



# Ōtari Newsletter

## March 2026

For Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust members  
Join us on [www.owbt.nz](http://www.owbt.nz)

### Ngā mihi nui, greetings in this, our Centenary Year

On October 12, 1926, the Ōtari Open-air Native Plant Museum was opened, setting the scene for the protection of some of New Zealand's rarest native plants. This continues in today's Ōtari Native Botanic Garden, an essential part of Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. Join the celebrations in our year-long programme of events, with some surprises yet in store!

**NOTE: The Trust AGM will be held on April 16, 5pm at the Wilton Bowling Club**

#### In this issue:

- Centenary news
- Botanical Art
- Summer Writing Competition
- Meet the volunteers
- Farewell Anita
- News from the Trust Chair and Ōtari Manager



*Kotare fishing for kōura in Ōtari, as restoration returns the mouri to the Kaiwharawhara Stream. Tony Stoddard, wildbirds.nz*

## Centenary Year is now

In the early 1900s, botanist Leonard Cockayne expressed dismay with the demise of native plant species throughout New Zealand. His vision was to bring as many native plants as possible into a number of 'open-air plant museums' for their protection.

On October 12, 1926, with support from Wellington's Director of Parks and Reserves, John Gretton Mackenzie, and the Royal NZ Institute of Horticulture, five acres at Ōtari were set aside for the 'Ōtari Open-air Native Plant Museum'. With Cockayne at the helm as 'Honorary Botanist', plants were collected from throughout New Zealand and brought to Ōtari. Here, mini ecosystems designed to replicate the natural habitats of these plants were key to ensuring their survival.

Cockayne's vision continues today. The 'plant museum' is now the Ōtari Native Botanic Garden, and with the adjacent Wilton's Bush Reserve makes up Ōtari-Wilton's Bush, a six-star Garden of International Significance.

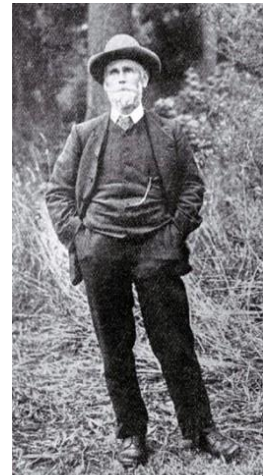
In partnership with Wellington Gardens (WCC), we will mark Centenary Year with events, formal functions and some yet to be made announcements.

Here's a summary:

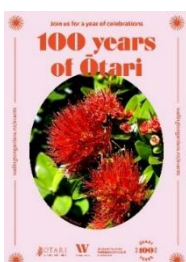
- Monthly walks and talks: our usual seasonal guided walks and talks programme has been extended throughout the year. A recently updated programme has been sent out with this newsletter. Book your guided walks here: [wellingtongardens.nz/our-gardens/otari-wiltons-bush#otari-100](https://wellingtongardens.nz/our-gardens/otari-wiltons-bush#otari-100)
- Rā Tūwhera ki Ōtari | Open Day in September, with a Centenary focus.
- Formal Centenary Ceremony (12<sup>th</sup> October), to be shared with many special guests, including descendants of Dr Cockayne, Job Wilton and Walter Brockie. This will be followed by a Centenary Community Function open to all Trust members.
- NZ Plant Conservation Network Conference (October 12 to 15), will focus very much around the centenary, with Field Trips and Workshops hosted at Ōtari.
- Wellington Heritage Festival events – telling stories of Ōtari's heritage and Leonard Cockayne.
- Trust Centenary Scholarships – as announced by Chair Kevin O'Connor (see next page).
- And there's more: look out for concerts and community picnics, special Centenary signage and a sculpture, details yet to be confirmed.

## Centenary logo and poster

The poster is self-explanatory, the rātā chosen as a suitably bold statement befitting the 100-year achievement of caring for New Zealand's native plants. Council's design team has this to say about the logo: the circular shape relates to looking through a scientific microscope – shining a light on the lab work happening at Ōtari (and long may it continue). The font is a nod to 1920's Art Deco-style to reflect the era Ōtari was established. The 'plants' are designed to 'solidify' the purpose of Ōtari, as in protecting and showcasing native plants. They are not specific to a species.



*Dr Leonard Cockayne*



## From the Chair

### *Kia ora tatou*

We are well into Centenary year, and every week I'm reminded how much this place relies on people who simply turn up, roll up their sleeves, and get stuck in.

Our cruise-ship guided tours have been in full swing and the nursery team has started its popular plant sales for the year. These two volunteer programmes raise considerable funding for the Trust, which is channelled directly into conservation, education and research initiatives.

Our second annual summer writing competition brought in a wonderful range of entries, including from Under-12 Ōtari fans. Congratulations to overall winner, Megan Ireland, our own Ōtari Collection Team Leader. (All judging was done 'blind'.) Several entries are on our website and in this newsletter.

The Trust-sponsored restoration revisitation in the Kaiwharawhara Valley is more than half way done, with encouraging results. It's been wonderful to see many of the original planters returning to enjoy the results of their efforts.

Sadly, the future of the Lions Ōtari Plant Conservation Laboratory remains highly uncertain following Dr Karin van der Walt's departure. Trust members, some who have volunteered hours of their time to help the work of the Lab, have asked if we are doing anything about this. The Trust has repeatedly stressed to WCC the Lab's scientific, cultural, and reputational importance, as well as the more than \$460,000 in external funding it has attracted over the past decade. We have also been working closely with the Karori Lions Club, whose generosity helped establish the Lab. Despite this, we have been consistently disappointed by WCC's lack of engagement, slow responses, and unwillingness to meet or collaborate, despite assurances that partners would be involved. This lack of clarity is deeply concerning for a facility of such significance. The Trust will continue to push for a genuine partnership model with WCC, DOC, Te Papa, VUW, the Karori Lions, and others to secure a stable and credible future for the Lab.

On a bright note, our Centenary Walks and Talks are already underway. An updated copy has been sent out with this newsletter and is available on our website [www.owbt.nz/visiting/centenary-events/](http://www.owbt.nz/visiting/centenary-events/)

I am delighted to confirm further details for two new Trust Centenary Scholarships. Both will be funded for three years at \$5,000 each per annum, with continuation beyond that to be reviewed. One will support education for Ōtari garden staff, the other an academic scholarship, associated with Victoria University of Wellington, for postgraduate study related to native terrestrial biota.

Our AGM will be held on 16 April, along with an early-evening social function, for all members and volunteers, at the Wilton Bowling Club. You will receive separate notification of this, and we look forward to seeing you.

On a personal note, I'll be stepping down at the AGM, although I'll remain available to help the Trust if required until I move away later this year. It has been a privilege to work alongside such dedicated and good-humoured people; I'm grateful for the support and camaraderie that define this community.

Thank you all for everything you've contributed over summer—whether volunteering, attending events, supporting plant sales, or simply being part of the Ōtari whānau, Ōtari is in good heart because of you.

***Ngā mihi nui, Kevin O'Connor***



## Ōtari Manager's update

It has been an interesting summer, which eventually arrived for a brief visit! Following heavy flowering in spring, we are seeing a good seed set on many species in the forest where birds haven't got to them. The weather is now cooling, and the weeds are starting to relent a little in the gardens. Kauri cones are exploding again, which we have come to associate with cool mornings and warm afternoons. See if you can spot their little winged seeds scattered among the larger scales beneath the older kauri trees in the gardens at the moment. We have had lots of comments about the chorus of cicadas this year. It seems to be a bit of a consensus that they are louder this year than any in recent memory.



Over summer we had Molly McDougall as our Amenity Horticulture Apprentice, who is now working at Wellington Botanic Gardens. In February we welcomed Amber Johnson from City Horticulture who is with us until June.

We are getting a lot of interest in the centenary celebrations. It is great to see an extended period for the walks and evening talks this year. Make sure you get along to them, check out the programme sent out with this newsletter. Also, Megan has pulled together a hard-working committee for the NZPCN conference which is being held in Wellington alongside the formal centenary celebrations in October. The theme is *Māhia ngā here – Collaboration for better conservation*. See the website for information and to register: [nzpcn.org.nz/nzpcn/events/2026-nzpcn-conference](https://nzpcn.org.nz/nzpcn/events/2026-nzpcn-conference)



The big storm in February had a significant impact on us. We have managed to open all areas since, but the storm caused the temporary closure of large parts of the gardens for a few weeks and a number of forest tracks for a week or two. It was the most severe storm since the Matariki storm in 2013, with gusts up to 193km from the southwest, which is very unusual for us. We even had a few clumps of harakeke and *Gahnia* simply blow over! As well as small branches and leaves scattered everywhere, there were many snapped branches hanging from trees. We are still asking people to please keep an eye out for large hanging branches,

especially if they are spending long periods of time in the forest. The worst damage was in our Fernery and 38 Degrees Garden, where a number of trees toppled over and many large branches snapped off. While all of Ōtari's tracks are now safe and open there is still a lot of work for the team to do to clean up, as well as catch up with the non-urgent work which has had to wait. There is much more work to do across the city, so if you see something awry please let us know via [wellington.govt.nz/Report-a-problem](https://wellington.govt.nz/Report-a-problem)

While it was a short inconvenience, it was great to have Wellington Water onsite getting ready for the planned wastewater upgrade near our Northern Entrance. They drilled a few holes and dug some big test pits in the Northern Carpark on Wilton Bush Road to get a better understanding of the ground conditions before starting work properly in October. It is likely that the work will take 3-4 months, so it will be a big change for many locals who park in the Northern Carpark when visiting. This car park will be closed and the mulch pile will be unavailable during the works over summer.

In other news, we have decided to revert the Cockayne Lawn back to exotic lawn grasses. We had a good crack at establishing native grass on the lawn, but due to a few frustrating challenges were



*Preparation to resow an exotic lawn after the native grass trial*

unable to get it to thrive and stay weed free. We put a lot of work into the project and the main investments of new edging and irrigation will not be lost. Significant factors that made it difficult for us were weed contamination of the soil we brought in, also the native grass was heavily affected by a fungal disease and other pests which we did not anticipate. It was a good opportunity for us to try it out and we hope to try again in the future (perhaps in another area!) when we have capacity. Part of the role of Botanic Gardens is to experiment, so while we

are disappointed this trial wasn't successful, we are grateful for the opportunity to test it. My team has done a great job of sorting out our nursery in anticipation of winter plantings, and it's great that, after a summer break, Jane and Lynley are back selling plants from the Trust nursery.

### **Mā te wā, Tim Park**

**Kaiwhakahaere Ōtari - Manager Ōtari Native Botanic Garden and Wilton's Bush Reserve**

### **Ōtari Flies and Spiders hit the news**

Our Centenary Walks and Talks programme is attracting attention. In early March, TVNZ's Breakfast TV came spider and fly hunting at Ōtari with our guided walk hosts, Te Papa Lead Curators Julia Kaspar and Phil Sirvid. Phil impressed reporter Davina Zimmer with his spider find, a very big, black tunnelweb. Julia showed some of her vast collection, including the live larva of a glowworm, and explained the important role these tiny critters play in our ecosystem. It was a great opportunity to advocate for our little native invertebrates, she said.



*Phil shows a black tunnelweb to the camera and talks about the circa 11,000 other species of native NZ spiders*



*Julia's collection hits the limelight*



*Ōtari invertebrate hunting, live on national television*

**Botanical Art: from the Volcanic Plateau, also in the Brockie Rock Garden!**

***Dracophyllum subulatum*, monoao, by Eleanor Burton**



*Dracophyllum subulatum* is only found on the Central Volcanic Plateau in the North Island. It is a plant of frost flats, and where present it is usually the dominant cover. The specimen illustrated was growing near the Pureora Forest Lodge. At Ōtari it can be seen in the alpine garden, in the bog area next to the tarn.

## Our Volunteer Teams

It's been back to 'work' with a vengeance this year for our many volunteers, active in so many ways throughout Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. Here's a summary.

### Guiding tours amid the storm

Cruise ship passengers dominate our summer guiding programme and bring significant funds to the Trust. This season we hosted 802 passengers off 26 ships. Several 'cruisers' said they would like to have spent longer at Ōtari. And the guides were not fazed by the February storm damage that blocked key tracks, they simply adapted their tours to suit.

We host more than cruise ship passengers though. A number of garden club tours, a Washington University group, and the Karori West Brownies have all been recent visitors.

Here's what Brownies' leader Hannah said about their evening tour, guided by Susan Timmins. 'The Brownies had fun and learnt lots of stories and facts for their outdoor badge. I learnt some new things too. You were so prepared, engaging and patient with the stories and questions. The session was exactly what the girls needed and was at the right level.'



*Tony guiding the 'cruisers'*



*Susan enthralled the Brownies*



*Weeders Susan and Emily*

### Forest weeders

Several newbies have popped up to join the veteran volunteers giving grief to the weeds around the forest margins and along the Kaiwharawhara valley. Recent focus has been on tradescantia and montbretia along the Kaiwharawhara, and release weeding new plantings on the big slip. A team of eight or so can get a lot done in a morning, says coordinator, Maggie Bayfield. The group works with an Ōtari staff member and meets on Thursday mornings (1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of the month, 9am to noon).

### Thursday garden weeding and maintenance team

This enthusiastic group is looking forward to a busy few weeks following a wet summer which has been good for the gardens but also good for the growth of weeds. The group meets every Thursday, from 8.30 until midday, and shares morning tea and the 5 minute quiz with the Ōtari staff.

### Plant Sales: from the Trust Nursery team

We had a very successful sale in February and quickly sold our stock of plants. We welcomed many new faces and are really grateful to our regular customers for their support. We are a small team of volunteers and we are doing our best to respond to requests and to vary the plants available for sale each month. Plant sales are held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of every month, at Tāne Whakapiripiri, the visitor centre, from 10am. Plants sell quickly!



*Plants galore from Jane and Lynley*

**If you'd like to know more about our volunteer options, see [www.owbt.nz/about-the-trust/volunteering](http://www.owbt.nz/about-the-trust/volunteering)**



*Wilbur in the valley*

## **Kaiwharawhara Revegetation Team**

Some have been toiling at this project for years, yet new helpers keep turning up to join the team. Possibly the weekend timing helps for those who work on weekdays. On February 14, the first turnout for the year, 10 people volunteered, followed by 14 in March, including more younger volunteers. Coordinator, Wilbur Dovey, says the main activity has been weeding on the former tip face, but with a change. Instead of the usual tradescantia, the main weed found was montbretia, both above and below the top track up to the Rugby Club and right down to the Kaiwharawhara outlet. 'We did such a thorough job on the tradescantia last year it hasn't come back in any quantity yet, but there are signs of regrowth for the months to come.' This group meets on the second Saturday of each month, from 9am to 12.

## **Weekend Hosts and The Joy of Hosting**

*A personal account, by host Andrea Courtney*

For the last couple years, I have had the good fortune to be able to step out the door of my home and be in the thick of the old forest within a few minutes' walk.

When my dear neighbour, Jocelyn, mentioned that she regularly hosted at the Visitor Centre, it piqued my interest. How can I give back to Ōtari Wilton Bush, for all the peace and serenity that it had given me? In what way can I be a part of the continued success of such a beautiful place?

So, a year ago, Jocelyn put me in contact with Justin, the host coordinator. On the day I met Justin, we came across a kākā lying on the path, dead! It had somehow come to an unfortunate end. So started my monthly hosting. Thankfully, not all hosting sessions are so dramatic. Mostly the hours are filled by chatting with visitors coming through.

I have partnered with wonderful people from all walks of life. My knowledge of New Zealand plants is limited compared to some, if not most of the other hosts, but this is part of why I love doing this role. The experience and knowledge that the other hosts have, and are willing to share, is fascinating and has made me want to know more.

What I do bring to hosting is sharing my enthusiasm and love of the walks that I go on through the myriads of tracks that have been passionately and laboriously created and maintained. The personal connection I feel to the place, the trees, the birds and fungi, even to the cicadas which were so loud this year I contemplated wearing earplugs.

Hosting in such an incredible place, sitting in the sun outside the centre, tree top height as the birds fly through at eye level, gives me a sense of gratitude. Gratitude for the new people I am meeting through the hosting. Of the lovely conversations with visitors that come through and of being part of a very special place in nature.

***Would you like to become a Weekend Host? You don't need to know everything about native plants, you will get full training and work in pairs with another host, be rostered for about half a day a month and you will meet lots of interesting people as you share the things you love about Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. If this sounds like you, get in touch with Justin at [justinnacey@gmail.com](mailto:justinnacey@gmail.com)***



*Host Andrea*

## Meet the Volunteers – Richard Grasse

*Wherever you look around Ōtari you'll see a bunch of regular volunteers. Some, like Richard Grasse, have been doing many things for many years. We asked Richard (who said he did NOT want to 'blow his own trumpet') when he started, what he does, and why.*

Working around Ōtari is a peaceful, stress-free activity and hopefully a worthwhile occupation— and how else would you fill your time?

I started trapping along the Ōtari Skyline in 2011, sharing the line with Andrew McLellan and I started with Wilbur on the Ian Galloway Park slope restoration project the following year. Now, I do the Skyline trap line every other month, work with Wilbur's monthly Saturday morning group, work with the Thursday morning Forest Weeders and am a guide for the cruise ship visitors and glow worm tours. I used to help with Jim's twice-a-year pest monitoring programme but have given it up as climbing the slippery banks got too difficult.

My motivation? I was a trapper and liked the bush. I grew up in England in the countryside, keen to go "bird nesting" in springtime, that is taking an egg from a bird's nest to add to my—collection highly illegal now but a common activity with village lads in the old days! Many of my ancestors were Gamekeepers, which involved trapping and killing any 'vermin' that might kill pheasants, so maybe trapping is in my blood!

A highlight for me trapping on the Skyline was in January this year catching five hedgehogs, four rats and a weasel in one trip! Also, once on the Skyline I was buzzed by a pair of falcon. The Ōtari bush and especially the undergrowth is regenerating well now that there are fewer possums and rodents, while the gradual restoration of the Ian Galloway Park slope has been another highlight. The blackberry and gorse have virtually gone and the planted pukatea, hīnau, tawa and podocarps are slowly emerging. Also, I'm noticing more visitors coming to Ōtari, and more volunteers offering to get involved. Outside of Ōtari, I run the Forest & Bird plant nursery in Highbury, service trap lines around Mt Kaukau, Heke Reserve and Trelissick Park and help plant and weed in Khandallah Park, Heke Reserve, Trelissick Park and on the Korimako and Silversky Tracks.

**Thanks Richard!**

## A shout out to Tony Stoddard and The Nest at the Zoo

Wildlife photographer Tony Stoddard is generous with his stunning photographs, letting the Trust use them for our publications. But in recent months he's been hard-pressed to visit Ōtari as often as he'd like, he's been too busy rescuing injured birds. Since Boxing Day, Tony's travelled an estimated 3,000km solely on bird rescues; collecting them, delivering them to The Nest Te Kōhanga at Wellington Zoo for treatment, then returning the recovered birds to their homes in the wild. Some of these are Ōtari birds. He doesn't ask for funding or donations, although he does donate a percentage of sales from his wildbirds.nz website to help The Nest. He does the work because the wildlife need it. Like this young kererū (right), most likely injured from falling from its nest.



## Revisiting the restoration

By Kathy Ombler

As many of you know, volunteering in Ōtari is always rewarding. For me, a recent morning in the young, shady, forest of the Kaiwharawhara Valley with Jonathan Kennett, Maggie Bayfield and Susan Timmins was particularly satisfying. My job was to be the 'recorder', to write down the names and heights of various species as identified and called out by the three rather more botanically-astute people than I, as they moved in a systematic grid pattern through 'Vegetation Plot 15', not missing a single plant.

In the early 2000s, this 'plot' was one of 30 that had been cleared of its scruffy blackberry, gorse and grass, planted with natives then release weeded over the years, by countless volunteers many of whom who still work on the valley's restoration. (See Richard's story on the previous page.)

Jonathan Kennett and Brown Wall led the original project and are now, 25 years on, undertaking a revisitation of the valley to see what's happened. The study is funded by the Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust, and the findings will be of value for future reforestation projects in the region. Light-welling, as in clearing spaces for taller canopy trees to grow, and weeding is also being undertaken as the volunteer teams move along the valley.

The study has now passed the halfway stage and our morning's tally, showing huge growth at Plot 15, was typical of that now found throughout the valley. Here's the data: 98 plants and 12 species were originally planted at Plot 15. There are now 28 species (not counting weeds) and 366 plants. The most common species we found were rewarewa (107), mahoe (61) and kawakawa (51), all of them self-seeded. Other common arrivals were parsonsia, a native jasmine (21), pigeonwood (20), *Asplenium oblongifolium*, a spleenwort/fern (19), kohekohe (13), and hangehange (11). Healthy rimu, tawa, hīnau and tītoki were also found, while just outside the plot were tōtara and kōwhai.

Having self-seeded natives brought in by the birds or wind is how a natural forest develops. As Jonathan says, we now have a real native forest in the valley. Thus the satisfaction from my morning's 'work', learning from more knowledgeable colleagues, and feeling grateful for the hard work of so many volunteers who, decades ago, kick-started the regeneration of this valley.

Jonathan and Bronwen will provide a full report to the Trust on completion of the study.



Above: Plot 15, 2003

Below: 2026 (the recorder is well hidden)



Jonathan Kennett, photo by Frances Fukac



Frances Fukac, the Trust's youngest member!

## Farewell and thanks, Anita Benbrook

Of all the positive impacts made by staff during their time at Ōtari, Anita Benbrook racked up more than a few. She worked at Ōtari from 1987 until 2001, in various roles, then remained in touch through her job as Biodiversity Specialist in Plants with the WCC Urban Ecology Team. At the end of 2025 Anita retired, and we caught up with her as she began the Tour Aotearoa Bike Challenge, with plenty of time to contemplate the highlights of her time at Ōtari.



Back in 1987, Anita was appointed as an Ōtari gardener by Ray Mole, even though she'd applied to work in the Botanic Gardens Herb Garden. But she was delighted with this twist. It was also Ōtari's gain.

'When I first started at Ōtari, the collections hadn't been added to for ages, plus the accession records were not in good order. Carol Leach (Ōtari supervisor) and I worked quite hard on this, we revised plant lists (all were paper records from pre-computer days) then we embarked on quite a number of collecting trips around New Zealand targeting specific, missing plants.'

When the sewer line through the valley was replaced, in the late 1990s, that opened another opportunity, she recalls. 'Opening up the upper valley when the sewer line was replaced eventually led to establishing the walkway, which involved clearing lots of broom and gorse, etc. Then we started the restoration planting.'

This marked the start of the Kaiwharawhara Restoration Project, which has become a local benchmark of community volunteer restoration.

As the senior gardener and collections manager, Anita worked with Curator Mike Oates in what was a busy period of development for Ōtari, when the current Alpine Garden was established and the Canopy Walkway constructed.

There are many memories, she muses: 'Training lots of apprentices, changing a lot around in the collection areas, starting the threatened plants collection, developing the nursery in its early stages and being able to collect data about how to propagate and grow an increasing number of species after our collecting trips.' Anita recalls that horticulturalist and author, Lawrie Metcalf, consulted with her and used her records in his book, *The Propagation of New Zealand Native Plants*.

She said going to Kew Gardens to study a Diploma in Park Management is up there with the good memories, as is working with Trust volunteers on volunteer days in the nursery.

'Primarily the high points have been the joy of getting to know New Zealand native plants from all over the country, sharing that with passionate people, and being able to pass that knowledge on.'

A quick scan of The Trust's book, *Ōtari, 200 Years of Ōtari-Wilton's Bush*, will reveal a huge amount more about Anita's influence and contribution. It's worth a read!

## Remembering summer

This climbing rātā made a delightful, flowery show on the Canopy Walkway and near the Banks Entrance in January. *Metrosideros perforata*, or akatea (aka meaning vine, tea meaning white, as in Ao-tea-roa), is not rare, it is a delightful nectar-producing feature of the forest, great for the birds, butterflies, bees and geckos.



## What does Ōtari mean to you?

We are gaining momentum. Our second summer writing festival generated many more entries than last year's initial event. They came in all forms, stories, poetry, haiku, illustrations. We were especially delighted to see the many creative, thoughtful entries from under twelve-year-olds, it was difficult to not make everyone a winner! We are grateful to our two judges, Naomi O'Connor, who has a background of writing, is a published poet and a some-time RAMBO trapper, and Carol West, who has knowledge of many things Ōtari and proven writing and editing nous. Entries were judged 'blind', with no names.



Both Naomi and Carol unequivocally chose *A Traveller's First Sighting*, written by Megan Ireland – our very own Ōtari Collection Team Leader, as overall winner. According to Naomi the story was 'nicely made, complete, fresh, real.' And this from Carol: 'Really evocative, love it, No 1 for me'.

### ***A traveller's first sightings, by Megan Ireland***

She's enveloped in the night, a chorus of ruru surrounding her beneath the carpet of stars. Turning her phone torch on, she heads into the bush. She's on the hunt.

Walking down Te Ara Porowhita beneath towering trees, the vines swoop down in greeting, leaves and branches snapping underfoot. This could be scary if it weren't for the warm feeling washing over her the further she goes, there is a sense of peace or welcoming here. Pair that with the smile pushing her lips and the butterflies in her stomach, and there is no fear here.

Ducking below a vine, she turns left at the junction. The spotlight of white ahead moves and bumbles about with her but in the quiet, she can hear the trickling of the stream, the ruru in the distance, the leaves of the canopy blowing in the breeze and ahead the waterfall.

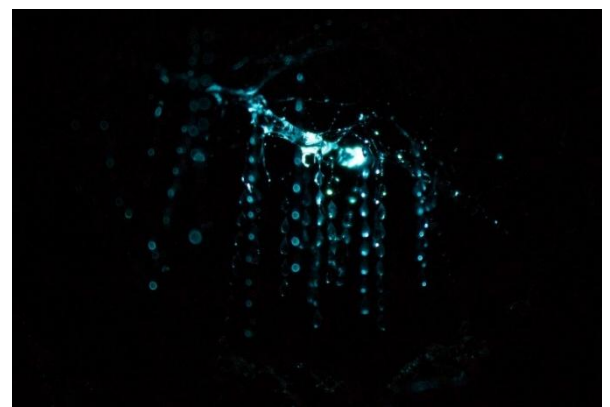
Reaching the waterfall, she shines the torch around, and not seeing anything out of the ordinary, turns it off and waits. Letting her eyes adjust, she looks up to the stars, wondering if she will see one shooting. Slowly, as she's absorbed in the tranquillity, her eyes float down looking at the waterfall and the starry night, mind drifting as she watches them twinkle and move with the water.



The sudden realisation hits: you don't get stars in waterfalls.

The crevices of the waterfall emit a blue-green magical glow, hundreds of them. More appear with each breath, giving off different intensities. She's found them.

The stars and the glow-worms blur into one, the galaxy seeming to spill into the bush, or perhaps the bush is quietly offering its magic back to the stars. She watches a while longer, marvelling at the strange, gentle magic of a forest lit like the night sky.



## Youthful yarns

The Under 12s' winning story, by eight-year-old Eddie Lensen, really impressed Naomi. "I memorised the first line because it had beautiful internal rhythm. It's so immediate, so complete, and it says what lots of the adults use piles of words to stumble around on, with just that one line in the middle: 'I don't need to think'. Eddie lives near Ōtari, he's obviously a fit young lad as well as talented writer.

### ***Ōtari Bush Run*, by Eddie Lensen**

I know the loop like the back of my hand.

We start at a brown pole.

I go down a small hill, and then I'm excited cause it's time for my favourite part.

I feel like I'm going to fall over, but also like I might fly. My legs are spinning fast, like I'm in a cartoon.

I love seeing all the nature, all the trees and birds and eels as I speed by.

The flowing stream is beautiful.

I don't need to think.

Over the bridge, and then I see Troup Lawn. I have to touch the eel sign, and look at my watch.

The fastest I have gone downhill is six minutes five seconds.

But then there's a big hill. This part is going to take forever. I just have to keep moving - one step at a time.

Then I hit the boardwalk and I know I'm nearly home.

The trees are right below me.

And then I see the brown pole again.

It's the end, and I feel very tired.



***Ōtari Bush Run***

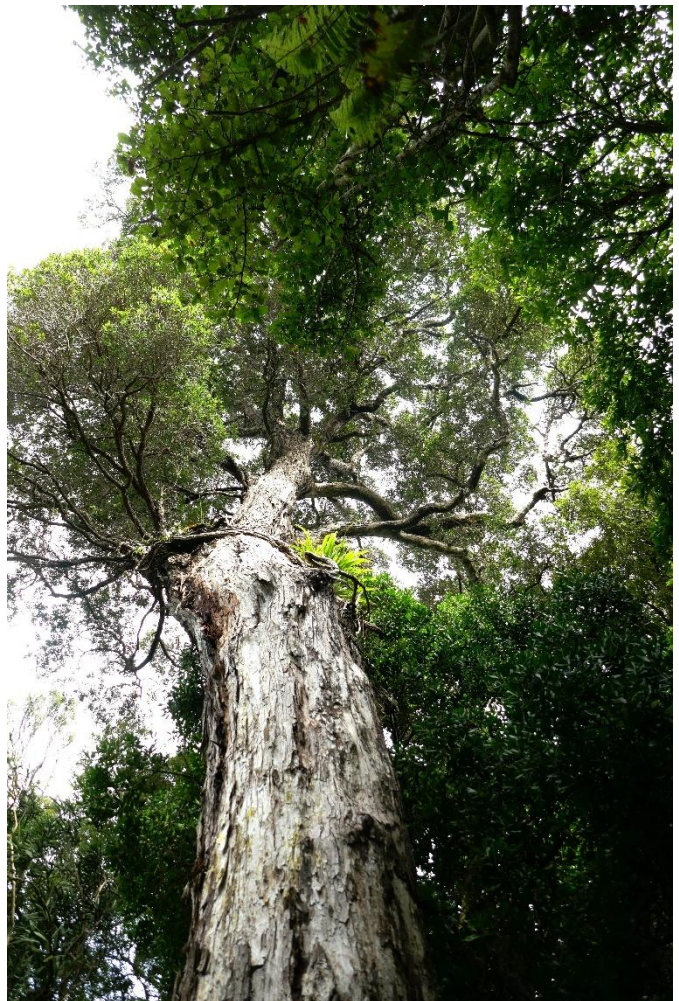
## Rātā, by Charles Dawson

[Highly commended. Carol liked the biology and ecology descriptions and said it was the essence of Ōtari. Naomi felt it gives you things to think about, that there's pleasure and challenge along the way.]

Awahi: (vb.) to embrace; to surround; to besiege.

Rerenoa: vb. To spread out. In Māori lore Rerenoa is a daughter of the God of the Forest, Tāne; she is mother to the Rātā tree.

Even now I recall the thrill of flight  
the gusted arc of my seeding,  
Nestled in the crook of your high branches, gusted  
into the promise of light, I sent fingers  
down, a tentative caress  
from epiphytic lodgings.  
Soon I was runneling  
to ground, binding  
with your skin, your limbs  
my path to water.  
When I touched earth  
I re-membered proliferation  
my thin roots a web of longing, the unending echo  
of silence at my heart.  
An inkling  
of our torqued  
embrace,  
That holding  
pattern lived out  
across two thousand moons.  
Rimu, don't let anyone say  
I simply took from you.  
You fed me, oh yes.  
But ours was the slowest of dances.  
Like you, I was simply striving for the warmth.  
Do not berate me,  
for I would not exist without you.  
Even today, I twine in upon myself  
always seeking your touch,  
my limbs plaited around an emptiness  
this hunger has bequeathed me.  
Today I stand as a monument  
to abundance,  
sanctifying those like you  
who have looked upon me, given your heart,  
and raised me up,  
no matter what the cost.  
I do not know where my children are,  
but in this canopy of branches  
and in hills around me  
small red blossoms are emerging  
for the first time  
in ages.



## Haiku, by Anjali

Wonderland of trees  
Quiet space to think and thrive  
Beautiful collage

And who doesn't relate to the following highly commended story, poem and watercolour?

### What Ōtari-Wilton's Bush means to me, by Fiona Robinson

Monday to Friday, my to-do list gets ever bigger. Tasks are stacking up like piles of paper in an in-tray growing higher and higher. Must book basketball club; order groceries; prepare dinner; pick up prescription; take back overdue library books; eighty-eight unread emails. Must get one more task ticked off the list before I can relax. But the tasks never go away – they stalk me. My breath gets shallower. My muscles tighten.

Until... I grab my sneakers and keys. Time for a walk.

I arrive at Ōtari Wilton Bush and a rabbit hops by. Flax flutters in the breeze. I pause by the stream to hear water bubbling and kaka calling. I see eels gently gliding and dappled light falling through the trees. I feel the sun's warmth on my face.

Finally, I breathe out slowly with a sigh. My shoulders ease down and I stand more upright not cowed. Here in nature my world feels expansive and full of possibility – not restrictive and constrained. I remember happy times at Ōtari. Sausages cooked on the barbecue and sitting on blankets on the lawn on a sunny afternoon before we owned a barbecue or a garden of our own. The awe and magic of seeing glow worms for the first time. My son cooling down on a sweltering day by paddling in the stream in his nappy. An eighth birthday party on the Troup Picnic Lawn – an outside gathering that allowed us to celebrate during COVID – chocolate cake-covered faces, nerf wars and squeals of fun. Spotting the eels – is it an eel or is it a stick? – and taking my first tentative steps back into trail running. Happy memories of times gone by and the joy of knowing I can experience Ōtari for many years to come.

### The Edge of the Forest

Gliding, silently, through  
the darkened stream  
Hid in shadows  
Safe, unseen  
The wind is high  
the towering trees  
Bend and sway  
Protecting, free  
The birds swoop and  
rise  
The trees dancing  
to their cries  
Now loud and quiet  
Crystalline and high  
Unaware, un-noticing  
the gaze below  
A glimpse of sun  
At the water's edge  
Eyes watching, glinting  
still, serene

Watercolour and poem by Maryann McKee



### Other stories and poems

One delightful entry to receive was *Tempus Fugit* (Time Flies), a story written by Irene Swadling (nee Lusty), in 1951, when she was a third former and it was published in the Wellington Girls College Reporter. It was all about losing track of time, whilst playing in Ōtari-Wilton's Bush, something many could relate to. Irene's story, along with other winning entries, are published here:

<https://www.owbt.nz/botanical-art/writing-about-otari-1/>

## Special guests hosted at Ōtari

New calligraphy skills and celebrating the Year of the Horse were priorities for Wellington mayor, Andrew Little, and councillor, Afnan Al-Rubayee during a recent visit to Ōtari. They were joined by the Japanese Ambassador, His Excellency Mr Makoto Osawa, to celebrate New Year by taking part in kakizome, the traditional Japanese 'first calligraphy of the year'.

Those at the celebration were hosted by the Wellington Sakai Association (Sakai is Wellington's sister city in Japan) and

welcomed to Ōtari by Trustees of the Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust. Under the tutelage of Mikiko-sensei (Teacher Mikiko), all guests were invited to draw the symbol of the Horse, and to write a word or phrase that reflects their hopes and intentions for the year ahead. The Wellington Sakai Association, which often enjoys the peace and serenity of Ōtari's gardens and forest for its events, also celebrated its 32nd Sister City anniversary.



Trustee Maggie Bayfield, Ambassador Osawa, Councillor Afnan, Mayor Little

## Trust Membership

If you've been given this newsletter to read and would like to join or donate to the Trust please visit our website: [www.owbt.nz/membership-donations](http://www.owbt.nz/membership-donations)

All members receive our quarterly newsletter, free entry to our Seminar Series, Autumn Guided Walks and Winter Glowworm Tours. Memberships and donations also provide funding for our ongoing conservation and education work.

If you wish to learn more about our Endowment Fund, the Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Fund, please visit: [www.owbt.nz/membership-donations/endowment-fund](http://www.owbt.nz/membership-donations/endowment-fund)

## Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust - Trustees:

Kevin O'Connor (Chair)

Maggie Bayfield (Secretary)

Ivan Jakich (Treasurer)

Justin Nacey (Weekend hosts)

Kathy Ombler (Communications)

Geoff Ridley (Seminars and Guided Walks)

Susan Timmins (Guided Tours)

Annie Yeates (Guided Tours)

[oconnorkevin170@gmail.com](mailto:oconnorkevin170@gmail.com) Ph. 027 270 9787

[bayfield@xtra.co.nz](mailto:bayfield@xtra.co.nz) Ph: 027 545 4333

[jakichi@outlook.co.nz](mailto:jakichi@outlook.co.nz) Ph: 022 176 4403

[justinnacey@gmail.com](mailto:justinnacey@gmail.com) Ph: 021 211 3019

[kathy@ombler.co.nz](mailto:kathy@ombler.co.nz) Ph: 027 275 5152

[Ridley.geoff@gmail.com](mailto:Ridley.geoff@gmail.com) Ph: 027 422 4102

[stimminsdoc1@gmail.com](mailto:stimminsdoc1@gmail.com) Ph: 027 516 2979

[annieontour74@hotmail.com](mailto:annieontour74@hotmail.com) Ph: 027 440 0129

*The Trustees welcome comments and questions from members on any matters relating to Ōtari-Wilton's Bush or the Trust. For Newsletter comments or contributions contact Trustee Kathy Ombler. Remember to check our Instagram and Facebook pages. This is where we 'post' regular news and photos about what's happening in Ōtari. If you don't want to join these, simply go to our website: [owbt.nz](http://owbt.nz), and click on the Facebook or Instagram logo on the home page. It's all there for you to read, with no obligation to join. We also publish news items on our website, from time to time.*

**Quick questions: Do you enjoy your newsletter? Is it too long, too short, or just right? Would you prefer a different format, e.g. all within your email instead of an attachment? What would you like to read more about? This is your newsletter. Please tell us. Email Kathy: [kathy@ombler.co.nz](mailto:kathy@ombler.co.nz)**