



ŌTARI
WILTON'S BUSH TRUST

Ōtari Newsletter

September 2026

For Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust members

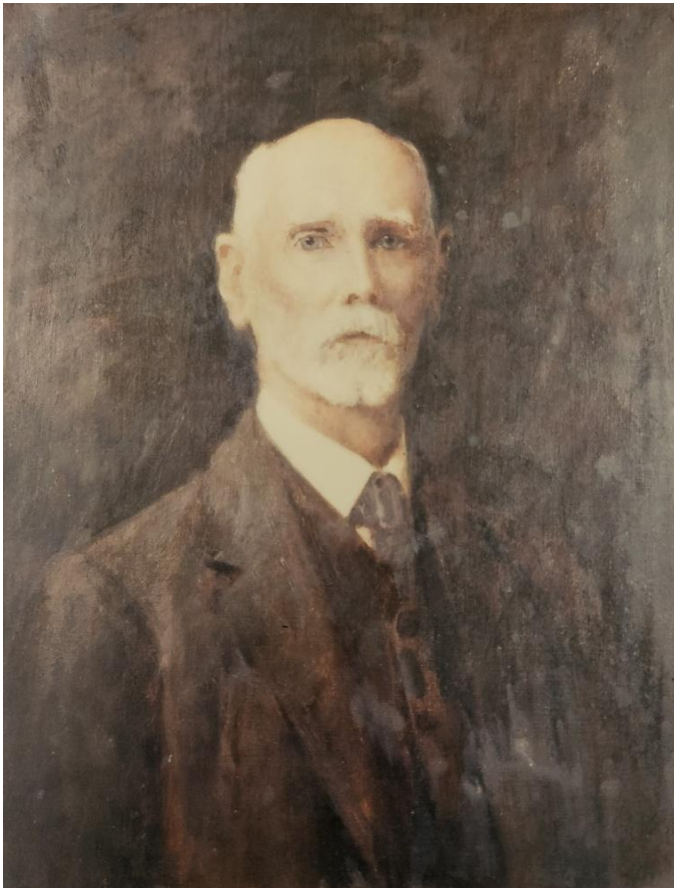
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Ngā mihi nui, greetings in this, our Centenary Year

On October 12, 1926, the Ōtari Open-air Native Plant Museum was opened, setting the scene for the protection of some of our rarest native plants. For this achievement, we acknowledge the roles and foresight of Dr Leonard Cockayne and Mr J.G. MacKenzie. Their vision is still honoured in today's Ōtari Native Botanic Garden, Ōtari-Wilton's Bush.

In this issue:

- Centenary celebrations! October 12
- Guided walks, talks, a plant conservation conference and a community picnic!
- Volunteers are amazing
- Our Lab helps native seeding by drone at Makara Peak
- The Rēkohu relationship



Dr Leonard Cockayne, Private Collection



J.G. MacKenzie, Wellington City Archives

From the Chair

Kia ora koutou

We are entering the busiest phase of Ōtari's centennial celebrations. In the lead up there have been monthly guided walks and seminars and these continue until November. Open Day will have a centenary flavour as Cameron Harrison will make a special batch of sausages for our popular sausage sizzle: pork with native herbs – advice on suitable herbs to use provided by renowned chef Joe McLeod. Plant sales and some of the usual stalls from aligned groups will feature as in previous years. We look forward to welcoming you all on 19 September.



Our Trust volunteers have been busy. In the past three months the new track maintenance volunteer team has formed and got off to a good start despite being thwarted by winter storms. The forest weeders are also helping out with gardens maintenance in their off weeks ahead of the centenary celebrations on 12 October. Glow worm tours have booked out as soon as they have been advertised. It seems the wetter the weather, the brighter the glow worms shine so people have really enjoyed their trips in the rain.

Working with the WCC Urban Ecology team and stakeholders (Te Papa, DOC, Greater Wellington Regional Council, Victoria University, Karori Lions) Kathy Ombler and I have been attending meetings every four weeks aiming to develop a sustainable future for the Lab. This is not an easy task with declining central and local government budgets and a lot of legislative changes in the pipeline. We remain hopeful that a solution can be found because the work carried out at the Lab can solve many problems for plant conservation, whether it's for rare plants or revegetation. Every species is different and many have specific requirements for germination or seed banking that we don't yet know about.

You might be wondering why the centenary sign that we've created and installed on the Visitor Centre wall features *Rubus ×barkeri*: it was Leonard Cockayne's favourite plant, apparently. We are grateful for Eleanor Burton's depiction, drawn especially for the sign. The real plant can be found about halfway along the border with Ōtari School.



We are looking forward to welcoming you to the centenary celebration at the Bowling Club on 12 October from 4.30 pm. Here, along with former Ōtari staff and NZ Plant Conservation Network Conference delegates, you'll be able to enjoy light refreshments and an audio-visual presentation covering the history of Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. That will be followed by an auction of some very stylish, Ōtari-related artworks and for something different, useable things that have been found within the valley by volunteers. Check our website later in September for details of the auction items.

We are also looking forward to welcoming members, along with local families and the community at large to the Trust's Centenary Community Picnic, scheduled for November 14. Mark your calendar! We thought the Centenary was something worth celebrating with everyone who enjoys Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. You'll find more details later in the newsletter.

Ngā mihi o te huritau kotahi rau! Happy Centenary, everyone!

Carol West

Ōtari Manager update

Our gardens are looking great and not too battered after the recent storms, record wind gusts, frosts and even snow! The ground is still quite wet which has been great for our winter planting and weeding. A big thank you to all the regular garden and forest volunteers for the extra help to get the gardens looking ship-shape for Open Day and our centennial events. I have been reflecting on how much volunteer effort goes on at Ōtari and am constantly humbled by the huge amount of support we get from our community. This support goes far beyond volunteering in the forest and gardens; there is a wide range of ways that our community gets involved and we truly appreciate all the effort.



Kathy Ombler has done a great job of leading the production of the Cockayne Centenary information sign on the deck outside Tāne Whakapiripiri, Ōtari's Visitor Centre. Kathy did a sterling job finding the image of Cockayne in the forest on a collection trip and juggling the text to make it fit and flow beautifully alongside Eleanor Burton's illustration of *Rubus ×barkeri*. A big thanks to Kathy and the Trust for making this happen so more people can learn about Ōtari's origins.



Track volunteer Reuben

We are hoping to get the section of track below Ian Galloway Clubrooms open before Open Day. This turned out to be a complex project due to the way two big pines had fallen across the track and stream. We needed to get a tracked woodchipper and a small excavator to the trees so we could make them as safe as possible. There is new fencing in the area to keep people away from the pines that may continue to settle and slump as the ground dries out. We will be doing more work to improve the track surface over the coming months. The track maintenance volunteers have already been helping with this big job! Also, other track upgrade work is ongoing on Te Ara o Tama (on the section of track above Moko, the 800-year-old rimu) but this track remains open.

A big infrastructure upgrade project is coming to the Northern Carpark (off Churchill Drive) very soon. Work is anticipated to start in October and this will mean that there will be no carparking or mulch pile access in this area all summer and into autumn. This project will significantly improve the wastewater network and reduce pollution of the Kaiwharawhara Stream, so we are very supportive of the project but we do recognise it will cause some inconvenience for our visitors. Please bear with us while this work is underway. We are hoping to open the mulch pile soon, once our gardeners have completed their winter maintenance programme and before the wastewater project starts.



Rēkohu nikau berries

It was a real honour to recently host the New Zealand launch of *Manaka Mai* at Ōtari. This is a book about the special plants of Rēkohu/Chatham Islands that I co-authored alongside Matt Ward and Bart Cox. It was published by my father-in-law Roger Steele of Steele Roberts, illustrated with paintings by 92-year-old Pat Thorpe, and edited by her daughter Susan Thorpe, with contributions from Māui Solomon and Peter de Lange. This book was a real team effort and it flowed out of the work being done to ecologically and culturally restore the south-eastern corner of Rēkohu, a place on Moriori land called Manukau. My team and I, along with many others, have been involved with the restoration planting efforts there.

We have collected many of the plants that are now in Ōtari's Rēkohu Garden from the area. It was fantastic to be able to introduce people who attended the book launch to some of the plants that are featured in the book. Many of the island's plants are endemic, but are often related to their NZ cousins so they have some interesting evolutionary stories to tell.

My team are all looking forward to Open Day. It is always exciting having lots of people here catching up, chatting about native plants and Ōtari. We look forward to taking people behind the scenes to see what we do in the nursery, so if you haven't ever had a nosey, be sure to sign up early for one of the behind-the-scenes tours. There is also a lot of work being done by Megan Ireland and the team behind the NZPCN conference. The programme is shaping up well, with a brilliant array of talks, workshops and field trips. See you at Open Day, the Trust's Centenary Celebration, and the Conference!

Mā te wā, Tim Park

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

Adaptations

Megan Ireland, Kaihautū o te Kohinga o Ōtari | Ōtari Collection Team Leader

Winter is always a busy time for us in the gardens with plantings and projects; many of the collections have had a little love and spruce up this winter ahead of some exciting milestones.

One we have focussed on is our Adaptations Garden. This is a space to explore some of the unique and sometimes quirky ways plants have adapted to their environment. There are many ways plants evolve or adapt over time to better attract pollinators, or to deter or disguise themselves from predators.



Horopito

Horopito (*Pseudowintera colorata*) is a popular example, one that many of us were taught about by someone encouraging them to try a leaf, by saying it tastes sweet, minty or zesty.... well you are not alone. Along with many apprentices, students or trusting colleagues, deer and other ungulates have the same reaction and as a result it is often one of the few species avoided in the understory. It is so successfully spicy that other species such as toropapa (*Alseuosmia pusilla*) mimic it.

Māwhai (*Cassytha paniculata*) is a pale-yellow vine which can be found scrambling across kānuka. Its stems wind clockwise up its host and latch on with haustoria (little alien-like suckers) which penetrate into the host plant's bark. Once this parasitic vine has a firm grasp on its host, the host plant eventually dies with it, as it is getting all its nutrients from the host! Another oddity is that this parasitic vine is actually a laurel, belonging to the Lauraceae family.

Hakeke (*Olearia* (=Shawia) *ilicifolia*) is a new addition to this collection and a good example of plants that have seeds that are dispersed by wind. Ever made a wish while trying to blow all the seeds of a dandelion? Daisy seeds are well known for harnessing the wind to get from one place to another. Aotearoa has many native daisies (over 300 species) which all use this tactic. Hakeke also has dull, fragrant, spiny leaves which help it survive well in its habitat of shrublands, riverbeds, montane and subalpine environments.



Hakeke

Next time you're in the garden see if you can guess why some plants are hairy, why some flowers smell the way they do or why they are so small you can hardly see them.

Botanical Art: *Agathis australis* (kauri), by Eleanor Burton



The oldest accession at Ōtari is kauri. The two kauri at the Banks Entrance (next to the school) were planted in 1926, by Mayor and Mayoress Norwood, during the official opening of the Ōtari Open-air Native Pant Museum. Kauri is a northern species, not found south of a line between Hamilton and Tauranga. Cockayne mentions it in his Plan for the development of Ōtari; he planned an 'artificial kauri forest', of kauri and its associated flora, and planted about 100 up near what is now the Flax Clearing. Some of these are still there, though stock damage was a major issue when they first went in. Curator Walter Brockie added about another 100 in the late 1950s. There are also many planted in the garden areas, most in the 38 Degrees garden.

There's a lot happening at Ōtari – here's a run down

Rā Tūwhera ki Ōtari Ōtari Open Day September 19

As we do each Spring, we invite everyone along to discover the people, plants, and projects around Ōtari and our conservation community. From 10am to 2pm. (Rain day Sunday September 20.)

There's a special treat this year: BBQ Centenary Sausages, read on!



Open Day highlights:

- The Trust's Native Plant Sale – all plants raised in the Trust's Ōtari nursery. *
- Behind-the-scenes tours, with Ōtari staff.
- For kids - the 'Discovery Den' (a cosy canvas camp on the kauri lawn) where young explorers can check out natural treasures through microscopes and magnifiers, sketch, read, and learn about the ngahere.
- Try the 'Walk Down Memory Lane' treasure hunt.
- Test your dexterity and enjoy ngā taonga tākaro – traditional Māori games.
- Raranga/weaving.
- Rongoā workshop.
- Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust table, name the native birds and plants!
- Community conservation – chat with the folk from Capital Kiwi, Wellington BotSoc, Kia Mouriora Te Kaiwharawhara, Lions Ōtari Plant Conservation Lab, Treliwick Park Group, Animal Services, Conservation Volunteers NZ, and our very own RAMBO



Open Day 2025

Of course, the Trust will be hosting tea and coffee with cakes and slices, and cooking up a BBQ storm. All for just a koha.

And what's this about special sausages? Local butcher, Cameron Harrison, is mincing up a special 'Centenary' mix of sausages. There may even be some native herbs included. Tasty. We'll also have vegetarian options.

Trust members – can you help us on Open Day?

We are looking for home bakers, also volunteers to help on our Trust table, serve up teas, coffees and cakes, and help with the BBQ. Just an hour or so of your time would be wonderful. If you're keen, please let us know on enquiries@owbt.nz ideally by September 14. If you can't make it on the day, we'd love some baking contributions – cakes, slices, scones – to go with our teas and coffees. Last year members whipped up a wonderful bevy of treats. Drop them in first thing on the day, if you can?

***September Plant Sale**

Note that the September plant sale will take place on Open Day, not September 12. Normal sale days (the second Saturday of the month) will resume for October and November.



Plant sale preparation is well underway

Centenary: Ōtari Open-air Native Plant Museum: Ōtari Native Botanic Garden

How it all began, and those behind it: a story of visionary action, as summarised with excerpts from Evening Post reports

New Zealand's unique native flora is day by day vanishing from the land.
Dr Leonard Cockayne, 1908.

A national botanic garden is necessary for the Dominion.
NZ Institute of Horticulture conference remit, January 1926

The range of flora in Wilton's Bush is still very wide. ... There are few native plants that will not thrive there. A native garden ... within a few miles of the Capital City will be well worth developing.
J.G. MacKenzie, Director Parks and Reserves, WCC, April 1926.

We will recreate native ecosystems from all around New Zealand. All the native plants capable of being cultivated in these gardens should be brought into them without delay.
Dr Leonard Cockayne, April 1926.

Wellington and New Zealand are indebted to the promoters of this open-air museum, the first of its kind in the world, the object of which is to grow and protect the flora of New Zealand.
Mayor Norwood, officially opening the Ōtari Open-air Native Plant Museum. October 12, 1926.

And here we are, 100 years later: the only botanic garden in New Zealand dedicated solely to native plants. Host to more than 1100 species, around half of all the species that grow in New Zealand, including many of our rarest. Today, botanists, scientists, students, kairaranga, families, community and international visitors all come to study, savour and reflect on the plants in Ōtari Native Botanic Garden.



Mayor and Mayoress Norwood at the kauri planting during the Ōtari opening in 1926. But who is the man on the left? We'd love to know, can anyone help?

The Celebration October 12, 2026

During the day's commemorations we will acknowledge all those who brought Ōtari to its fruition; Cockayne, MacKenzie, the Institute of Horticulture (now the RNZIH), Wellington City Council, Wilton for saving the forest that led to Ōtari being chosen as the site for a national 'plant museum', and all the curators and gardeners who have held true to the legacy in the past hundred years.

Programme:

3 to 4pm: Formal commemoration ceremony on the Cockayne Lawn, for invited guests. To be held at the same date and time as the original opening, it will mark exactly 100 years, to the minute!

4.30 to 6.30pm: Centenary Celebration in the Ōtari Bowling Club

For all invited guests and all Trust members. Hosted by the Trust and Wellington City Council, a chance for Trust members to mingle with leading plant conservationists from throughout New Zealand, descendants of Cockayne and past curators and gardeners. Food and drinks, a small presentation and a special, centenary auction to look forward to.

MEMBERS: Your invitation will arrive by email soon. Please RSVP so we can cater for everyone.

It's all happening at once! NZPCN conference

As well as celebrating Ōtari's centenary, October 12 will see the start of the NZPCN (New Zealand Plant Conservation Network) conference. It is being held in Wellington this year to coincide with the centenary.

October 12 is going to be an exciting day for us, says Ōtari's Megan Ireland, who is also heading up the conference organising committee.

'The conference theme this year is *Māhia ngā here - Collaboration for better conservation*. Effective plant conservation relies on collaboration, partnership and collective effort of many working toward the protection of a species or ecosystem. We are looking forward to sharing ideas and making new connections.

Monday 12 will kick start the conference with several workshops across the city, including at Ōtari. In the morning, Ōtari will host four workshops: Interactive tools for new weed records in your area, Pūrākau in practice, Learn your ferns, and Bryophyte identification (field).

The conference symposia will be held at Te Wharewaka Function Centre on Tuesday 13 and Wednesday 14. Presenters from across Aotearoa include four keynote speakers: Aaria Ripeka Dobson-Waitere, Carlos Lehnebach, James Brock and Jason Arnold. There will also be familiar faces with presentations from Jonathan Kennett, Jennifer Alderton-Moss, Sarah Goldberg, Carol West and Tim Park. Check out the website for more info: <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz>



NZ king fern, *Ptisana salicina*

Centenary Community Picnic – November 14 - you're all welcome

After the Centenary formalities are done, the Trust is inviting all the locals out for a relaxing, fun and family time on the Troup Picnic Lawn. After all, that lawn has been hosting picnics for at least 100 years, even before it was formally named, by Curator Andy MacKay, for Mayor George Troup, a staunch supporter of Ōtari.

Here's the deal: The Trust will host the picnic, putting on a BBQ (cooking up a special order of Centenary Sausages, as created by local butcher Cameron Harrison using a few local, native herbs!). We'll do bread, sauce, onions (of course), plus vegetarian sausages. You are welcome to bring anything extra you might need, along with drinks. And a picnic rug.



Stringbean Puppets will be there



Troup Picnic Lawn

Entertainment – Anna, of Stringbean Puppets, is booked for a 2pm show!

Before Anna, we will welcome another, mystery, musical guest – this one is a bit secretive, possibly blending into the background, so we can't say too much. Just be listening from around 12.30pm.

Logistics: We'll be there from 12pm to 3pm. Come whenever you can. You'll need to walk to the Lawn of course and the northern car park will be closed then for the big wastewater upgrade. There are other tracks and more details about Ōtari access during this closure will be available soon.

One Hundred Years of Ōtari: One year of walks and talks

Many varied topics, including a focus on the heritage of Leonard Cockayne, are yet to come in this year's talks and guided walks programme. Talks are entry by koha, guided walks are free to members, otherwise \$10. Walks are limited to 20 so please book on wellingtongardens.nz/our-gardens/otari-wiltons-bush#otari-100.

And members please - we know plans can change. If you've booked on a guided walk and can't come, cancel your booking! There have been some 'no-shows' recently, at the same time people wanting to come have been turned away.

Talks are held in Tāne Whakapiripiri, the visitor centre, 7.30 to 8.30pm. No bookings required, come early. Guided Walks start from Tāne Whakapiripiri at 2pm, and last for around 90 minutes. Gentle trails. Please, no dogs on these walks.

The programme:

September 27 Guided Walk

Kaiwharawhara Restoration Revisited, Jonathan Kennett and Bronwen Wall
Explore what has become a benchmark of community forest restoration.



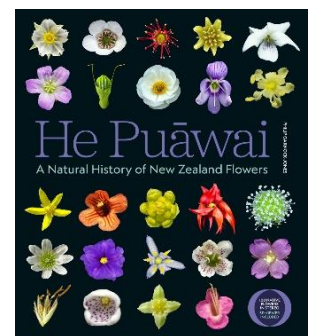
October 3, Guided Walk

The prolific birdlife of Ōtari-Wilton's Bush, Hugh Robertson
Hugh is one of New Zealand's leading experts on native birds, and a prolific author of books about our birds. Take a short circuit walk with Hugh calling up the birds and talking about their status.



October 6 Talk

He Pūawai, A Natural History of New Zealand Flowers, Phil Garnock-Jones
The emeritus professor, former chair of botany at Victoria University, and author of the beautiful tome *He Pūawai*, will discuss the complexities of Aotearoa's spectacular native flowers.



October 25 Guided Walk

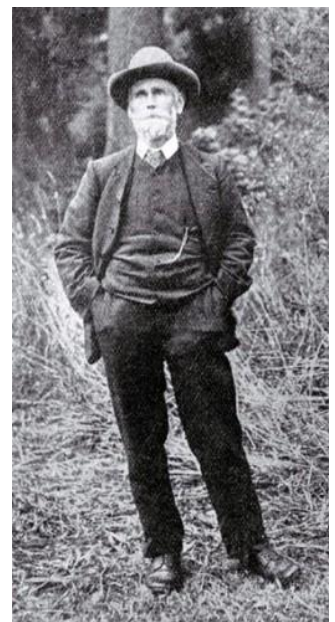
Dr Leonard Cockayne's vision for Ōtari – how well has it been achieved? Dr Carol West
We'll learn about the four elements of Cockayne's plan for native plant conservation at Ōtari, and see some examples he personally established.

November 3 Talk

Who was Dr Leonard Cockayne? Dr Carol West and Kathy Ombler
Dr Cockayne did so much more than help establish Ōtari. Hear about his prolific recording of New Zealand botany and work to protect significant conservation areas around New Zealand.

November 22 Guided Walk

More than 100 years of heritage, Kathy Ombler
Ōtari's legacy encompasses more than a hundred years of foresight, and includes mana whenua, farmers/settlers, conservationists, botanists, curators and community volunteers. Come walk in their footsteps.



All events are listed on our website:

<https://www.owbt.nz/visiting/centenary-events/>

Our volunteers!

Are busier than ever. The Trust was a finalist in the 2026 Wellington Airport Regional Community Awards, up against an impressive array of volunteers doing good things around the city. But we don't do what we do for Awards. Here's a recent snapshot of Ōtari volunteers just doing what they love. Many do more than one thing. Thursday's garden weeders and forest weeders rally together, trappers and track gang vollies mix it up, quite a few just do a bit of everything! See Tina's story, next page.



Susan



Yao, Jane, Lynley



Barb and Helen



Rachel



The weeding team (some of them)



Track man Dick: another day, another culvert!



Kathy shovelling



Charlie and Charles



Well-earned smoko for the track gang



Carol forest weeding



Russell forest weeding

My Volunteering Journey at Ōtari

Volunteer story, by Yan Luan (Tina)

I'm currently studying for a Master of Professional Business Analysis in Wellington. I first discovered Ōtari because it is close to where I live. I spend a lot of time sitting during the day, so thought volunteering would be a good way to get outside, move my body and spend more time in nature.

In 2026, I joined three different volunteer activities at Ōtari, whenever they fitted around my study schedule.



One was forest weeding, and what I didn't expect was how relaxing it would be. There is something quite therapeutic about doing a simple task with your hands and not having to think too much about anything else. And there are always unexpected rewards — encountering kārearea and ruru, or coming across a huge fallen tree covered in different kinds of fungi.

I've also started to see the bush differently. When I began, I saw a sea of green and had no idea what I was looking at. Now, individual weeds almost jump out at me! Maggie told us that after learning to recognise weeds at Ōtari, she found herself spotting them while travelling in Australia. We joked that once you learn to identify weeds, it can be a habit that follows you everywhere — even on holiday.

Since joining the Weekend Host team, I've become much more familiar with Ōtari. Initially I thought hosting was about sharing information with visitors, but I soon realised that it is just as much about listening to their stories.

Visitors come to Ōtari for many different reasons. I remember talking to a father who said that he had spent his Saturday doing six loads of washing and came to Ōtari simply to walk and clear his head. I've also met families who value the peaceful spaces at Ōtari, including the art table area, where I've seen some autistic children enjoy having a space to create and spend time in their own way.

These conversations have made me realise that Ōtari means different things to different people. For some, it is a place to learn about native plants; for others, it is somewhere to slow down, spend time with family, or simply take a break from everyday life. Listening to these stories has become one of the most rewarding parts of hosting for me.

The nursery gave me another kind of satisfaction — the feeling of creating something tangible. I spent about two months helping with plant propagation, and it was rewarding to see cuttings grow into healthy plants that people could take home and enjoy in their own gardens.

I also enjoyed watching Jane and Lynley share their knowledge with customers. They weren't simply buying plants; they were taking home native plants and learning how to care for them. Seeing how knowledgeable and enthusiastic many of the customers were, and how much they wanted to support Ōtari, made the value of our work feel very real and immediate.

What I originally saw as a way to get outside and exercise has gradually become something I genuinely look forward to. Through different volunteering roles, I've discovered the plants, history and people that make Ōtari what it is. More importantly, I've realised that volunteering is not just about what I can contribute. It is also about what I learn from the people around me and the place itself. I feel lucky to have found Ōtari and to have become a small part of its ongoing story.

The Rēkohu relationship

Rēkohu might be some 700km away from Ōtari but that hasn't stopped a special bond forming between the two. When *Manaka Mai*, a book celebrating the plants from Rēkohu and Rangīhaute, the Chatham Islands, was launched at Ōtari in August the close relationship became apparent.

The book, featuring beautiful paintings of Rēkohu plants by Patricia Thorpe, is a byproduct of the huge effort going into restoration at Manukau, Solomon hūnau (family) land on the windswept,

southeastern edge of Rēkohu. Eliminating pests and bringing back manu to the restored forest landscape is the ultimate goal, says Māui Solomon.

Ōtari Manager, Tim Park, has a long connection with Rēkohu. His German ancestors once lived there, and his father, Geoff Park, helped inspire the initial restoration of Manukau. As Tim mentions in his manager's update, Ōtari staff have visited Rēkohu to help with the planting at Manukau. Last year, Tim led the first citizen science BioBlitz of the Chathams and visited plant nurseries on the island where threatened Rēkohu endemics are being raised.



Māui Solomon and Tim Park at Ōtari's Rēkohu Garden

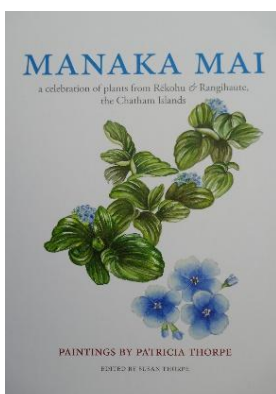


In reciprocation, Ōtari has been given plants from Rēkohu, which now feature in Ōtari's Rēkohu Garden, part of the more extensive Offshore Islands Garden. Following the book launch Tim and Māui hosted a tour of the garden and discussed differences of the Rēkohu plants compared with Aotearoa New Zealand species.

Rēkohu plants have evolved over millions of years of isolation, they also had no browsing moa or harsh frosts to defend against, said Tim. Rēkohu taramea, for example, has soft feather-like leaves, not sharp like the New Zealand 'speargrass'. Similarly, the hoho, Rēkohu lancewood, has almost smooth margins, not spiky leaves like its mainland cousin. The flowers of Rēkohu nīkau emerge near ground level, not high, above moa-browsing level, as with New Zealand nīkau.



Hoho, Rēkohu lancewood



At the launch, publisher Roger Steele said the book describes botany in readable and entertaining text! Whether you are an avid botanist, delight in beautiful botanical paintings, or keen for an insight into the Moriori people and their relationship to the natural world, you will love this book. You'll find it at Unity Books.

And if you want to see the real plants, take a wander in the Rēkohu Garden. That's the beauty of Ōtari – it's a showplace for native plants from throughout New Zealand and its offshore islands, right here on our back doorstep.

Ōtari and the student volunteers

University master's student, Venkat Vamshi, needed 'volunteer points' for his university programme. He joined our Track Maintenance team, shovelling and raking metal on the track from Ian Galloway Park.

It has been a valuable experience, and I truly enjoyed being involved, he later wrote. 'I really appreciate the opportunities you have given me and I wanted to let you know that I have now finished my studies. Thank you for your support, guidance, and encouragement throughout my volunteering.'



Venkat with Ōtari groundsman Martin



Hristo and Khan dealing to the trad.

Scots College students, Hristo, Khan and Johnny, have been volunteering during weekends and school holidays. 'My friends and I have been volunteering as part of a school assignment called the Community Project,' says Hristo. 'We chose to help restore and maintain native bush in Ōtari-Wilton's Bush.'

The Community Project is mandatory for Year 10 students, adds Johnny. 'We were interested in learning about protection of native species and how we as a group can make a difference.'

They've so far helped with light-welling, weeding and planting in the Kaiwharawhara valley and pulled out probably more tradescantia than they knew existed, with the Forest Weeders.

Hristo says it has been interesting to learn about what harms the native bush, and what people can do to help. 'I enjoyed learning about light-welling, and about the effects of weeds like

tradescantia. The people we have worked with have been very helpful. They also gave us the responsibility to work on our own,' he adds.

Khan says coming to Ōtari has been a wonderful experience because of the kindness of the people running the volunteer work. 'They have been really helpful and understanding of our situation.'

Johnny agrees. 'I have really enjoyed the people I have been working with. I enjoy their jokes and teamwork and how they are supportive and interested in what we are doing.'

Johnny has also enjoyed the light welling, giving plants the right amount of sunlight to maintain growth. 'The weeding I didn't enjoy as much as it was a slow process but at the end it was very rewarding. I have also learnt how easy it is to make a difference to the environment through teamwork, discussion and action. Asking questions of the people we've worked with has been useful for our project, and for our overall knowledge.'



Hristo and Simon prepare to clear the light

Their assignment is due in December so we hope to see them back before then.

Drone Seeding - from Ōtari's Lab to Mākara Peak

A look at how research in the Lions Ōtari Plant Conservation Laboratory helped seed remote parts of Mākara Peak, to supplement ongoing restoration in Wellington City's first official 'carbon sink' forest.

By Simon Kennett



In September 2024, I dashed from a Mākara Peak MTB Supporters tree planting party to the 'Behind the Scenes Tour' at Ōtari's annual Open Day. As luck would have it, Sarah Goldberg turned up while the tour was at the Lions Ōtari Conservation Laboratory (Ōtari lab) and Jennifer Alderton-Moss encouraged her to say a few words about her research there. This was focused on podocarp seeds which, at Mākara Peak, are as rare as weka teeth!

With the connection made, Sarah found herself presenting at the very next Mākara Peak conservation committee meeting. They were hooked on the idea of flying uncommon seeds into inaccessible parts of Mākara Peak by drone. It was good timing. The MTB Supporters were a recipient of an Air New Zealand Four Corners Project grant, and signed Sarah up to manage a drone seeding project in the park.

The project started in June 2025 with the establishment of four direct seeding test plots – two in a gully and two near a ridge. That work was partly informed by Sarah's previous direct-seeding experiment at Zealandia, but this time with a wider range of species.

In the end, the species selected were miro, hīnau, nīkau and mataī, which all have tough seed coats that protected the seeds as they went through the drone hopper.



Collecting hīnau seed in Ōtari



Sarah testing seed viability in the Lions Ōtari Plant Conservation Laboratory

In autumn 2026, 21,500 seeds were collected from a dozen Wellington reserves, including Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. Sarah then completed viability testing of each species at the Ōtari lab.

In late June, during a lucky mid-winter fine spell, the drone seeding went off without a hitch.

The seeds were dropped at four sites in the northern half of Mākara Peak and will be monitored over the next five years. It's expected that around a thousand seeds will germinate, some will become trees and eventually produce seeds of their own.

If this works as well as hoped, it opens up the possibility of reintroducing iconic, missing native species to large parts of Wellington's Outer Green Belt that are too rugged for planting by hand.

Thanks to Air New Zealand's Every Corner Project funding, Taranaki Whānui for their blessing for our seed collection, Ōtari for the use of the Ōtari lab, support from WCC and GWRC staff, Mākara Peak Supporters volunteers, and Red Tree Environmental Solutions for drone services.



After a karakia, the seed-laden drone lifts off

Art by Judi Lapsley-Miller

Our birds are already works of art! Says local wildlife artist, Judi Lapsley-Miller. 'My art features gorgeous, moody and joyful birds and other wildlife!' It's not surprising that Judi gets a lot of her creative ideas from Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. Don't forget to check out her kind offer, a 10% discount for members on artworks supporting Ōtari until the end of September, every artwork sold means a 10% donation for the Trust.

Thanks Judi. Check this link for Judi's special offer:

<https://www.artbyjlm.com/discount/OTARIFANSSPRING26?redirect=%2Fcollections%2Fsupport-otari-wiltons-bush-trust>



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 All members receive our quarterly newsletter, free entry to our annual talks and guided walks and winter glowworm tours. Memberships and donations 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

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The Trustees welcome contact from members on any matters relating to Ōtari-Wilton's Bush or the Trust. For Newsletter comments and 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**, and click on the Facebook or Instagram logo on the home page.*



Don't forget to check the kōwhai tree in the carpark this spring. This happened last year.

Photo by Tony Stoddard, WildBirds.NZ