



## a passion for the Port Hills

*Newsletter, Winter 2015*



*There's every reason in the world to take a walk on the Port Hills in winter with landscapes like this....*

### **From the Secretary**

It seems such a short time since I was working on the last newsletter, but here we are in the depths of winter 2015. Weather has been a mixed bag so far, with some fantastic and even barmy autumn days, (an 'Indian summer' or 'climate change autumn'??), traditional cold winter nights followed by glorious sunny Canterbury days, with of course, southerlies, rain and snow thrown in. After very dry conditions earlier in the year there has hopefully been enough rain to give all involved a good planting season on the Port Hills.

A lot has been happening since the summer, so this newsletter is more in the nature of news items rather than longer articles. The Board, work party convenors and your Secretary are having trouble keeping up. What is encouraging is that there seems to be a growing interest in planting, weed control and animal pest control, with more and more contact via our website. Improving the website and entering the world of social media is a work in progress.



### **Arbor Day**

This year's Arbor Day plantings were scheduled for Wednesday 3rd June, but for the first time for many years we had to postpone due to the weather, and given the forecast for the following week were on the verge of cancelling. However, all three schools were keen to go ahead, so we took a chance on the weather being kinder on Tuesday 9th. In the event, the day was mild and still and students from Cashmere, Halswell, Te Waka Unua Schools, joined by a small group of parents and students from St Martins School successfully planted over 400 trees on Latters Spur, adding to the hundreds planted in previous years.

It is now easy to picture a whole hillside of native trees planted by children. Once again the Society would like to thank Di Carter and the Port Hills Rangers, the Eastenders who prepared the site and our volunteers who were there on the day for making the occasion a success.



## Ohinetahi

From Anne Kennedy:

"We sadly said farewell to Jo Block who is returning to England, and welcomed Stuart Payne and Jane Kelland to our work party. There is still an opportunity for others to join us if you enjoy having your lunch on the side of a hill enjoying a million dollar view. February, March and April saw us attacking the usual weeds such as old man's beard, passion vine, spindleberry and any other exotic plants we could find. The fence lines have been tidied and we have also tidied around the plantings in the Ngaio track and twitch patch area. The northern entrance to Wai-iti track has been rerouted to avoid the scramble up the creek which was rather slippery at the best of times. The bait stations have been maintained and the odd mustelid snared."

### Fieldwork course

Lincoln University's new course, 'Field Ecology Methods', referred to in the last newsletter and which is using our reserve for students to carry out practical ecological fieldwork, started at the beginning of semester 1. It will be some time before we have any results from this, but hopefully we can feature something in the next newsletter. The Society would like to thank Dr Jon Sullivan and Dr Laura Molles.

### Otamahua/Quail Island Ecological Restoration Trust

The trust is installing a 'photopoint' at Ohinetahi. The idea is that this is a permanent fixed point from which photographs can be taken so that there is an ongoing record of the progress of revegetation on the island.



Quail Island from the Summit Road

### Spur Valerian

Spur valerian (*Centranthus ruber*) is an attractive garden plant with white, pink or magenta flowers. It has fine wind borne seeds which disperse readily. Originally from the Mediterranean it likes rocky and coastal habitats. It naturalised in NZ from the late 1870's. In Canterbury it is now dispersing from gardens and roadside embankments into natural rock outcrop areas, both limestone and basalt, where it inhibits and directly competes with the rock outcrop vegetation. The unique volcanic rock outcrops of the Port Hills and Banks Peninsula host a number of Banks Peninsula endemic plants, a couple of nationally threatened plants, a number of uncommon plant species, and some fine examples of rock outcrop vegetation.

This natural rock outcrop vegetation is prone to invasion by spur valerian which can form dense thickets that will displace much of the natural low growing vegetation and potentially alter habitat for native fauna. The rate that the plant is spreading has increased considerably since the earthquakes.



Ohinetahi has some fine examples of rock outcrop vegetation including a good number of the endemic species, including at one site the nationally threatened Banks Peninsula forget-me-not (*Myosotis australis*).

Working closely with Di Carter from the Port Hills Rangers, we put together a strategy for tackling the problem at Ohinetahi. Given the nature of the terrain, Anne Kennedy and her team can only clear spur valerian from the easily accessible areas and specialist contractors are needed who will access the bluffs by fixing rope anchors and abseiling. The total cost will be \$24,000 for a project that could three years.

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Spreydon/Heathcote	Melanie Coker	669 0336
Port Hills Rangers	Paul Devlin	332 5627
<b>Eastenders work party</b>	Paul Tebbutt	384 3086
<b>Ohinetahi work party</b>	Anne Kennedy	337 0364
<b>Omahu Bush work party</b>	Paul Tebbutt	384 3086
We are a voluntary society working to enhance, preserve and protect the natural environment, beauty and open character of the Port Hills of Banks Peninsula for people to enjoy. We need and welcome contributions to our work through memberships, donations and corporate sponsorships, participation in work parties (non-members welcome - but why not join us as well!), and bequests.		



Specialist contractors with a good head for heights are needed to access the bluffs by fixing rope anchors and abseiling

We are delighted to have obtained the full cost and work will start in early spring. The Society would like to thank Canterbury Community Trust, which has given a donation of \$7,500, World Wildlife Fund New Zealand, a grant of \$4,000 and Environment Canterbury, \$12,500.



Spur Valerian growing in prostrate kowhai



## Omahu

### Possum research

A Landcare Research scientist has been trapping possums at Omahu and taking DNA samples as part of the ongoing research to find some form of biological control. The worrying aspect of this project so far is the number of possums that are being caught. We thought that possum numbers were fairly low, particularly given the apparent health of the bush. However, it is becoming evident that we need to do more monitoring and step up our animal pest control programme.

### Rat traps

Still on the subject of animal pest control, mention was made in the last newsletter of the 200 modified Victor traps to target rats, installed at the reserve by Landcare Research. This project has now finished and Landcare Research has kindly donated all the traps to the Society. These will be split between Omahu and Ohinetahi, and the next task will be for the respective teams to put the traps out—and then remember where they all are!



Paul deals to a mature gorse bush

### Volunteers

Omahu Bush has certainly benefitted from the increased interest in volunteering when on June 6, the team was joined by 15 volunteers from Sungard, a software and IT services company, who enthusiastically tackled our gorse problem along Rhodes Track. Paul Tebbutt also spent some time talking about animal pest control and showed them some of our traps. Unfortunately one of them had the remains of a cat which drew several horrified gasps. Given the state of the cat and the remoteness of the site this was definitely a feral cat and not someone's beloved pet. Paul was quick to remind the volunteers that cats are successful predators of native birds and lizards.

### Planting Day

Anne and her team would be delighted if members and supporters would join them this year for their winter planting, followed by a barbecue.

**Ohinetahi Reserve – Planting Day**

**Sunday 6th September**

**Meet 1.00pm at the reserve next to the fire station on Ernest Adams Drive.**

**BYO spades, please.**





Gibraltar Rock overlooking Omahu Bush (left). Its other name is "Dog's Head", the origin of this name remains unknown to us

## Lincoln PhD project

Both Ohinetahi Reserve and Omahu Bush may soon be part of an interesting PhD project. Jenny Dent, a Lincoln University student is aiming to study how New Zealand honeyeaters (particularly bellbirds) learn about and remember the times and locations of ephemeral food sources and will be conducting a number of experiments in the Greater Christchurch/Banks Peninsula area. In terms of the work proposed there will be two components. The first is a study observing the availability of flowers and fruit and monitoring the abundance of bellbirds in a 1ha plot (100m x 100m). One plot from each of Omahu, Ohinetahi and Kennedys Bush will be compared. The second component will be a feeder trial examining spatial memory in free ranging birds, ideally in both Kennedys Bush and Omahu bush. The trial will involve banding birds and attaching a small leg band pit tags and supplying the birds with sugar water feeders during the winter months when natural nectar availability is low. The Society had no hesitation in agreeing to this study going ahead, and we look forward to finding out more information about 'our' birds.



Rhodes Track under attack

## And more animal pest control?

Derek Crombie and his wife Gillian established the Matukituki Charitable Trust in 2013 to protect the native fauna and flora of the Matukituki Valley in Mt Aspiring National Park. With volunteers working closely with the Department of Conservation, the Trust is aiming to increase the numbers of native plants and special birds of the area including kea, whio, South Island robin, rock wren, South Island kaka, plus long-tailed bat and several lizard species.

The Trust has been successful in securing grants to support their work and to pay for the many traps that have put out in the valley. With the trapping and Doc's recent 1080 operations in the area, the Trust expects to see a resurgence of native species by 2017 and is aiming to have predator levels at a low enough level to release some of the bird species that have been lost from the area.

Recently Derek approached the Port Hills Rangers to see if there is the opportunity for him and the Cashmere Rotary Club to carry out a predator control programme on the Port Hills.

PHOTO: SID MOSDELL



Korimako feeding on harakeke flowers



Matukituki Valley in Mt Aspiring National Park

Paul Devlin, head Port Hills Ranger very kindly suggested the Summit Road Society, and in May the Secretary, Anne Kennedy, Robin Collie and Paul Tebbutt gave a presentation about Ohinetahi Reserve and Omahu Bush to Rotary Club members.

As we 'go to press', nothing is finalised, but Derek has indicated that he would like to work with us. This is an exciting opportunity to give more support to our volunteers and to step up our animal pest control programmes. Derek and Gillian have good experience, access to some funding for more traps, but more importantly, access to volunteers who would be happy to manage and maintain traps.

For more information about the Matukituki Charitable Trust visit their website at:

[www.mctrust.co.nz](http://www.mctrust.co.nz)

## Volunteer Recognition Awards

Each year, Volunteering Canterbury invites nominations for their Volunteer Recognition Awards. We were delighted that our nomination for Paul Tebbutt was accepted. Paul is a deserving recipient given the work he carries out convening both the Eastenders and the Omahu group, his contribution to the Society's Board, and as a trustee of the Harry Ell Summit Road Memorial Trust. The awards were presented by former mayor and "lifelong volunteer" Garry Moore on 23 June. Previous recipients associated with the Society are the Eastenders and Ben and Colin Faulkner.



Paul Tebbutt receives his award from former mayor Garry Moore



## NATURE WATCH

"Ever wondered what that strange looking mushroom was, or perhaps you couldn't figure out what type of plant you saw down at the beach on the weekend? Well NatureWatch NZ is just the ticket for you. It is an online community of people that just love everything about nature. It's a place where you can learn about your new discoveries and share them with others.

NatureWatch NZ has been operating for nearly three years now and in that time individuals just like you have entered nearly 150,000 observations – that's an amazing 1,000 observations per week of weird and wonderful animals and plants throughout New Zealand. But the best part is that a small army of enthusiastic volunteers have also been helping the community by providing tens of thousands of identifications of 'things' that people have found. Putting a name to your new discovery, yes NatureWatch NZ has made many amazing discoveries species new to science, things that are new to New Zealand as well as rare species not seen in the wild for decades. So how do you join the NatureWatch NZ community?

There are two simple ways of getting started on NatureWatch NZ, either by our website or using your smart phone.

[www.naturewatch.org.nz](http://www.naturewatch.org.nz)

Just head over to our website and sign up and then sign in; the link is in the top right corner of the home page. If you already are a tech savvy sort of person and have a Facebook, Twitter, Google (Gmail), Flickr, or Yahoo account then you can just simply use those profiles to sign up. If not we will need you to create a NatureWatch NZ account by following the 'start new account' button. So why do we ask for you to sign up, well the chief reason is that we need to be able to keep all your observations in the one place. It also means that members of the community can then message you and help identify things that you can't put a name to.

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This little tomtit on the Blowhard Track in Mount Thomas Forest was recorded on NatureWatch



The age of this totara at Montgomery Reserve on Banks Peninsula is reported as anywhere from 800 to 2000 years. Dates are imprecise because tree ring dating for many NZ species is of uncertain reliability (except in kauri). This huge specimen is recorded on NatureWatch.

Once you are signed in and you return to the home page you can then click on the big button that says 'Record'. It's a simple process from then fill in the fields, i.e., what you saw, where you saw it, when you saw it, upload a photo, and if you like tick the little check box for 'ID Please' if you want the NatureWatch NZ community to help you identify what you saw. If you are using the ID functionality and don't know what you saw it is best to give it as close a name as you can, i.e., plant or bird. That's pretty much it, as easy as that, you can record what you saw, share it with others and if you like follow the learn links to read articles that people have written about the species you entered.

If you need more assistance check out the easy to follow tutorials under the help section (<http://naturewatch.org.nz/pages/help>).

The smartphone app is just as simple and it keeps everything in the one place. We have apps available for the iPhone or Android that can be downloaded from your respective app stores. Naturewatch NZ is in partnership with a larger global group called iNaturalist and it is their app we use. So to get started download the iNaturalist app and once installed it should automatically detect that you are in New Zealand and link you to NatureWatch NZ. If it does not do this look in the settings menu and you can select the NatureWatch NZ option from amongst the other partner countries. If you are new to NatureWatch NZ you will then need to sign up on the app just like you would for the website version. Once signed in you are ready to go, there is not as much functionality as the website but it is the fastest way of entering individual observations when you are outside and on the go.

The smart phone app has a short tutorial and simple instructions for adding new observations, grabbing the locality from your phone's GPS unit, and adding pictures from the camera. There is also that really useful 'ID Please' check box.

So don't be afraid to get out there and get amongst it. There are amazing discoveries being made by NatureWatch NZ users every day. Check out our blog or subscribe to our Facebook page to receive occasional updates about some of the more amazing things we have seen as a group. The links to these are at the bottom of our website."

**(Dr Stephen Pawson, one of the developers of NatureWatch)**

### On the 4th & 5th July, Paul Tebbutt attended a NatureWatch Workshop:

*"The purpose of this workshop was to explain the possibility of using NatureWatch NZ as a template for ecological/restoration monitoring and surveillance. The weekend workshop, held at the Travis Swamp Education Centre, was well attended with people from restoration projects, existing reserves and Forest & Bird taking part. My interest in attending was to understand how NatureWatch could assist the Omahu team in the monitoring of pests in Omahu Reserve.*

*Over the two days many topics were covered, including the essentials of monitoring and how to set up a project in NatureWatch. Once we had a project set up we then went through the details of how to gather data, sampling plots and the business of getting the data onto the NatureWatch site. The first part—setting up a project—was achieved and now all I have to do (!) is collect the information and get it onto the website. Once this is done (hopefully by spring) those interested will be able to follow the project online. As we get better at catching pests we can change trap types and the siting of traps if necessary. Overall this was a very interesting couple of days with enthusiastic speakers and attendees alike. Oh and the food was both plentiful and delicious....."*

*If you haven't already seen the website, go to [www.naturewatch.org.nz](http://www.naturewatch.org.nz) and have a look around."*

**Paul Tebbutt  
July 2015**

### STOP PRESS

The NatureWatch link is now on the Omahu Bush page of the Society's website. You can click through to the website and have a look at all observations made since the inception of NatureWatch. The link is live and so every time an observation (plant, bird, fungi etc) is made it will show on our website too.

### Harry Ell Summit Road Memorial Trust

The trust, which is a registered charity, was set up in 2002 to build up a fund for the purchase of land on the Port Hills and for the maintenance of existing Port Hills parks and reserves. Since that time, funds from donations and bequests have been slowly increasing. In 2014 the Trust received a substantial legacy from a former member which has enabled the trustees to start to plan for the future and to begin to identify possible strategic purchases to add to the public estate.

To find out more about the Trust and the work that the trustees have been doing, all members and supporters are invited to the Trust's AGM:

**Harry Ell Summit Road Memorial Trust  
Annual General Meeting  
Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> August, 7.30 pm  
Beckenham Service Centre/Christchurch South  
Library, 66 Colombo Street**