all of it will contribute to climate change.

This is not only happening in North Waikanae. Another example is on old SH1 just south of Paraparaumu. The expressway also used the extraction and replace process.



A close up of a peat pile being redistributed.

Neither farmers nor Fonterra pay for the carbon that their peat fields emit and neither does anyone associated with the residential development of Kapiti peatlands. In fact the carbon emissions may not even be accounted for and if it is not accounted for, there will be no incentive to reduce this source of carbon. And that is what we as part of a world society need to do, reduce climate emissions. RNZ could ask "Should KCDC* or the developer pay for the emissions from the peat they have effectively mined?" This is another difficult discussion to ask but as climate change ramps up, it is a discussion we have to have. * *If KCDC is interested in responding, I would consider putting a response in a future newsletter.*

Russell

REPRINT: EDS press release on the Fast-Track Bill

We thought the Environmental Defence Society's press release such a good summary, we asked permission to reprint it...

This article shows why it's important to support F&B (as well as EDS, Greenpeace and others) in an environment like we're in today.

Select Committee Report: no let-up in the Government's war on nature

18 October 2024

The Environment Select Committee has reported back to Parliament ([see here](#)) on the Fast-track Approvals Bill. Unsurprisingly, there are majority and minority reports with the Government members following Ministerial directions and largely ignoring the 27,000 submissions, mostly opposed to the Bill.

"The report confirms that final decisions on approvals will be in the hands of the Expert Panels and not Ministers. That was expected and is a good change to the Bill," said EDS CEO Gary Taylor.

"However, the three key amendments needed to make this Bill less bad have not materialised and that is deeply concerning.

"The first is that purpose and decision-making criteria remain heavily weighted against the environment, meaning that the Expert Panel process will largely be a rubber-stamping exercise. So, a new coal mine that will lead to increased greenhouse gas emissions, forest and wetland clearance and harm to indigenous wildlife would likely get consented.

"The second is that legal standing to make submissions to Expert Panels remains heavily circumscribed with local communities and environmental groups cut out of the process by default. This is perverse, considering that the Government is providing offshore companies with a privileged track for approvals while preventing New Zealanders from having a say.

"The third is that the Select Committee has not engaged in considering the Second Schedule projects and the method by which they are to be included in the legislation: via an Amendment Paper at a later reading of the Bill. There has been ample commentary on the questionable merits of many of the listed projects and on the negative constitutional implications of that approach.

"There are other changes that have been recommended including correcting numerous drafting errors and ambiguities. These will need careful analysis. But overall, the Select Committee report is extremely disappointing and shows it is in thrall to Ministers. The minority reports reveal more insights and that if enacted there is likely to be support for repeal when the government changes.

"Finally let me reassert that EDS is opposed to this Bill. We have workable fast-track law in place already and the review of the Resource Management Act is the place to consider further evolution of that law. It has been quite misleading for Minister Bishop and the Prime Minister to be saying in the House earlier this week that EDS supports the Bill. Taking selective comments out of context like they have done is both annoying and wrong," Mr Taylor concluded.

More: Gary Taylor 021 895 896 or gary@eds.org.nz

Biochar

At a KCDC event, for people who won KCDC climate grants, I met a person who made biochar (a material that is essentially carbon) from organic material. The material has to be heated in the absence of air, so it turns to biochar (like charcoal but more stable). If it is made well, (heated to high temperature without air) biochar may remain stable as a soil conditioner for hundreds or maybe thousands of years.

Mātuku Muster

At least six branch members took part in the nationwide bittern count last weekend. So far we have not heard of any bitterns being seen or heard (though we did hear fernbirds). We'd be interested to know if any branch members know of bitterns being heard last weekend (or at any other time) within our branch area (Titahi Bay to Peka Peka).

3D Mapping of NZ Ecosystems

Navigator X is a new online 3D map showing anyone who wants to invest in improving the natural environment, where they can get the best bang for their buck.

Eco Index, which launched it, is a company stemming from a research project out of University of Waikato to guide biodiversity investment. Among its offerings is a public, open-access [Ecosystem Reconstruction Map](#) for high level biodiversity information across Aotearoa New Zealand.

The map helps users prioritise a range of options that represent their own reasons for undertaking ecosystem reconstruction such as riparian benefits, improving land stability and supporting threatened environments.

Assessing our rohe, for ecosystems currently representing less than 15% of what they should be, and therefore of primary concern for restoration are: swamps (6.57%: 792.85 ha needed), kahikatea-matai/tawa-mahoe forest (5.82%: 925.52 ha needed), and kahikatea-pukatea-tawa forest (3%: 375.17ha needed).

MEETINGS

October Branch Public Meeting

On 16 October, Yolande Brophy from Te Rito Gardens spoke on an innovative restoration project they'd undertaken in an old landfill site at Otaihanga. The pond and surrounds was devoid of growth due to the nasty chemicals which had leached into it, and the lack of oxygen in the water. Their solution was to create a raft on which they planted wetland plants such as carex, sedges and rushes into straw, so that their roots grew into the water. By then placing the raft in position to disrupt what water flow there was, the roots caused the water to circulate becoming aerated, and provided a screen of roots to absorb toxins. As with all wetlands, the varying water levels have made planting the edges a challenge, but having tackled the weeds, and planting sympathetically the site has now become a loved track for dog walkers. Unfortunately, it is currently out of bounds until dangerous old-man pines can be dealt with – but the wetland continues to improve.

Branch Meet and Greet in Plimmerton: 3 November 2024

Kāpiti-Mana Branch of Forest & Bird is having a meet and greet afternoon tea (3pm) at St Andrews Church Hall, 11 Steyne Avenue, Plimmerton for members and environmental volunteers. Apart from recognising those who support our natural environment, we also want to gauge interest in having more F&B public meetings in Mana (as noted in our previous newsletter). We'd love to see you there, and would appreciate RSVPs (if possible) for catering and expedient name tags to: kapitimana.branch@forestandbird.org.nz

Dealing with the Climate Crisis - Prof James Renwick: 6 November 2024

Leading climate scientist Prof James Renwick is speaking to the NZ Fabian Society. He is a lead author on three Assessment Reports of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) that meets each year in what are known as COP summits. He won the Prime Minister's prize for Science

Communication in 2018 and has served on our Climate Commission. He will provide a snapshot of the latest data on climate change and discuss what needs to be done.

At: 2/57 Willis St (enter via the lifts at the back of Unity Books, Wellington) at 5:30pm.

Register here:

https://www.fabians.org.nz/index.php?option=com_civicrm&task=civicrm/event/register&Itemid=1392&id=666&reset=1

Whaitua o Kāpiti presentation to Raumatī Community Board: 12 Nov

The Raumatī Community Board have invited Dr Aroha Spinks and GWR Councillor Penny Gaylor to talk about the management of Kāpiti's catchments as outlined in this Whaitua document (discussed in our last newsletter). Come along and learn more with

PUBLICATIONS

Our Freshwater

Our freshwater 2023 is a report released jointly by the Ministry for the Environment and Stats NZ on 16 October. It examines the most pressing issues in our freshwater environment.

<https://environment.govt.nz/publications/our-freshwater-2023/>

You might also be interested to review water quality in your area on the LAWA site:

<https://www.lawa.org.nz/>, or the Lakes380 maps which shows the trophic levels of our lakes: <https://lakes380.com>.

Shining Cuckoo - Pīpīwharauoa - *Chrysococcyx lucidus**

*Evidently this scientific name is about to change to *Chalcites lucidus*

A harbinger of spring in New Zealand, the Shining Cuckoo's distinctive call is three rising whistles followed usually by a long descending whistle. It's always a thrill to hear my first cuckoo of the season. I've noticed that before I hear the cuckoo for real, I often hear other birds mimicking their call (but it's

the Raumatī Community Board on the **12th of November at 7:00pm at Te Raukura Ki Kapiti (next to Kāpiti College)**.

Launch of Waikanae Predator Free

On 23 November, Waikanae members are invited to come along to hear about the programme, join the Rat Pack and help to make Waikanae a predator-free community! There'll be demos and a BBQ, and traps for local use will be free (but a koha is appreciated).

Saturday 23rd November

9.00am - 1.00pm

Kapakapanui School

Rimu Road, Waikanae.

For more information email:

predatorfreewaikanae@gmail.com

Force of Nature

A conservation history of Forest & Bird (1923–2023)

This beautiful coffee table book was released as part of F&B's centennial commemorations, contains many interviews, stories and stunning photos of the history of conservation in New Zealand. Looking backwards helps us move forward and this book is a great way to capture and appreciate our history and all that's been achieved in conservation since 1923. Who do you need a gift for? Why not take advantage of the launch price and support F&B too.

<https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/resources/force-nature-book-published>

a bit 'off', usually without the descending whistle). Greenfinch can sound similar, for example, so I never record my first cuckoo sighting until I hear the descending whistle.

Pīpīwharauoa is a migrant spending most of the year in the islands to our northwest - poly-, micro- and mela-nesia, especially New Guinea and the Bismark Archipelago. They migrate to New Zealand to breed and it has been suggested that this habit could have encouraged polynesian navigators and explorers to travel south and find our islands.

They are found throughout New Zealand - even on Stewart Island and the Chathams, but not so much in unforested areas. This is probably influenced by the fact that they need the riroriro - grey warbler (mainly) to breed as they are a parasitic brooder using the grey warbler to brood and raise their chicks. Their eggs, while a similar size and shape to those of the warbler, are darker grey/green and not speckled. Scientists believe this enables other cuckoos to distinguish which eggs to leave alone, and which they should eject as competition. Fortunately the riroriro starts breeding early, and has often already fledged its first brood before the cuckoos arrive. They lay a second clutch but then have to work their wings off trying to raise the monster imposter chick. Grey warblers weigh about the same as a rifleman (6g) but have longer tails so are more similar to a silvereye - tauhou in size (11cm), while the shining cuckoo weighs about 25g (4-5 times bigger) and is about 16cm in size - similar to a sparrow but a bit chunkier.

Pīpīwharau is the smallest cuckoo in the world, and they have quite beautiful iridescent green bands across their breast as well as on their backs and in Australia (which also has Grey warblers) they are known as shining bronze cuckoo. They are much easier to hear than to see, and are most often seen when victims to window strike or being caught by cats or other predators.

In the islands where they spend the rest of their year, deforestation is a serious cause of their decline. Having said that, because their range is so wide they are not considered threatened.

The other cuckoo sometimes heard in New Zealand is the long tailed cuckoo which is usually heard in more dense forest, locally around Hemi Matenga Reserve, and their call is harsher without the descending whistle.

Where to hear a shining cuckoo?

There are a few in Queen Elizabeth Park near the Marines Memorial (Whareroa Road/Mackays Crossing entrance) at the moment. If you're reading this out of season, call into The Terrace underpass on Woodward Street in Wellington where it plays year round (this totally confused me for a month or so !). Alternatively, look online:

<https://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/shining-cuckoo> to hear the call and learn more.



Pic: © J Worster : Shining Cuckoo on Kāpiti Island

Valuing Nature at Waimeha Lagoons

We are saddened to hear of at least two maulings of ducklings at Waimeha Domain Wildlife Refuge in the past month. This Waikanae Reserve has local council signage requiring dogs to be on leads but sadly some do not comply and Paradise Shelduck-lings have been killed in awful attacks. Please, dog owners, follow the rules and keep your dog restrained. Uncontrolled dogs can be reported to the council using the Antenna app, or by calling them. Such maulings contravene the Wildlife Act and as such can also be reported to DOC.

Until next time ...

Russell and Pene

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Your feedback on this newsletter would be most welcome as would contributions to future newsletters

