



# Ōtari Newsletter

## December 2025

For members of Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust  
New members welcome: visit [www.owbt.nz](http://www.owbt.nz)

### *Ngā mihi nui, greetings*

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Tūi on rewarewa, Tony Stoddard [wildbirds.nz](http://wildbirds.nz)

## From the Chair

Kia ora tatou,

It is a pleasure to share with you some highlights from another busy and successful year for Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust.

Membership now stands at over 400, and our social media following has continued to expand. We currently have more than 1800 Facebook followers, over 1000 on Instagram, and many of our posts reach an audience of thousands, from all around New Zealand and further afield. This is a clear reflection of the wide appreciation for Ōtari-Wilton's Bush.



Our volunteers have once again been the backbone of the Trust. Guided tours for cruise ship passengers and monthly and Open Day Trust Nursery plant sales have generated significant funding, which is being reinvested into conservation, research, and education. This year we supported projects such as native orchid germination research, training for Ōtari gardening apprentices, long-term restoration studies in Kaiwharawhara Valley, and environmental education for Wellington schoolchildren. These initiatives all help to ensure that Ōtari remains both a living classroom and a sanctuary for native plants.



Volunteer Lucie

Wider volunteer contributions have been huge, from weekend hosting and guiding to gardens maintenance, forest weeding, plant propagation and forest restoration. We are always delighted to welcome new faces and have been encouraged by several younger volunteers joining our many long-serving members, whose commitment continues to inspire. The RAMBO team has also maintained its dogged predator control, ensuring the flourishing of native flora and fauna throughout Ōtari.

Looking ahead, we are excited to support the 2026 centenary celebrations of the Ōtari Open-air Native Plant Museum, today's Ōtari Native Botanic Garden. Planning is underway to mark this milestone; a number of special events will be hosted by both Wellington Gardens and the Trust. Some information is included in this newsletter; more details to come in 2026.

Thanks to the energy and generosity of our members, volunteers, and supporters, the health of Ōtari-Wilton's Bush continues to improve, and community interest in our work grows stronger every year.

***Meri Kirihimete ki a koutou katoa, Merry Christmas to you all***  
**Kevin**

## Announcing our second *writing* event

Last year the Trust ran an inaugural writing competition. Entries were few, but they were quality: wonderful to read, thoughtful, surprising, and shared varied aspects and experiences their writers have enjoyed while visiting Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. You can read the best of them here:

[www.owbt.nz/botanical-art/writing-about-otari-1](http://www.owbt.nz/botanical-art/writing-about-otari-1)

We'd like more of these - and invite you again this summer to put pen to paper (figuratively speaking). Tell us what Ōtari means to you. It could be a story, poem, or haiku. There will be judges (with literary and environmental expertise), and prizes - plants, books and beautiful cards. Adult and children's entries are welcome. Please send your entry to: [enquiries@owbt.nz](mailto:enquiries@owbt.nz). We'll close it off on January 31<sup>st</sup>. Go on, have a go!





## Ōtari Manager's update

Ōtari has had an explosive spring after an unseasonably calm winter when it seemed nothing would dry out. By explosive, I mean that it is a massive flowering season in the gardens and particularly the forest here at Ōtari, with the kaikōmako, rewarewa, tawa and hīnau all in full flower. Watch out for the hīnau flowers which are sprinkled across our paths like creamy-white confetti.



*Kākā loved the kōwhai this spring  
Tony Stoddard wildbirds nz*



*Martin McCrudden*

This spring we farewellled Travis and welcomed Martin McCrudden into the Groundsperson role. Travis did a great job in his time here and leaves Ōtari with the lawns looking better than ever and the forest with a lot fewer weeds! Martin previously worked for WCC as a Park Ranger, is an outdoors enthusiast and lives locally - so he knows Ōtari and WCC well. Say hi if you see him out and about on the tracks.

Over winter we planted an area along Wilton Road between Hampshire and Berkshire Avenues, which we call "The Shire". We have been clearing blackberry, sycamore and other weeds from here for the last year or so. It was great to have Wilbur and his dedicated group of 'revegers' and some local school students help us plant and mulch the area. Many hands do make light work. Keep an eye on the plants as they bulk up over summer – it is so much nicer seeing native plants given a chance over brambles. We also planted a large number of harakeke in our Pā Harakeke. These areas are looking fantastic and we will continue to expand our harakeke collection.

This spring we have embarked on a trial of a new native lawn grass variety (*Poa imbecilla* "Stewarts Slender"). This has been selectively bred as a fine lawn turf grass by PGG Wrightson's and is now commercially available. To achieve this, we removed the old turf, replaced the edging, installed irrigation and brought in new top soil before sowing the very fine seed (on a rare spring day without a breath of wind!). Now the covers are off it looks green, but we have some work to do to ensure that we allow only the native grass to prosper. It is hugely rewarding to trial this native lawn in the lead up to our centenary. Something Cockayne wanted to achieve to fulfil his vision for Ōtari was to have a completely native botanic garden, including the lawn.

Much work has been happening in the forest, particularly as Jonathan Kennett and Bronwen Wall have been leading a revisitation of the restoration planting done 20 years ago. This is between the Troup Picnic Lawn and Ian Galloway Park. The work is being supported by OWBT, WCC and volunteers who have been mucking in at work parties to remeasure the vegetation monitoring plots which were established to measure the success of the plantings. They are also clearing rubbish such as carpet squares, weeds and undertaking careful 'light welling' to give podocarps and long-term canopy species a chance to get into the canopy. Much of the work is being done in the areas that have been weeded by the Thursday Forest Weeders, many of whom have got deeply involved in the plot remeasurement and carpet removal.



*Jonathan Kennett and Bronwen Wall, with some special help:  
Walter Brockie's old tools!*

We have had overwhelmingly positive and glowing feedback from visitors and the local community about the re-jig of the walking tracks. It is a great feeling to know that all our tracks are clearly signposted, and new visitors are able to find their way around without a fuss. If you have any feedback please let us know.



*Assembly: lightbox exhibition profiling Ōtari plants, by Gabby O'Connor. On now!*

If you find yourself on Courtenay Place in the next few months, have a look at Gabby O'Connor's lightbox exhibition "Assembly". All the photos were of our plants and were taken in the nursery at Ōtari. They are not photoshopped! Gabby has taken the photos through coloured stage lighting gels. The concept of the exhibition was to re-assemble the plants that once made up the pre-human ecosystems that existed around Courtenay Place. It is very nice to have some of our plants on public display and to be able to support artists who come to their work with an environmental mindset.

Much work is underway to plan our centenary next year. See the details on the next page.

We are hoping to trial a pilot audio guide for visitors this summer. We were lucky to have an intern from VUW to capture the recordings and edit them for us. There are lots of plant stories packed into this experience which we hope will provide another way for more people to deepen their knowledge and appreciation of native plants.

Recently the *Dactylanthus*, Pua o te rēinga 'flower of the underworld', was rediscovered in the Wainuiomata Water Collection Area. It was thought to have been extinct in the Wellington region for over a century. Ōtari staff assisted on a day visit to the site where the plants were rediscovered. There are plans to do more extensive searching and surveying for these amazing plants. While the known plant is not in great condition it is a great sign of hope that there may be more hanging on in the wild in the Wellington Region.



*Ōtari was a popular venue for November's predator free hui. Some regional trappers went walkabout to look at RAMBO lines.*

We have been busy hosting a number of workshops and events. In November, we hosted a group of arborists who were learning how to 'veteranise' trees to create habitat for wildlife. This is a practice used to create nests and other habitat improvements. Ōtari was a great place for them to see natural kākā and kākārīki nests. On a recent weekend Predator Free Wellington and Predator Free New Zealand organised a regional hui for trappers. This was a great opportunity to tell the story of trapping and pest control at Ōtari, which was

the first reserve in Wellington City to receive targeted and sustained possum control, and was also the first place where community trapping started in the city.

I hope you have a lovely summer and that you are able to come visit Ōtari regularly to enjoy this amazing place we all work hard to look after.

**Mā te wā,  
Tim Park**

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





## 100 years – celebrating Ōtari’s Centenary

On October 12, 1926, the Ōtari Open-air Native Plant Museum, today’s Ōtari Native Botanic Garden, was officially opened. For the past year a Centenary committee, comprising Wellington Gardens staff and Trust members, have been developing a programme aimed to acknowledge the visionaries who established the garden, to further their aims in protecting the future of New Zealand’s native plants, and to bring everyone together to suitably celebrate this auspicious occasion. While some of the events planned will seem much the same as we do every year, be assured that 100 years of achievement in Ōtari Native Botanic Garden will be very much acknowledged and celebrated.



*Mayoress Norwood plants a kauri at the 1926 opening.*

**Full details and some activities are yet to be confirmed. This is an outline of plans so far:**

**Autumn Guided Walks** (March to May) – the usual annual programme, with a special emphasis on one hundred years of native plant collections and forest restoration.

**Winter Glowworm Tours** (April to September) – who can count 100 glowworms, one for every year?

**Winter Talks** (June-July) – seminars focusing on the changes and enhancements of plant and science conservation over the past 100 years. (Note: these will move from autumn to winter for 2026.)

**Te Wā o te Koanga - Wellington Gardens Spring Festival** (September) – will bring a definite Centenary vibe to Ōtari

**Rā Tūwhera ki Ōtari – Ōtari Open Day** (September) – again, a definite centenary vibe. Tweed suits and fedora hats, anyone?

**On the Day: Formal Celebration** (October 12, afternoon) – a re-enactment of the Order of Events when the Ōtari Open-air Native Plant Museum was officially opened by Wellington City Mayor, CJB Norwood. Dignitaries and descendants of key Ōtari people will be invited.

**On the Day: Centenary Community Celebration** (October 12, from 4pm) – a get together for all Trust members and the Ōtari community at the Ōtari Bowling Club. Details to come.

**NZ Plant Conservation Network Conference** (October 12 to 15) – to be held in Wellington to coincide with the Ōtari Centenary. Themed ‘Māhia ngā here - Collaboration for better conservation’, it will be attended by dedicated native plant conservationists from around New Zealand. Ōtari-Wilton’s Bush will be well represented; with current Ōtari Team Leader, Megan Ireland (organising lead) and former Ōtari curator, Anita Benbrook, on the conference organising committee. Workshops and field trips to Ōtari-Wilton’s Bush will feature in the programme.

**Trust Scholarships** – two scholarships, one that will support training for Ōtari garden staff, the other an academic scholarship to support post-graduate study related to native terrestrial biota will be confirmed and announced in Centenary year.

Other potential Centenary events still under discussion include an Ōtari Music Performance Series, a significant artwork installation, and a major science conservation project. Watch this space!

## Botanical art: our new native lawn

### *Poa imbecilla*, Stewart's Slender Poa, by Eleanor Burton



This is an endemic grass found throughout the North Island, in the South Island from Nelson and east of the main divide; also on the Chatham and Three Kings Islands. It is a small fine grass, forming small tufts with very slender seed heads held well above the foliage. It can be weedy, and has run happily through all my pots at home. I got it from Arnold Dench, who was given it by Pat Enright, who told him it was called *imbecilla* because you would have to be an imbecile to grow it. It is the grass we have sown to replace the exotic variety on the Cockayne Lawn to meet the wish of Leonard Cockayne for a 'native plants only' Ōtari. So hopefully, it will make a good turf.



## Our volunteers are not resting on their laurels

(If you'd like to get involved, see [www.owbt.nz/about-the-trust/volunteering](http://www.owbt.nz/about-the-trust/volunteering))

### Lots of plans for the Trust Nursery

Thanks to Jane Humble for this update: November 8 was the final plant sale for 2025. We had a busy morning and sold most of our stock. Volunteers will now be busy over summer, propagating and tending new plants and keeping the nursery stock watered and weeded.

Keep an eye out for plant sales resuming in February. We plan to increase stock numbers and we are working to source and grow a wider range of native plants suitable for your Wellington garden. Often these will be plants not available from Garden Centres. We also aim to improve our labelling, to provide more information about the habits and cultivation of the plants. On a recent Sydney visit I discovered that the Friends of Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney set a fine example.



*Jane Humble*

While we do not grow plants to order, if there is something you are particularly interested in please let us know and we will tell you if it becomes available.

As part of our work to improve our selections, Lynley Trower and I had an interesting visit in November to the Tatou Development Trust/Te Rito in Porirua, where Steve and Yolande and their team are propagating many beautifully tended plants for revegetation, at the same time providing training and employment. We hope in the future to connect with regional charity nurseries and create an informal group to support and learn from each other.

### Collections gardens weeding and maintenance

The Thursday morning weeding in the collections continues to be kept busy with plenty of weeds. We have three enthusiastic recruits; Rachel, Yao and Anju and the mornings fly by with lots of interesting talk as we work. In fact, weeders have been known to work overtime! We must say a huge thank you to the Ōtari staff who supervise us, for their support at all times. New volunteers are always welcome.

### A winter guiding glow and a smart summer start

Our winter glowworm tours finished in September, they were popular and oversubscribed to the very end. It was a delight to host entire families and see the faces of young kids light up when they found a 'light', or a creeping creature of the night.

The summer cruise tours began in October. While cruise ship visits to New Zealand are down this year, there is still huge interest in our Ōtari tours. Thank you to those guides who have stood down this season, and welcome to our newbies. All up we now have 41 guides and 'tails', all smartly kitted out in their new hi-vis vests and Ōtari cap.

We held a successful pre-season training session, one challenge is learning to change our commentary as flowering and growth in the gardens change! The visitors range greatly in age, mobility and interest in plants but in the main people are happy to be outside amongst the plants at Ōtari and hear our stories.



*Our smartly turned-out guiding team*

## Forest weeders

Increasingly good turnouts and some major impact on weeds, particularly *Tradescantia*, have been highlights for our team. We also spent one morning weeding in Pā Harakeke, ahead of the November visit from the Gardens Trust assessors. We know that the collections weeders were also working hard in anticipation of that visit. It was great to be joined one busy morning by several keen university students, members of the Victoria University Tramping Club. You are welcome back any time! We are also happy to be welcoming a number of new members, and thrilled that several enthusiastic team members have started turning up every Thursday morning to attack the weeds, not just the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday (9am to 12) that we officially meet!



*University tramping club volunteers, Natalie and Susan, give forest weeder Carol a hand. Thanks!*

## So, what's it like to be a weekend host?

*Greeting weekend visitors to Ōtari can be interesting, rewarding and full of surprises. Carolyn Tait signed up for her first rostered day in early November. Here is her story, thanks Carolyn.*

It just seemed the right time for me to find something new to do in my life! I have enjoyed such benefits from living close to Ōtari. Walking the trails with my family, our children and now our grandchildren, has given me both comfort and joy. I decided that it was time to give something back to Ōtari as a volunteer. To make extra certain that this was what I wanted to do, I sat with Chris, a host with years of experience, for a couple of hours during her shift.

And then - what a beautiful sunny day for my very first official shift! I was a little apprehensive, especially as I don't have much botanical knowledge. Once I had been briefed by Justin, who



*Justin Nacey (host coordinator) and happy host, Carolyn Tait.*

coordinates the hosts, I felt more confident. I was initiated into the mysteries of “the cupboard”, which contains everything hosts need including the EFTPOS machine and stores of books and cards for sale.

Chatting to people as they came through was a chance to look at Ōtari through different eyes. There were regular visitors who pointed out to me some of the flowering trees, families with children doing rubbings, and people from overseas, full of excitement watching the kākā swoop.

A few Trust Board members called in to do some tidying jobs and I felt warm to be included. Reflecting on my first experience as a host, I had thought that I was going to give something back to Ōtari by volunteering but, actually, it was me who gained from these two hours. I learned new things about the area, enjoyed seeing how the visitors value Ōtari, had a chance to interact with people, and felt part of the community of volunteers in the Trust. It made me realise how the name for the information centre, Tāne Whakapiripiri, meaning ‘Tāne who draws people together’, is very apt, and I am looking forward to my next shift.

***If you think hosting could be you – we are always happy to welcome new weekend hosts.***



## Great news from the Revisitation Project

It's official! From a once weed-choked, rubbish-filled Kaiwharawhara valley we now have a real native forest, with natural regeneration well underway.

On October 18, a volunteer team made up of ecologists, botanists and several 'originals' – those who were at the coal face 25 years ago when replanting of the once ravaged valley began - joined the first 'restoration revisitation'. The project is being led by Jonathan Kennett and Bronwen Wall, (who started the original project) with support from the Trust. The plan is to 'revisit', measure and count all of the 22 original monitored sites to see what's happened.



*Measuring growth, Jonathan Kennett, Richard Grasse, Susan Timmins and Maggie Bayfield*



*Bronwen Wall on Site 17, circa 2001.*

From the start, results have been exciting. On 'Site 10', a 3x10m plot where 10 species and 50 trees were planted, there are now 25 native species and 247 native plants. 'Some of the original volunteers from 25 years ago could not believe that it was a planted forest,' said Jonathan. 'Self-seeded arrivals have included kohekohe, porokaiwhiri, kawakawa, rewarewa and hangehange, plus many vines and ferns. 'We also found five weed species (39 plants) which have been pulled out.



*Site 17, 2025 - Carol West measures the growth.*

Other project volunteers are clearing lightwells above podocarp species, and several wool fadges have been filled with old carpet squares, originally used as mulch around the plantings. Wool carpet was used, expecting that it would break down over time. Sadly, the underlay matting was not a natural fibre and didn't compost, instead much of it become tangled in tree roots, hence it's removal.

As this newsletter goes to print, we can report more progress. Hundreds of weeds have been removed from sites 14 and 17. Site 14 was originally planted with 68 native plants and 11 species. Now there are 212 plants and 27 species! At Site 17, native plants have gone from 49 to 145, the species diversity from 11 to 26, with some trees up to 10 metres tall.



*Carpet squares are out, says volunteer Charles Sullivan*

Site 1 is significant. Initial monitoring here led to new techniques being employed for reforestation in the valley, says Jonathan. 'This site was planted 4 times, in 2003 there were 49 native plants and 13 species, now there are 152 plants and 21 species and the canopy is 8 metres tall.

While the revisitation will continue through summer, early indications show that the toil and dedication of those volunteers, many who have worked on this project since it began in 2001 and continue to do so, along with the huge support from Wellington Gardens, Ōtari staff, Greater Wellington and the Trust, has transformed Ōtari's Kaiwharawhara Valley.



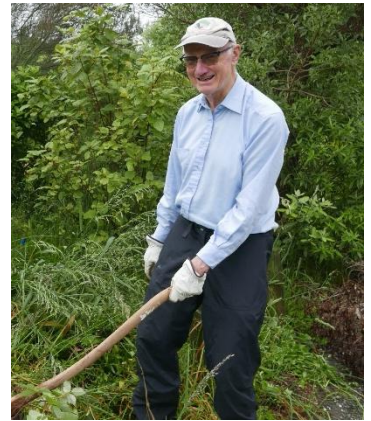
*On Site 20, Jonathan Kennett and Carol West were joined by Robert Ashe, who led Global Volunteer groups on the original project.*



## Kaiwharawhara Restoration - it all started here

*As we watch progress on the Kaiwharawhara 'Restoration Revisitation', **Wilbur Dovey** recalls how the valley was transformed from one with gorse, blackberry, dumped rubbish and a choked, unhealthy stream to a benchmarking native forest restoration.*

The Ōtari Revegetation Group is one of the oldest revegetation groups in the Wellington area. It began with the inauguration of the Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust in 2001 when Jock Fleming, a Trust founder, obtained funding for a restoration programme. In partnership with Greater Wellington Regional Council and Wellington City Council, the Trust employed Jonathan Kennett and Bronwen Wall to oversee a volunteer project to clear and revegetate the Kaiwharawhara valley, from the Troup Lawn to Ian Galloway Park.



*Wilbur Dovey*

They got close to the old Wilton tip face by 2006 when the money ran out. As the Trustee with responsibility for revegetation I took on the leadership of the project with my wife Liz. We continued on a monthly voluntary basis and Ōtari staff provided plants and advice for where to plant them. For two years, we worked in various areas throughout the valley, including above the Troup Lawn where old macrocarpa trees had been cleared in 2005.

in 2008, Ōtari Curator Rewi Elliot asked us to focus on the old tip face. We have made such progress with revegetation our main job now is weeding. In 2001, gorse, broom, blackberry and fennel were the main weeds, now tradescantia has become the most prolific. On your walks, look for the big, black weed bags hidden near the tracks. These are full of the weeded tradescantia, now rotting down to compost. Montbretia, bindweed, Darwin's barberry, bamboo and bear's breeches (*Acanthus mollis*) have also invaded.

Winter months were devoted to planting, we followed the model established by Jonathan and Bronwen, planting relatively close together with bigger species at the bottom of the hill and smaller species as we worked higher. We usually planted around 200 trees per year.



*Ron Fountain*



*Laura Couling*



*Lynley Trower*



*Geoff Couling*

Some of our original volunteers have continued with us, year after year. Tireless workers such as Geoff and Laurel Couling, Lynley Trower, Ron Fountain, Charles Sullivan and Richard Grasse have provided continuity with the original Trust volunteers and Jonathan and Bronwen. Thanks to a recent push for volunteers by the Trust we have also been joined by younger, fitter folk. With their input I am confident the revegetation group has a good future and thankfully so, as invasive weeds continue to have a presence in Otari. We will continue to meet on the second Saturday of every month.

Wilbur Dovey



## Conservation and Science Update

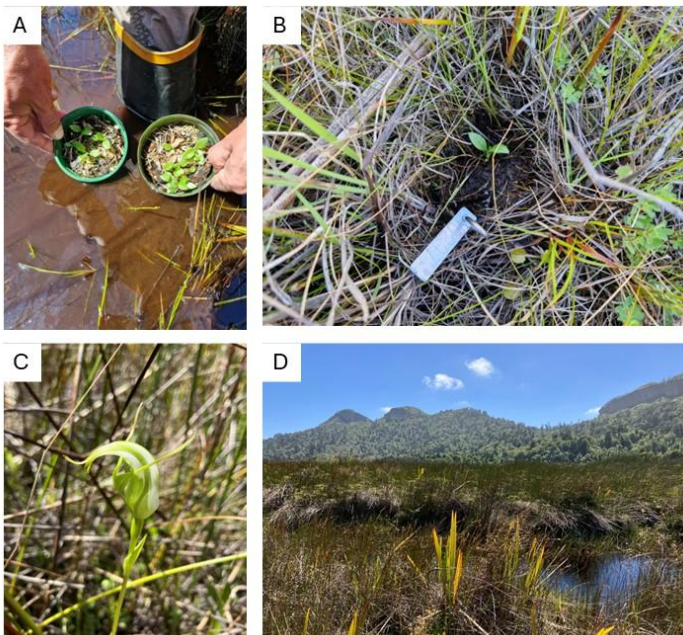
*Orchid seedling success and an orchid horticulturist joins the team – highlights from the Lions Ōtari Plant Conservation Laboratory, by Karin van der Walt*



Phoebe Smith

We were fortunate this year to receive a grant from the Stanly Smith Horticultural Trust which enabled us to employ Phoebe Smith as our first orchid horticulturist. Phoebe has worked with the team to take our orchid conservation programme to the next step, establishing methods to move lab-grown orchids into the nursery and beyond. With her excellent horticultural skills, Phoebe has tidied our existing orchid collection. She has successfully transferred seedlings from the lab to the nursery of *Caladenia* 'Red Stem', *Gastrodia cooperae*, *G. cunninghamii*, *G. sesamoides*, *Pterostylis tristis*, *P. micromega*, *P. patens*, *P. trullifolia*, *P. montana*, and *Thelymitra* sp. plus the two epiphytic species *Drymoanthus adversus* and *D. flavus*.

We are particularly proud to have reached this stage for the nationally critical greenhood, *P. micromega*. Research technician, Jennifer Alderton-Moss, did a stellar job of germinating and nursing the small seedlings in the lab, before handing them over to Phoebe who carefully hardened them off using a phased approach. First, she weaned them off the comfortable temperatures in the incubator, then gradually opened the lids of the humid containers to teach the seedlings how to cope with lower humidity environments. We had a couple of sleepless nights when *P. micromega* initially responded by dying back but are delighted to report that they have grown back strong and healthy in spring. So healthy in fact that 20 seedlings were planted back into Mangarakau Wetland (south of Farewell Spit) where the seeds were originally collected.



### Images

**A&B:** *Pterostylis micromega* (swamp greenhood) seedlings grown in the Lions Ōtari Plant Conservation Laboratory and nursery being transferred back to Mangarakau wetland, credit Greg Napp DOC.

**C:** *P. micromega* in flower in the Mangarakau wetland and

**D:** Mangarakau wetland, credit Carlos Lehnebach, Te Papa.

Another 69 smaller seedlings were given to DOC in Nelson who have planted them in a tray with soil from the Mangarakau wetland. Since these seedlings are still too small to plant back into the wetland, they will be grown on over the summer at the DOC office then planted in the wetland in spring of 2026.

As well as thanking the Stanly Smith Horticultural Trust for supporting Phoebe's position, we are grateful to the Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust, who funded all the consumables and resources required to achieve this significant milestone in the conservation of *P. micromega*.

## Farewell Karin

And on a sad note from the science team: Dr. Karin van der Walt is leaving her role as Ōtari's Conservation and Science Advisor. She will finish in early January.

Henk Louw, WCC Urban Ecology Manager, said that Karin had been one of the main drivers of the establishment of the Lions Ōtari Plant Conservation Laboratory.

‘Over the past 10 years, Karin has made an exceptional contribution to scientific work for plant conservation efforts within the wider botanical community both here in Wellington and across Aotearoa New Zealand. Karin has, over the years, sourced significant investment for the Ōtari laboratory and the numerous successes that have been achieved at the laboratory over the years is a testament to her dedication, hard work, commitment, and leadership. Her expertise, passion for threatened species, and publication of many scientific peer-reviewed papers have left a lasting impact on our organisation.’

‘We are incredibly grateful for everything Karin has brought to the Ōtari laboratory and the wider Botanic gardens teams, from leading important research and conservation initiatives, mentoring colleagues and strengthening our conservation connections with local, regional and national partners.’

The Trust also thanks Karin for her huge contribution and wishes her well for her future. We look forward to the many gains for plant conservation we are sure that she will make, wherever she goes.



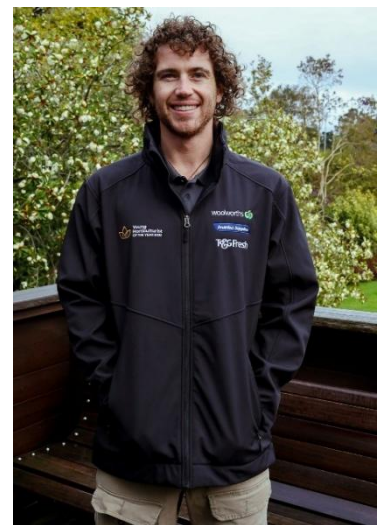
*Karin and best mate Tsotsi*

## Training pays dividends

Last year, the Trust supported apprentice gardener, River Foster, to attend Canterbury University's Biology 305 course at the Cass Field Station. River reported back enthusiastically about his experience. ‘Learning in the field, about subalpine plants from expert tutors, was the most enjoyable and fun piece of study I've ever done.’

But River didn't stop there. In May, he picked up the NZ 2025 Young Amenity Horticulturist Award and, in October, came third at the NZ Young Horticulturist of the Year 2025. Here he also won the Craigmore Sustainability Best Presentation Award, and he credits his time at Ōtari for this. ‘My presentation focused on projects and propagation techniques for New Zealand conifers, in particular about revegetating sites, so working at Ōtari, with its conifers and revegetation work was a big inspiration for me. Also, in the competition there were sections covering all aspects of horticulture. In the Botany Section I got the highest score, that was certainly helped by my time at Cass.’

River moved into horticulture from a medical career (he was a phlebotomist then a cardiology technician). He says horticulture felt like a natural extension to medicine. ‘Botany biology is really interesting. After being a human biologist, it's almost like I continued my journey except that I'm working with plants, not humans. Gardeners in horticulture are just great to hang out with,’ he adds. After a short stint at Christchurch's Botanic Gardens he moved north to take up a horticulture apprenticeship with Wellington City Council, and now works for Blackbird Gardening with Joel Gailer, a former Wellington Gardens' colleague.



*River Foster*



## Te Ara Whāia

Fibres and plants of Ōtari and the talents of Ōtari weavers were on show, when the Tuakana rōpū of Ōtari Raranga Weavers exhibited their collective works in Te Ara Whāia, in November. The exhibition was held at the 113 Taranaki Street space. At the opening, rangatira Frank Topia said being able to work in the environment of Ōtari, in Pā Harakeke and in the ngahere and among everything that lives there, is truly a gift for the rōpū.



*Cape with Ōtari tī kōuka, muka and kiekiei, by Sarah O'Sullivan*

Pā Harakeke, a collection of harakeke from the Rene Orchiston Collection, chosen from around the country especially for their suitability for different weaving uses, was opened in 2019. At the time, Ōtari Manager, Tim Park, said bringing people and plants together is the essence of a botanical garden. 'These plants are able to be used, these are resources that can strengthen our cultural connections. We are really fortunate to have this collection, and to have the dedicated Kaiako Linda Lee and Frank Topia, from Ōtari Raranga Weavers, to guide us.



*Left: Kete, by Anita Murdock (top) and Caitlin Dalzell.*



*Fibres give a layering effect in this cape by Anita Murdock. Fibres include kiekie from Pororari River, pingao from her Tainui home, and tī kōuka.*



*Makeweroa (harakeke) cape with kōorari dye (from the harakeke flower stalk), by Frankie Stewart.*

## Another raranga story we like:



How special are these kete? Ōtari friend and weaver, Linda Hall, presented the beautiful kete as a fundraising opportunity for the Trust on Open Day. Thank you so much Linda. The delighted winner of one of the kete was Sharli Solomon, respected rongoā practitioner, who had just run a three-hour Open Day workshop and donated proceeds to the Trust. Now that's fitting.

***Check the next page for our Open Day recap.***



## Rā Tūwhera ki Ōtari: Ōtari Open Day 2025 – a pictorial review

Great weather, a great community vibe, and busy, that was Open Day 2025. We trialled book readings (and a fernery tour) by local and very prestigious authors. Our plant sales were as popular as ever, with Jane and other leading horticulturalists and botanists on hand to help people choose the right plants. Justin cooked up a storm on the barbecue, new and old volunteers turned out to help and we actually raised more money for the Trust through a koha for sausages, teas, coffees and cakes than we ever did trying to sell them all. What a wonderful community! Here's a snapshot of the day:



*RAMBO's Richard Grasse and friends*



*Art with Tū Mātau Ora*



*Busy plant sale trading*



*String Bean Puppets wowed the kids and big kids.*



*Wellington BotSoc and Trelissick Park Group.*



*The deck was busy! There was a great turnout for our supporters from local environmental groups, many folk shared a cuppa at the Trust table, and Justin's BBQ was a popular, all-day attraction.*



*Ruth Paul (with kiwi egg prop) was one of four authors who shared stories and readings.*

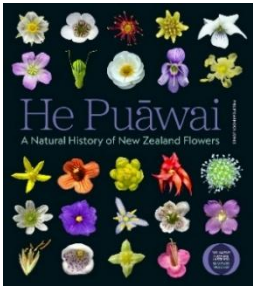


## Books

There's a bit of book activity happening around Ōtari. First, in 2027, Bateman Books will be publishing *New Zealand's Gardens of International Significance*. This is a big project, covering 17 gardens each chosen for their unique qualities and, yes, Ōtari is one of them. In October, Ōtari staff and trustees hosted co-writer Tony Barnes for a close look at Ōtari's fine features, and chatted with him about the history, native forest, gardens collections, and the huge community that embraces Ōtari.



Kevin O'Connor, Tom Belworthy, Tony Barnes, Tim Park



In October, Philip Garnock-Jones launched his magnificent *He Puāwai, A Natural History of New Zealand Flowers* (the flowers depicted in stunning 3D photography). Ōtari plants and flowers feature, and Tim Park predicts the book will inspire another generation of botanists and nature lovers in Aotearoa. *He Puāwai* retails at \$79.99 and Philip has offered a \$10 discount for Trust members making online purchases through the Auckland University Press website. Simply write the code FLOWERS in the coupon box on the checkout page.

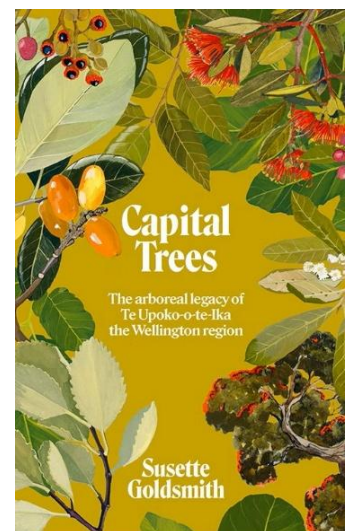
## Book review

Also in October, a delightful book celebrating the heritage of Wellington's trees was released. Not surprisingly, *Capital Trees: the arboreal legacy of Te Upoko-o-te-Ika the Wellington Region*, by Susette Goldsmith, features many Ōtari trees. Thanks to Dr Carol West, for this review:

There's a new book out, and Ōtari gets a mention, several in fact. Susette presented on some of her earlier research at the Trust's 2022 seminar series. In "Capital Trees" she discusses how trees have gained recognition via lists of notable trees and how those lists came about (Part One). She also discusses the long-standing issue of non-native native trees (think pōhutukawa, karaka etc.), how many of these have been planted around Wellington and why (Part Two). Finally, Susette describes the history of commemorative trees around the city (Part Three).

The only Ōtari tree listed on the NZ Tree Register is Moko, the old rimu. She's also illustrated in *Capital Trees* (p. 214). Another Ōtari favourite is illustrated with a fabulous two-page spread – the big northern rātā in the 38 Degrees garden (pp. 118–9). We learn that as part of the 1940 Centennial celebrations 200 kōwhai were planted at the entrance to Ōtari Plant Museum (as it was then known). I wonder how many of those have survived?

Some people central to Ōtari's history are mentioned for their wider roles, as well as specifically at Ōtari. Susette's visit to Moko is nicely portrayed and it's pleasing that the book the Trust commissioned Bee Dawson to write about the history of Ōtari gets a fulsome mention. Continuing on the theme of Ōtari connections within *Capital Trees*, there is an illustration of a herbarium specimen of hard beech seedlings collected by Eleanor Burton, long-term Ōtari staff member.



If you are interested in trees and the history of their recognition, especially around Wellington, you'll want to get a copy of this informative book. The cover alone is worth buying the book for – it is so evocative of Ōtari-Wilton's Bush! Published by Te Papa Press, the book retails at \$40.

## Bringing schools to Ōtari - environmental education gets a boost



Exploring healthy soil.

More than 300 school students have taken part in environmental education at Ōtari this year, thanks to funding by the Trust and Transpower.

WCC, through Wellington Gardens, is an approved Ministry of Education provider to run curriculum-based 'outside the classroom' environmental education programmes. They are provided by the Ministry at a cost of \$6 per child, to be paid by the school or child. However, the uptake of these programmes had not been great as many schools could not afford bus transport to Ōtari. In keeping with the Trust Deed and its focus on education, the Trust considered options to help.

In 2024, the Trust agreed to cover transport costs for schools with an EQI greater than 471 (formerly known as lower decile schools) up to a total of \$1600. This was more than matched when Transpower added a \$4000 grant in support.

The combined funding has enabled 300 Year 1 to Year 9 students from six schools (Postgate, Titahi Bay, St Annes, Naenae Intermediate, St Bernards and Linden) to visit, take part in curriculum-based education, and experience Ōtari-Wilton's Bush.

There's been a great teacher response. Teachers from St Anne's School, Newtown, wrote that many of their ākonga (students) come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. 'Having the opportunity to wānanga (be in a place of learning) in such a rich taiao (natural) setting was incredibly special for them and their whānau. Our ākonga approached the experience with enthusiasm, curiosity, and a real willingness to learn. Being in the ngahere allowed them to make meaningful connections with te taiao and deepen their understanding of our current inquiry into the importance of healthy soil and how it sustains all living things. We are extremely appreciative of the Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust for making this haerenga (journey) possible.'



Connecting with te taiao, the natural world.

Other teachers agreed, confirming that they would not have been able to visit without this funding, and were incredibly grateful for the support that allowed their students experience such an inspiring and unique environment.

## Fungi: the golden parasol and a new record for Aotearoa

*Thanks to Geoff Ridley, Trustee and mycologist*

The golden parasol belongs to the genus *Bolbitius* and is a small wood decay fungus occasionally found on wood mulched at Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. In Aotearoa, the golden parasol is usually identified as the introduced European species *Bolbitius titubans*. However, a specimen collected during the annual guided walk in 2014 was recently DNA sequenced and has turned out to be the North American *Bolbitius variicolor*. According to Jerry Cooper, who sequenced the specimen, these species are almost impossible to tell apart although *Bolbitius variicolor* is supposedly more olive in colour than *Bolbitius titubans*. This Ōtari specimen is the first record of *Bolbitius variicolor* for Aotearoa.





## RAMBO Report

Ōtari-Wilton's Bush and RAMBO trapping lines were in the limelight when Predator Free New Zealand and Predator Free Wellington held a trapping hui at Ōtari, in November. Ecologist and trapping specialist, Cam Speedy, led workshops into the bush to discuss traps on the RAMBO network. He shared simple tips for everyone: make sure traps are actually working by firing them every few months, test the calibration, and place them on stable ground. A predator might be wary of entering a wobbly trap! He also believes the effect of the lunar cycle is a key factor on catch rates.



*Cam Speedy talks trapping*

In other RAMBO news, a few stoats have been caught recently, we don't catch many these days but this is the season the young emerge from their nests so it's great to try to stay on top of them. The Western Hills biannual monitoring was carried out in November. This includes four lines through Ōtari – 10 bait tunnels per line set 100 m apart (in a straight line, off track, which makes the going interesting). While other recent monitoring projects, by



*Jim Tait*

Victoria University students and Greater Wellington, have detected a slight increase of rats across the western hills, the latest results were good for Ōtari. In our four lines only mice and insects, most likely wētā, were detected.

Meanwhile RAMBO coordinator Jim Tait has been spreading the word to future trappers. He attended the Ōtari School Fair then joined fellow trapper Kathy Ombler, and Sandra and David from PFW, to discuss conservation and trapping with 55 Wadestown School students.

## Banding the babies

Four kākā chicks, from two nests, were banded at Ōtari in early December. Most of the region's kākā are now not banded, due to the success of the reintroduction of the species to Wellington. However, Tim Park says that banding a few helped give an understanding of how they are spreading around the landscape. For example, a banded parent who nested at Ōtari last year was hatched ten years before in Ngaio, confirming that generations of kākā are now breeding and dispersing outside Zealandia. Band records are maintained by DOC, sightings and band descriptions can be reported online at: [birdbanding.doc.govt.nz](http://birdbanding.doc.govt.nz)



*Rawiri Walsh lifts a chick from its hīnau nest.*



*Lynley Trower helps Linton Miller.*

Helpers from around the local conservation community came together for the banding. Rawiri Walsh (Capital Kiwi) was on hand to gently lift the chicks from their nest. The chicks came from nests in old, hollow hīnau, one in the 38 Degree Garden and one near the Troup Lawn. Kākā love Ōtari's old-growth forest and many kākā chicks have been hatched from these two trees in recent years.

Zealandia volunteer, Linton Miller, led the banding. (Only certified people with specific training can band the birds.) He was helped by Annemieke Hendriks (DOC) and Kirsten Anderson (Wellington Zoo). Also keeping an eye on things was Lynley Trower, on hand to see the rewards of her 18 years of volunteer trapping in Ōtari. Lynley is one of the originals of Ōtari's 'RAMBO' trapping team, making a difference in keeping birds safe from predator pests.





## Who's been visiting?



### Working out

On Wellington College's annual Volunteer Day, a host of enthusiastic Year 10s cleared weeds and tracks for several hours. Thanks!



### Meeting up

These folk from Wellington's Meet Up Walking Group were spotted resting at Moko while checking out the new Te Ara o Tama. Leader Bridget Porter (centre back) said they loved the views, the forest diversity and the meandering, clearly-signposted tracks.



### Joining in

This ESOL class of recent immigrants from English Language Partners enjoyed their 'outside the classroom' Ōtari experience. Three of them worked together to write about what they learned:

*Yesterday we went to visit Ōtari-Wilton's Bush in Wellington. It is a big protected area saved from clearance in 1868 by the farmer Job Wilton. The teacher gave us a lot of information about native plants and birds. We learned the Māori names of several trees like kauri, which is the biggest tree in New Zealand. We also saw northern rātā, which is the tree that starts its life from vines. We learned about several smaller plants too, like astelia, called the widow maker; taramea, the sharpest*

*plant in the mountains; and kawakawa, the plant with heart-shaped leaves. After lunch we drank some kawakawa tea. We also saw different birds, like tūī, kākā and kererū. At the end we walked round the garden and forest. In the stream we saw a big tuna (eel). We enjoyed this journey. We also enjoyed this class because it taught us a lot of New Zealand's native species. **Lu, David, Fabrizio***

## A shout out to Judi Lapsley Miller

Thanks to artist Judi Lapsley Miller for her support. Judi's work involves layered blends of photo artistry and digital compositing, her images resemble more painting than photograph. Ōtari is a favourite place for Judi, who donates 10 percent of her Ōtari-inspired sales to the Trust. Judi is offering Trust members a 20% discount on prints that support Ōtari, valid to 31 December. Just go to Judi's online collection with this link:

[www.artbyjlm.com/OTARIXMAS20](http://www.artbyjlm.com/OTARIXMAS20). Or use the discount code OTARIXMAS20 on [www.artbyjlm.com](http://www.artbyjlm.com).





## Did you spot the nest?

Big and boisterous tūī, kākā and kererū steal much of the limelight around Ōtari, and we don't mind at all. That said, it's always a thrill when a korimako calls its resonant tones. This one was on a recent mission; supping up the nectar with chicks waiting in their nearby nest, in a kauri tree just by the canopy walkway.



Korimako, bellbird. Tony Stoddard wildbirds.nz

## 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:

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Kathy Ombler (Communications)

Geoff Ridley (Seminars and Guided Walks)

Susan Timmins (Guided Tours)

Annie Yeates (Guided Tours)

oconnorkevin170@gmail.com Ph. 027 270 9787

bayfield@xtra.co.nz Ph: 027 545 4333

jakichi@outlook.co.nz Ph: 022 176 4403

justinnacey@gmail.com Ph: 021 211 3019

kathy@ombler.co.nz Ph: 027 275 5152

Ridley.geoff@gmail.com Ph: 027 422 4102

stimminsdoc1@gmail.com Ph: 027 516 2979

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.*