



# Ōtari Newsletter

## September 2025

For members of the Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust  
Website: <https://www.owbt.nz/>

### *Ngā mihi nui, greetings*

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*Te Whenua Māori o Te Kura Ōtari shared waiata for the launch of Ōtari's wayfinding trails and signage*

## From the Chair

Kia ora koutou

I am delighted to announce Trust support for a proposed Kaiwharawhara Stream Restoration 'Revisitation'. Ōtari's Kaiwharawhara Valley already sets a benchmark for community restoration. The information gathered in this revisitation will provide long-term data on a dedicated restoration project, which will be of benefit for future projects wherever they may be.



Supporting this proposal is a good fit with the Trust's purpose, which includes the encouragement of education, study and research related to the conservation, protection and awareness of our native plants.

For background, from 2001 to 2006 the Trust, in partnership with WCC and GWRC, undertook a streamside restoration project between the Troup Lawn and Ian Galloway Park. Ōtari staff and volunteers spent many hours clearing the area of gorse, blackberry and broom, ready for restoration. All seedlings planted were sourced locally and cultivated by Ōtari staff. The project objective was to improve the instream habitat, reduce weed infestations and establish native forest contiguous with Ōtari-Wilton's Bush.



*Jock Fleming and Athol Swann, pioneer volunteers in the valley*

The Trust contracted Jonathan Kennett and Bronwen Wall to coordinate the project and, over six years, hundreds of volunteers planted and cared for more than 55,000 seedlings. As well, 22 monitoring plots were set up to study the survival and growth rates of the species planted, and this continued for ten years.

The project was hugely successful and volunteer restoration, lead now by the untiring Wilbur Dovey, continues to this day.

More than 20 years on, Jonathan and Bronwen feel there are lessons to be learned from this project that could inform future planting projects and benefit a wider audience. After a 'test measure' of tree growth on one of the 22 sites, and being fascinated by the results, they have proposed to return to all 22 initial monitoring sites, re-stake the monitoring plots and measure the trees.

As part of this project, volunteers will help clean each of the 22 sites (remove carpet remnants used to suppress weeds, remove tradescantia and other weeds, create light holes for climax species, and assess where more planting is needed). In 2026, the revisitation findings will be presented to the Trust and Ōtari staff, exactly 25 years after the original project began.

We look forward to working with Jonathan and Bronwen on this most important project.

Meanwhile we hope you have a bit of fun exploring the new 'wayfinding' suggestions for walks and routes to explore the wonderful and varied features of Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. (And don't worry, all your favourite tracks and circuits haven't gone anywhere.) We also look forward to meeting and mingling with you all at Open Day, Saturday September 13. A big thank you to all of those who are helping out, and especially those baking for our tea and coffee stall.



*Kaiwharawhara Valley: all lower slopes are now planted*

**Ngā mihi nui, Kevin**



# Ōtari Update

Kia ora koutou, ngā mihi o te kōanga!

It is fantastic to see the spring blooms emerging despite the return of the wind - the kōwhai in the carpark is stunningly attractive and the kererū are getting frisky already!



We are very happy with the new track routes, names gifted by mana whenua, wayfinding bollards and map boards, plus the five new brochures and the updated Nature Trail self-guided walk brochure. This project has been a massive effort by the team and me, plus contractors, designers, and translators so it's great to have it come to fruition. One of the main pieces of feedback we had from new visitors in recent years was the confusing track signage and inconsistent walking experiences on the forest tracks. It is great to be able to provide consistent walking experiences and clear signage for our visitors that is consistent with the citywide track network. While we haven't made any new physical tracks the new routes incorporate the changes and unplanned closures that have occurred in recent years. I hope you all take the opportunity to try the "new" routes that suit your fitness levels!

We are very happy to have a full team again at Ōtari with Lucy Williams' recent appointment. Lucy started at WCC on an amenity horticulture apprenticeship after completing her BSc in Ecology followed by a couple of years of retail plant nursery work in Nelson. Lucy has also worked as an animal keeper and supported environmental volunteers in previous roles. Welcome Lucy!



Lucy Williams

I was fortunate to again visit Rēkohu/Wharekauri/Chatham Island to speak at, and contribute to, the Chatham Island Science Festival supported by the Chatham Island Landscape Restoration Trust (CILRT). I spoke about the popularity of Chatham Island plants across the world, and that in particular, kakaha (*Astelia*



Tim (at right) visiting Hokoeti Moriori Trust's Henga Nursery on Rēkohu.

*chathamica* a.k.a. *Astelia* 'Silver Spear') is a garden plant favoured globally due to its spectacular form, fruit and stunning silver colouration. I also led the first citizen science BioBlitz using the iNaturalist platform, visited several native plant nurseries and private properties, where ecological restoration and nature protection is underway. It was encouraging to see several very productive native plant nurseries operating and especially exciting to see that they all are growing large numbers of threatened Rēkohu endemics to holistically support the recovery of these species in the absence of a dedicated DOC facility. Due to the generosity of the Manukau, Henga and Wharekauri Native Plant Nurseries and permissions to

collect seed and cuttings, I was able to bring back a diverse mix of Rēkohu endemics, from flowering herbaceous plants to some of the island's tallest trees which will help us more fully develop our Rēkohu Garden. This is part of our larger Offshore Islands' Garden. The fact that many of these provenanced plants are already in pots will make our job much easier to improve our Rēkohu Garden and support the plant conservation work on the misty isles.

While I was away overseas on Rēkohu and on leave in Japan, the team significantly expanded our Threatened Species Garden! Plant conservation is a big part of our work at Ōtari, and we want to tell more of the amazing, threatened plant recovery stories from across the motu that we and our peers have contributed to in recent years.

Featured in this garden are the local Cook Strait māhoe (*Melicytus orarius*), rātā moehau (*Metrosideros bartlettii*) from the far-far north and *Myosotis petiolata* from Hawke's Bay limestone ranges via Dunedin! Some of the cultivars have been moved to the Curators Garden next to the Leonard Cockayne Centre, including the horopito topiary. Have a chat to the team on the Open Day 'Behind the Scenes' tours to learn more about this newly planted area and hear more about the plant conservation work we do with our partners.

Thanks again for your interest in Aotearoa's native plants and your support of Ōtari. See you at Open Day!

Ka kite anō, Tim Park



*Ōtari team leader, Megan Ireland, with a rātā moehau in the expanded threatened species garden*

## Ōtari Wayfinding



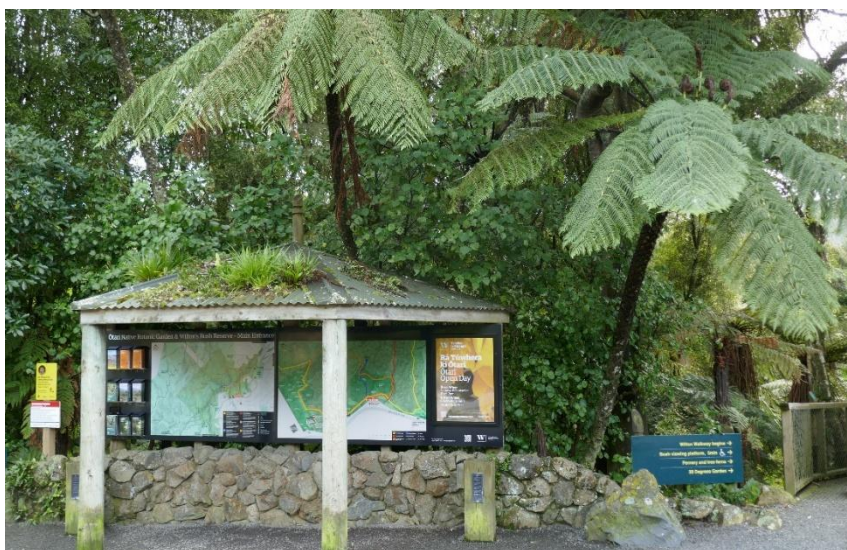
There was a big bright rainbow over Ōtari and frenzied kererū and kākā gate-crashed proceedings, as the new wayfinding was blessed and launched at Ōtari-Wilton's Bush on September 9. Ngā ara o Ōtari represents a significantly updated way of communicating the main forest and gardens walking experiences. (But all of your usual favourite tracks and circuits are still there.)

What's included:

- Two new brochures, **Forest Tracks** and **Native Botanic Garden**, available in Māori and English.
- A renamed and updated **Te Ara Koukouoro Nature Trail** brochure, available in Māori and English. (The Treasure Trail brochure, designed by Trust founder John Dawson, remains available.)
- New 'map boards' at main entrances and key locations.
- New directional signage along the tracks (colour-topped bollards).
- Five circuits, to suit individuals depending on their interest, fitness and inclination on the day.

The changes have been designed and implemented by Wellington Gardens (Wellington City Council). Essentially, they are about making it easier for visitors, particularly first timers, and are a response to visitor reports of unclear signage and confusion with the traditional network.

No new tracks have been created, and all current tracks will remain open. The existing track network has simply been used to create the five new 'routes'. These offer options throughout Ōtari across degrees of difficulty and are designed to provide a more consistent experience. The new bollards display the track name, plus distance markers to key features (car parks, toilets and picnic lawns).



Names for the five new routes were gifted by Taranaki Whānui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika, mana whenua for Ōtari. They reflect the cultural landscape and physical nature of each track – and provide a great learning experience for those interested in better understanding reo Māori.



## The new trails, where they go and their names explained

**Te Ara Porowhita:** 1.6km | 30–60min loop Easy | a few steps

Circular loop track and our most popular walk. Features stream, native forest and gardens. Go clockwise to walk down steps to Troup Picnic Lawn and return up a more gentle slope.

**Meaning:** literally translates as “The Circular Walk”, reflecting the old name and its circular nature. The word ‘porowhita’ is derived from poro, the Māori transliteration for ball. Porowhita can also be used to encircle or reserve an area. This is fitting as the original forest protected by Job Wilton, which forms the core of Ōtari today, is encircled by this track.

**Te Ara Pinaki:** 3.25km | 60–90min loop Easy | some steps

Gently rising loop track which takes you from the Troup Picnic Lawn, meanders through native forest to Karori Cemetery then descends and returns along the Kaiwharawhara Stream.

**Meaning:** the gently rising (or meandering) track.

**Te Ara o Tama:** 4.75km | 90–120min loop Moderate hike

Moderately rising tramping track with steps and roots through ancient native forest. You will be rewarded with visiting Moko the 800-year-old rimu, epic views from the Skyline and will return via the Flax Clearing.

**Meaning:** named for Ngāti Tama ki Kaiwharawhara who have owned much of the land that this track passes through.

**Te Ara Tūpoupou:** 2km | 45-90min loop Hard | lots of steps

Steeply rising tramping track through some of the best old-growth forest in Wellington. Mostly steps with a small stream crossing and some narrow sections.

**Meaning:** the steeply rising track. With its sharp rises and descents, this is the one for those after a wild high-cardio experience.

**Te Ara o Kaiwharawhara Awa:** 2km one way | 60–90min return Easy | No steps

Follow the flow of the Kaiwharawhara Stream along this mostly flat forest walk. Keep an eye out for tuna in the stream. Buggy friendly.

**Meaning:** Quite simply, the track that follows alongside Kaiwharawhara Stream, a very significant waterbody to Taranaki Whānui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika.

**Te Ara Koukouoro Nature Trail:** 750m | 15–45min loop Moderate | lots of steps

Self-guided walk around the two main garden areas and through the forested gully and stream that links them. Brochures available in Māori and English.

**Meaning:** the path through the dense dark bush. Koukouoro is a word from the Taranaki area that means ‘dense dark bush’. Koukou is another word for ruru (morepork), and oro is a way of describing resonating sound. So another way to think of it is the track where you can hear the sound of ruru.



Familiar Ōtari faces spotted at the ‘Wayfinding’ launch from left: Jonathan Kennett, Kevin O’Connor, Wilbur Dovey, Geoff Ridley, Carol West



After the launch the staff did a fine job of running around the tracks to unwrap the bollards! Lucy and Atom return here with a heap of plastic and the job done

## What's in a name?

Taranaki Whānui have gifted names for Ōtari's new trails. This is a treasure to hold dear. Around the country, reo Māori placenames reflect many things: the cultural and natural landscapes, the stories of ancestors, and important events that happened in the past.

As a young child I lived on a farm in a place I knew as 'Howtap', because that's what my parents and our pākehā farming community called it. As I grew up, I learned the name was Hautapu – meaning sacred wind. The wind that blew between the local mountains Maungakawa and Maungatautiri. A place to respect.

There were other placenames I needed to 'relearn'. Parapram. Tamrinui. Och-ra-honga. Mangled and meaningless. With correct pronunciation (and that's not hard, once you make a little effort) also came better understanding. This has not been about learning full-blown te reo for me, simply a step towards better understanding and respect. Often the translation would be poetic, lyrical, and learning the meanings and stories behind many placenames opened a whole new world for me.



And so to Ōtarikākā. The 'place for snaring kākā', describing forests teeming with a veritable food store full of kākā and other birds to eat – because of course there was no Crofton Downs supermarket when the first people came here. You'll see Tarikākā, 'where the kākā rested', on the new maps and brochures for what is known today as (Mt) Kaukau. Kaukau is a mispronunciation of kākā. In reo Māori, kaukau means to swim, not exactly what you would expect to do on a dry mountain top! Another mispronunciation is Karori, a mangled version of Kaharore, as in kaha (plentiful) and rore (traps to catch birds). The full name is 'Te kaha o ngā rore'. There are many more examples. And new names always appearing, as our stories and histories evolve.

So, let's thank mana whenua for their gift. Let's embrace the new trail names, the poetry and the learning they bring.

Like Te Ara Koukouoro, the Nature Trail that descends into the steep bushy gully linking the two main garden areas. Te Ara is the trail, or path, koukouoro means the dense dark bush. Or, it could be koukou, a Taranaki name for ruru (morepork), and oro, meaning resonating sound. So, it is the track in the dark bush where you can hear the resonating sound of koukou (ruru). How beautiful is that?



**Kathy Ombler,**  
**Editor and Trustee**



## Thanks Joc

When Jocelyn Hoskin moved away from Wilton this winter, the Trust lost a valued volunteer and former Trustee and Treasurer. For many years, Joc was the friendly face, volunteering as a weekend host, that would meet and greet visitors to Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. She was also a stalwart every Open Day, helping on the Cake Stall or the Trust table. In 2013, Joc was a deserved Ōtari Award recipient. Thanks for all your time and smiles Joc, and we wish you well for your retirement.



## Open Day Programme (in case you missed our special edition)

September 13 – Rain day Sunday 14 check our website [owbt.nz](http://owbt.nz) on Thursday

### **Trust Nursery Plant Sales - Leonard Cockayne Centre Deck** **10am to 2pm (or until sold out)**

Our perennially popular sale of native plants. All plants are selected for their suitability for Wellington gardens and propagated in our own Trust Nursery here at Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. Some of them are rarely available for sale. Our nursery team, headed by the indefatigable Jane Humble and Lynley Trower have been toiling for months to prepare these plants for sale. As usual they'll be there to advise you, along with our staff gardeners and Trust botanists who really know their plants. Note: we will have an eftpos machine at the sale.



### **Authors' Talks – Tāne Whakapiripiri Visitor Centre**

For all the family. Some talented and exciting authors are attending our Open Day. Come and meet them. Hear about how and why they wrote their books, listen to them read their favourite passages. Their books will be on sale and the authors will be happy to sign them for you. So who's coming, and when?

#### **Ruth Paul 10.30 to 11am**

Ruth has written and illustrated more than 25 books, illustrated yet more, and was twice winner of Best Picture Book at the New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults. Ruth lives at Makara and she'll be bringing her latest book, *Anahera, the mighty Kiwi Māmā* (one very special māmā kiwi who was released into the wild 'just over the hill' near Makara by Capital Kiwi).



#### **Phil Sirvid 11.45am to 12.15pm**

As co-author of titles such as *Why is that Spider Dancing?* *Amazing Arachnids of Aotearoa* and *Incredible Insects of Aotearoa*, Phil has got to be a hit with kids and big kids. As a curator of invertebrates at Te Papa, he knows his entomology, especially spiders and harvesters, we're told.

#### **Walk among the ferns with Leon Perrie 12.30 to 1.15pm**

Curator of Botany at Te Papa, Leon is the co-author of New Zealand's definitive visual guide to identifying ferns. He's also a great Ōtari supporter, returning year after year to take part in the Trust's seminar and guided walk programmes. Leon explains things clearly and gets people engaged – which is what he aims to do at Open Day. Reading from a book when the real things are growing all around seemed a wasted opportunity, so join Leon on a guided tour of Ōtari's most special ferns.



#### **Michael Szabo 1.30 to 2pm**

*Wild Wellington* author and photographer Michael Szabo is well acquainted with the region's wildlife and wild places. He is editor of *Birds New Zealand* magazine, the author of *Native Birds of Aotearoa* (Te Papa Press, 2022), and has written for *New Scientist*, *New Zealand Geographic*, *Sunday Star-Times*, *Forest & Bird* and *Wilderness*.

### **Ōtari's Native Orchid Research**

#### **11 – 11.35am, Tāne Whakapiripiri Visitor Centre**

Hear all about the latest ground-breaking research into the germination of some of New Zealand's rarest native orchids, from the talented conservation scientists at the Lions Ōtari Plant Conservation Laboratory.



### ***Behind the Scenes Tours***

**10.30-10.50, 11.30-11.50, 12.30-12.50, 1.30-1.50**

Your opportunity to see how our professional garden staff propagate and care for some of New Zealand's rarest native plants, and to learn about the research successes of Ōtari's conservation scientists. It's first come-first served for these tours, guided by our knowledgeable staff gardeners. Register at the welcome desk outside Tāne Whakapiripiri.



### ***Tū Mātau Ora***

**10am – 2pm, Cockayne Lawn**

So much family fun and challenges here, sharing Taonga Tākoro (traditional Māori games and activities), designed in a safe, enjoyable way to engage, educate and empower you!



### ***Rongoā Workshop***

**10am to 12.30pm, Leonard Cockayne Centre**

Join Sharli Solomon (Ngāti Toa Rangatira); revered rongoā practitioner with strong connections to Ōtari. Sharli will lead a pani/balm making session, \$10 per person to go to the Trust, bookings via <https://www.eventfinda.co.nz/>. Mirimiri (Māori massage/holistic healing) will also be offered.

### ***Raranga Workshop***

**1-2pm, Leonard Cockayne Centre**

Ōtari Raranga Weavers have a valued presence at Ōtari, teaching traditional raranga using species from the collections especially cultivated at Ōtari's own Pa Harakeke. Join them for an introductory workshop, be there promptly in time to weave something beautiful.



### ***String Bean Puppets***

**11-11.30 am, 1-1.30 pm Cockayne Lawn**

Two shows from popular puppeteer Anna Bailey: 'Once in a Full Moon' (about a Kiwi) and 'Tree Friends' (about weeds). Anna (in action here at Open Day 2022) has a passion for the flora and fauna of Aotearoa and her shows are fun, engaging and emotionally resonant. She's very much in demand and we're delighted to have her here at Ōtari - bring the family.



### ***All Day on the Deck, Tāne Whakapiripiri Visitor Centre***

Come and chat, learn what's new with our supportive community and environmental groups. Here's who will be here, along with their props, plants, furry pests and critters: **RAMBO** (our own trapping team), **Capital Kiwi**, **Kia Mouriora Te Kaiwharawhara Sanctuary to Sea**, **Conservation Volunteers NZ**, **Wellington Botanical Society**, **Porirua City Council Sievers Road Nursery**, **WCC Animal Control**, **Te Papa** and the Invertebrates team and our supportive neighbours the **Trelissick Park Group**. **Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust** will of course be there, offering information about the Trust and our work to support Ōtari-Wilton's Bush, our volunteer opportunities, membership forms and we'll be selling merchandise: books and beautiful cards.

**Plus tea, coffee, cake and one big, tasty sausage sizzle (with onions, of course). Koha – bring coins! Members are welcome to bring along cakes, cookies or slices to share with our tea and coffee.**



## Volunteers: what we've all been up to

For volunteer enquiries please email [enquiries@owbt.nz](mailto:enquiries@owbt.nz) or contact each volunteer lead person, see our website page: <https://www.owbt.nz/about-the-trust/volunteering/>

### Worrying those weeds

Many of our volunteers are retired folk so with the future in mind we always encourage younger people to join us. The Forest Weeders took that to extremes recently when volunteer Emily (on maternity leave), introduced young Arthur to everyone at morning tea time. Arthur was certainly looking keen about something, if not the weeding. (Possibly the baking, word is some of the weeders are also dab hands at baking gluten and dairy free cake and cookies.)



*From left: Russell, Travis (WCC), Marshall, Lyn, Emily, Arthur, Maggie, Anne, Lou*



*Weeding the forest slopes*

The volunteer weeders are making good progress attacking tradescantia and other weeds along the streams and bush margins. A bit of steepness doesn't hold them back. They meet on the first and third Thursday every month (9am to midday). On alternate Thursdays many of the team have been helping Russell with what seemed an enormous patch of Tradescantia near the cemetery. However, many hands have made light work and after a few weeks the difference is amazing, says coordinator, Maggie Bayfield.

### Glowing in the dark

Our evening Glowworm Tours were even more popular than last year's, with two extra tours quickly booked out. The tours are held in winter because it gets dark earlier, and are scheduled around new moon cycles when the forest is darker. And it's not only glowworms who star, many critters emerge in the forest at night. Parents and their young children often make up the tour groups, the look of wonder and awe when they spot a shimmering titiwai, or creepy-crawlie insect, is a delight to see. The pūriri caterpillar tunnels in one special putaputawētā tree are a particular hit. Thanks to all the volunteer guides and tail-enders for coming out into the cold to help. Tour guiding is now fairly quiet until the cruise ship season begins in October.



*Really? There's a pūriri moth going to come out of there?*

### Committed to our collections



*Anja*

A small influx of keen new garden volunteers has joined the group that works in the garden collections with volunteer coordinator, Jane Humble and garden staff. This 'work' is something of a painstaking privilege – learning what's a weed and what is possibly an endangered native plant in the Ōtari native collections, known for their rarities. Much diligence, along with guidance from Ōtari gardeners is required. The group meets every Thursday, in all weathers, from 8.30am until midday. Morning tea and the Five Minute Quiz challenge is shared with Ōtari staff.



## Longevity in the valley



*Kaiwharawhara Restoration team from left: Ron, Wilbur, Lynley, Lou (at the back), Richard, Don, Peter, Brett, Charles, Dominic, Lucie*

The Kaiwharawhara Restoration Group is remarkable for its long-standing volunteers (several over 80), younger folk now joining, and the work achieved in weeding and planting on the old tip face near the Rugby Club. Thanks to a recent push for volunteers by the Trust we have been joined by younger, fitter volunteers, says coordinator Wilbur Dovey. 'This year these volunteers have been diligent in clearing large amounts of tradescantia and, in July and August, planting over 100 native trees. With their input I am confident the revegetation group has a good future.' The group meets every second Saturday of the month.

## RAMBO reflections

RAMBO stands for 'Rodents and Mustelids Busting at Ōtari'. Nothing to do with Sylvester Stallone. It's our community trapping project that began in 2007, one of the first of now many such projects throughout Wellington. These days we don't catch much. Is this a good thing? Or are the traps in the wrong place? These often-asked questions, and others were examined at a special meeting held in July. RAMBO trappers, along with Predator Free Wellington, Greater Wellington, and Capital Kiwi were represented. The discussion was wide ranging and, as can happen within the pest trapping community, varying theories and views were raised.

The situation, said RAMBO co-ordinator, Jim Tait, is that many of our traps have been in place since 2007 with new traps and new lines being added piecemeal. Some of the trap boxes are old and need replacing, other boxes are too short and a potential threat to curious kiwi, so also need replacing now that kiwi are venturing our way. (Replacement of these boxes is well underway.) In 2007, we started with 56 DOC200 traps, targeting mainly stoats and weasels but also catching rats and hedgehogs. We've since taken on lines in surrounding areas, Karori Cemetery to the Skyline and Izard Park, and added new lines within Ōtari. Today we have 143 traps of which 90 are DOC200's, 3 are bigger DOC250's and the rest are smaller rat traps. Around a quarter of all traps are placed along the Kaiwharawhara Stream, where there is a definite concentration of catches, while many are on boundary edges. With just 6 stoats and 17 weasels caught in the last five years rats have become our main target, followed by hedgehogs. RAMBO has 15 currently active volunteer trappers.

Bruce Brewer and Paul Horton from Greater Wellington discussed their Ōtari bait station programme that targets possums. Bait stations are topped up every three months. There has been a drop in the uptake of bait in the past year. A WCC possum trapline along the Skyline catches small numbers above Ōtari.

How do we know what pests are still out there, and where? Regional Council undertakes monitoring, with baited tracking tunnels every February and August, while RAMBO volunteers do similar monitoring each May and November as part of a WCC programme. All this monitoring generally detects low rat numbers, below levels where birds would be critically affected. On the bright side, many show the increasing presence of wētā, one sure sign of a recovering forest.



*Jim Tait, RAMBO Coordinator*



The meeting discussion moved around whether we should put more traps along streams, or simply put more traps into the network. There was support for using more, smaller traps targeting rats, while still keeping some DOC200s to target stoats and weasels. The next step is that Jim Tait and Tim Park will discuss options to review the current network, with a view to tweaking and/or increasing the placement of traps throughout Ōtari. Rodents and mustelids – beware.

Meanwhile, our trap boxes need replacing but our traps don't, and for that we can thank retired engineer Robert Thomson. For the past six years, tinkering away in his very tidy garage, Robert has cleaned, repaired and calibrated an estimated 60 traps for RAMBO. It keeps him out of trouble, he says.



Robert Thomson

'I've been cleaning them up as needed and they can be recycled for another four or five years each time. It's a matter of stripping off the rust, cleaning and painting them. I use rust remover, then a few undercoats and a top coat. Also, as the old rotten boxes are brought back I take the traps out and service them. The older traps were galvanised and they would take several hours of work. I mainly play with making trains work, at Plimmerton's Mainline Steam Trust, so I can take those traps to their workshop and clean them on their rotary wire brush, it's much quicker.'

The new traps are better, but they still need calibrating, says Robert. 'You can recalibrate in the field but I think it's better not to be doing that – these traps are really lethal, if they go off your fingers can go off.'

### Stories from our Weekend Hosts

*Following the drama of the (not) dying possum in the visitor centre, related last issue by volunteer host Chris, here are some thoughtful musings from long time host Lyn Clark.*

I've been a host since my daughter was at secondary school, possibly earlier, and she's 30 now. I was won-over by a recruitment poster outside Thorndon New World, featuring NAC air hostesses and thought whoever had come up with that idea was very clever! Becoming a host gave me the opportunity to stop my very old botany and zoology degree from completely rusting out, and I continue to find it a very pleasant 2 to 3 hours. The most immediate memory I have from a few years ago now, is of a young man who worked at Kew Gardens, and who knew the scientific names of a great deal more plants here than I did. He was absolutely delightful to talk to.



I've found that even on an utterly miserable, wet, cold day there will be passers-by, often a parent with a child in a stroller escaping cabin fever. The bush is a great way to get outside while being mostly sheltered on a windy day.

I'm pleasantly surprised when I find someone who has lived in Wellington, or even in nearby suburbs, is visiting for the first time, or in a long time, and is blown-away by the vitality of the forest and the number of birds. I've noticed myself the increase in bird numbers and think it's fabulous to now have the possibility of kiwi expanding their range into Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. There are definitely more kererū, kākāriki, kākā, and kārearea now than when I started volunteering.

I've met some very lovely fellow hosts, the most fascinating would have to be Olaf John, sadly no longer with us. His life stories, told on a quiet day over the cup of the tea he'd bring and share was a treat. I hope somehow his life has been documented in all its fascinating and historical detail. My life has changed and been more challenging in ways I would never have anticipated when I started out as a host, and I'm grateful to still be able to turn up once a month and contribute to the enjoyment of visitors to our unique place.

**Lyn Clark**

## Would you like to be a host?

Or do you know anyone who might be suited to this very special volunteer role? We say special, because it really is rather special to be a voice for this six-star Garden of International Significance, Ōtari-Wilton's Bush.

Ōtari is also loved by the local community. Weekend visitors could be families, groups in for a barbecue, runners and walkers, botanists, birders, international tourists and first-time visitors, Kiwi tramping clubs, well, just anyone.



*Weekend hosts, Joc and Lyn*

Essentially, the host role is to chat with visitors (if they want you to), answer their questions (if you can), give them some ideas about where to walk, what plants are flowering and the birds to look out for. We also have books and cards to sell.

Hosts are rostered on about once a month, working in pairs (usually) for 2.5 hours on either a morning or afternoon shift, Saturday or Sunday. You'll get full training, weekly advice about the latest goings on around Ōtari, and a phone number to call if you need advice. It can be very rewarding.

**Interested? Email the Trust Host Coordinator, Justin Nacey: [justinnacey@gmail.com](mailto:justinnacey@gmail.com)**

## Botanical art – introducing the artist



For many years we've been privileged to share botanical art drawn specifically for our newsletter, always accompanied by precise botanical notes, by artist and botanist Eleanor Burton.

For those who don't know, for 20 years Eleanor has been the records manager for collections and libraries at Ōtari Native Botanic Garden and Wellington Botanic Garden ki Paekākā. This is a critical role. In a botanic garden every plant has an accession number that stays with it though its life at the gardens. This information assists researchers, helps conservation projects and credibly tells stories about our plants.

Eleanor says she has enjoyed drawing plants from an early age. 'My mother knew Nancy Adams, and took me to meet her and show her some drawings. I remember that she told me to study botany so I would know what I was looking at. It was good advice, and I have always been glad I took it.

'Most of my work has been black and white line drawings, including interpretation drawings for Queen Elizabeth II Trust and Wellington City Council. I also draw regularly for two other newsletters, the Wellington Botanical Society and New Zealand Botanical Society.

'A few years ago I rediscovered colour, and after a series of workshops in watercolour and colour pencil I decided that pencil was my preference. At the time I was helping out in the garden of Arnold Dench, who had an amazing native alpine garden in Newlands. He had a big specimen of *Celmisia hookeri* in a pot, so I borrowed it to draw. Colour drawings are much harder to reproduce though, so they are mostly for fun.'

In 2017, Eleanor received a NZ Plant Conservation Network Special Award for Botanical Illustration. 'The accuracy and elegance of her line drawings follow the ancient tradition of the best botanical illustrators', read her citation.

Eleanor has produced a book of her drawings, which is available to purchase from our weekend hosts at the Visitor Centre. Some of her drawings can be seen on our website [owbt.nz/botanical-art/](http://owbt.nz/botanical-art/).





A species of button daisy found throughout the North Island (though uncommon north of Waikato), Chatham Islands and Northwest Nelson. It is the most common *Leptinella* in the Wellington region. In cultivation it forms a fairly dense mat. The lower leaflets on each leaf are often brown. This species is dioecious (male and female flowers on different plants). It is a plant of lowland open places, growing in coastal vegetation and riverbeds, sometimes in open places in lowland forest or scrub. At Ōtari it can be found in several places, including the Banks Entrance, Wellington Coastal Garden, and Asteraceae Garden.

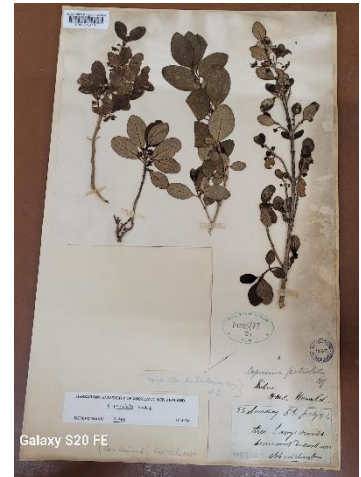
## The Kew Connection

Back in the day, Leonard Cockayne forged a friendship with Sir Arthur Hill, Director of Kew Gardens. The pair shared plant collection trips around New Zealand and Sir Arthur once stated that Dr Cockayne was ‘an ecologist waiting for the term to be adopted by botanists’.

This winter, almost 100 years on, Kew has been graced with the presence of three botanically, or should that be ecologically, inclined people with Ōtari connections.

Botanist and former Trust Chair, Dr Carol West, visited Kew Herbarium to look for specimens from early scientific plant collections from Rangitāhua (Raoul Island). Carol works closely with Rangitāhua mana whenua, Ngāti Kuri, hence her interest. ‘The specimens were collected in July 1854 by John MacGillivray and William Milne, naturalists aboard the survey ship HMS *Herald*,’ she said. ‘I also looked at other Rangitāhua collections, from Thomas Cheeseman in August 1887 and Reginald Oliver who spent 10 months on the island in 1908.’ The quest met with some success, though not as much as she’d hoped.

At Kew, Carol, was surprised to bump into Ben Carson, who she had met in 2023 when he was a VUW Summer Research Scholar and Research Technician in the Lions Ōtari Plant Conservation Lab.



*Coprosma petiolata*, from W. Milne, 1854. Carol West

Ben was completing an internship in the Herbarium of the Royal Botanic Gardens. His work focused on Euphorbiaceae and Phyllanthaceae in the huge Wallich (or British East India Company) Herbarium. It holds over 20,000 specimens, mainly collected across South Asia in the early 19th century. ‘I trawled through publications to update current names, identify type specimens, find duplicates, and make information more accessible online,’ said Ben. ‘I was also able to view some of the exquisite watercolours and lithographs that accompany the herbarium.’



Ben shows his Kew intern research to Carol

‘My Kew internship was a fantastic opportunity to learn about nomenclature, taxonomy, history and herbarium curation. I have loved working amongst the huge science team at Kew, who strive to understand and conserve global flora.’

Ben is now a Research Assistant in Kew's Mycorrhizal Ecology lab, where he is helping analyse underground mycorrhizal communities across England. ‘By collecting data at a nationwide scale, we hope to understand how these fungi contribute to ecosystem functioning, such as storing carbon and cycling nutrients, and how changes to the environment might affect their diversity.’

Ben said he was very thankful for his Ōtari experience and to have been mentored by Karin, Jen and Carlos (from Te Papa). ‘My time at Ōtari inspired me and affirmed that I would love to keep pursuing plant conservation research.’

Also in July Sarah Goldberg, currently working as a lab technician at Ōtari while completing a Science Master's thesis, was accepted for a short training programme at Kew's Millennium Seed Bank, located across London from Kew Gardens. All course and travel costs were sponsored by Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

‘The training focused on seed morphology, storage behaviour, moisture measurement, and germination including dormancy,’ said Sarah.



Sarah studying seed morphology at Kew



‘Additionally, there was a lesson on assessing seeds in the field, tours of the nurseries and the underground seed storage vaults, and opportunities to meet with technical specialists and project coordinators at the MSB. We were also introduced to a pilot software programme they’re developing to assist with germination protocols.’

Sarah took the opportunity to stay a second week at Kew to learn more about the global *Nothofagus* project she will be starting this year with Karin van der Walt, Ōtari Conservation and Science Advisor (who had successfully nominated Sarah for the training programme at the Millennium Seed Bank). Working in partnership with the Millennium Seed Bank/Kew, the aim will be to develop species profile sheets on *Nothofagus* species globally. ‘We will focus on the New Zealand species,’ she said. ‘The experience at Kew was incredibly valuable to help me prepare for this global beech seed research project.’



*Photos: The flash Millennium Seed Bank facilities. Left: spiral staircase to the underground seed vault Right: international students peek at the collections in the cold vault*

## Righting an historical wrong



*Sarah Phillips, the Cockaynes' granddaughter, at the memorial unveiling in 1952.*

When Leonard and Maude Cockayne were laid to rest in their beloved Ōtari, in 1934, it took 12 years to reach agreement about what kind of memorial should mark their resting spot. Finally, in 1952, an impressive stone from Belmont Hills was put in place, along with a memorial plaque. But Maude's name on this was misspelt. It took another 73 years but we're delighted to see that finally, thanks to WCC's Wellington Gardens, the mistake has been rectified. RIP, Leonard and Maude.



*The new plaque*



## Kākā in the kōwhai

Just lie back and let it flow! The big kōwhai in the car park is floriferous just now, sending kākā and tūi into a frenzy. And the kererū are not to be left out, performing their seasonal diving aerodynamics from lofty heights then swooping through the carpark. Come and see, they should all still be there on Open Day. Credit: Tony Stoddard <https://wildbirds.nz/>



## Macro magic

Now here's a treat. The macro photography by Luca Davenport-Thomas, focussing on the very tiny things that live in and form a critical part of the natural biodiversity of Ōtari-Wilton's Bush, was a hit in our last newsletter. So, we asked Luca if he'd been back to Ōtari. Not as much as he'd like, was the answer, but enough to treat us with some more 'little' findings, with these descriptions.



Springtail



Flatworm

'The mites with long legs are called *Linopodes* and are actually quite common and easy to spot if you look closely underneath some fungi. But they are still only a couple of millimetres long. They are very active and will rapidly walk over the fungi eating up things they grab with their mouthparts.'

'The white springtail is a Onychiurid, between 1 and 2 mm long. While these are very common under wood this one looked especially nice on a cool orange fungus.'

'Last issue we featured a red mite, a species of *Chyzeria*. This brown mite found under some wood, is a different species of *Chyzeria*, slightly larger at about 4 mm. And the gorgeous flatworm *Australopacifica spectabilis* was just under some wood. At around 2 cm long it's a bit larger than the other critters.'

'I'm really happy there is such interest in these critters,' said Luca.



Mite (*Linopodes*)



Mite (*Chyzeria*)

## Slightly bigger, but still little things

Ōtari's Wardian Case is usually worth a closer look, right now is a good time. Wellington Gardens apprentice, Cloud Jordan, has curated a 'who knew' display describing native insects and spiders, the important roles they play in our ecosystems and the relationships they form with specific native plants. There is drama in the telling.

Our common stick insects are in fact cryptic 'masters of disguise herbivorous phasmids' that mimic the twigs and leaves of their host mānuka, making them all but invisible from predators. The karaka tree is a nursery for our giraffe weevil, where 'females meticulously bore angled holes into the tree's bark to lay single eggs, a process that attracts males vying for mating opportunities'. The native fishing spider doesn't just live in ponds, it also hides in the divaricating branches of *Muehlenbeckia astonii* in order 'to ambush prey with stealth and precision'. There's the native praying mantis on its host kānuka, and much more.

What even is a Wardian Case, you may ask? The terrarium-style container was originally designed for transporting plants on long sea voyages (tea plants from China to England, for example). Today, the concept is mainly used for display. Ōtari's Wardian Case can be found on the deck outside Tāne Whakapiripiri, the visitor centre. It was funded by the Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust, and the displays keep changing.





## Look who's been visiting

Ōtari was looking good, said former gardener Finn Michalak, when he called in to run a botany course earlier this year. Finn was an Ōtari gardener from 2008 to 2021 and worked closely with Curator, Rewi Elliot. It was a transformative time, said Finn, when new paths and raised terraces were being established to make plant collections more accessible to visitors, the 38 Degree Garden was being established and the first harakeke species that would become part of Pā Harakeke were being sent from the Rene Orchiston Collection at Landcare Research for planting. 'By working with local weavers we ended up with a really good collection,' he said.



He recalled collecting trips around the country and bringing locally extinct species – *Olearia gardnerii* from Wairarapa and kohurangi (*Brachyglottis kirkii* var. *kirkii*) from Kaitoke and Akatarawa – to Ōtari, the critically endangered *Olearia adenocarpa*, Canterbury Plains tree daisy, from the Rakaia River and Waimakariri, and propagating Northland species for the 38 Degree Garden.

Finn was also happy to see Ōtari's old compost bins still in working order. 'Those bins were built from timber that came out of the original 38 Degree Garden pathways. They were built from very old Wellington telegraph poles and they'd been in the ground for 30 years, now they've been compost bins for about 15 years so they've done pretty well.'

There was a touch of serendipity about Finn's Ōtari appointment, back in the day. The young plant-mad Briton happened to pick up a little red plant book, published in 1923, in a car boot sale in Cornwall. Turns out it was '*The Cultivation of New Zealand Plants*' by one Leonard Cockayne. 'I didn't even know he was a famous botanist or responsible for Ōtari when I applied for the job here,' he recalled. He still has the book. 'It is so well written, so down to earth.'

A restructure saw Finn leave Ōtari, but he only lasted six months before reapplying. "I realised how it's a powerful place, Ōtari. It becomes everything after a while and I felt quite a nervous wreck leaving a second time. But now I'm happy. Someone else is here.'

Finn is now a wetland ecologist with Greater Wellington Regional Council. And to think he only came to New Zealand for a year, back in 2008.

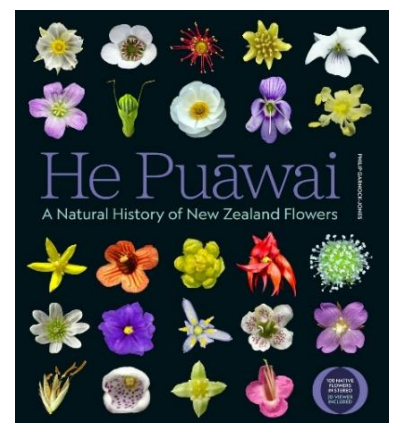
## He Pūawei - invitation to a beautiful book launch

Philip Garnock-Jones is a botanist, emeritus professor and former chair of botany at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington. In October, he will launch *He Pūawei*, a natural history of the native flowers of Aotearoa, depicted in extraordinary 3D photography.

Ōtari has been a focus for some of his research. Philip is grateful that Tim Park and past curator/gardeners, Rewi Elliot and Finn Michalek, had all been generous in providing flowering material for his photos, especially of *Rhabdothamnus* and *Myosotis* which feature in the book.

Tim Park believed the book opens a microscopic window to appreciate native plants like no other. 'I predict this book will inspire another generation of botanists and nature lovers in Aotearoa.'

Philip is extending an open invitation to the launch (on 10 October, 6 pm, at Unity Books) for Trust members. He also said if members wish to purchase the book (\$79.99) on the Auckland University Press website, they are welcome to use the code FLOWERS for a discount.



## How popular is Ōtari-Wilton's Bush?

Many groups have been spotted on recent visits and there's obviously a good turnout when Ōtari is on the club programme! In August, Forest and Bird's Wellington Regional Walking Group (Wednesday Walkers) explored plants and waterfalls throughout the forest. And a big bunch from the Palmerston North Tramping and Mountaineering Club headed from Raroa Train Station to Wellington Railway Station via the Skyline, Ōtari-Wilton's Bush and Ahumairangi! Word is there are a few keen gardeners among them and the Club plans a return for a closer look at our collections.



Left:  
Visitors from  
Palmerston  
North

Right:  
F&B  
Wednesday  
Walkers



## 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: <https://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 <https://www.owbt.nz/membership-donations/endowment-fund/>

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*The Trustees welcome comments and questions from members on any matters relating to Ōtari-Wilton's Bush or the Trust. For Newsletter feedback 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.*