



I hadn't been to Mohi Bush, in the Maraetōtara Valley for over thirty years but, when an old school friend came to stay, I thought it would be a pleasant destination for a relaxed picnic and a good spot for some birdwatching while we strolled along its easy tracks.



The reserve, which is considered the best on the Maraetōtara Plateau for people to explore, is located in Waipoapoa Road (off Maraetōtara Road), some 38 kms from Havelock North.



On the way there, we passed the Maraetōtara Falls and briefly stopped to have a look at the picturesque waterfall. It was New Year's Day and young people were jumping from the falls or off the rope swing while families enjoyed a picnic and a cool dip beside the pool below.



A popular walk is to follow the track to the site of the former hydro-electric power station which operated from 1922 - 1941.

Back to Mohi Bush... there is a pleasant, covered picnic area in the carpark paddock and a loo a couple of hundred metres further on.



There are two loop tracks. One takes around half an hour, the other over an hour. We followed the signage to the left which sent us along a grassy track through farmland running parallel to the fenced-off bush. Half way along, we climbed a stile (one of several) and that's when we entered the bush. From there on, it was an easy walk back.



Learning from the experience, next time I visit, I'll head right at the first sign which takes a shorter route into the bush. You can then join up with the longer loop inside the bush and return by retracing your steps along the first track, which is much more interesting than viewing the entire area from the paddock.

We met a local who told us that the best time for watching or listening to the birdlife was in the early morning or at dusk. We visited at lunchtime and saw kereru and fantails but didn't manage to see NZ's smallest bird, the elusive and reclusive rifleman.



The bush trails are wide and well-formed and, with the choice of two loop tracks, the fit and not-so-fit are catered for. For those who are less physically able, there are a couple of issues. Firstly, the stiles which are quite high and, secondly, the number of tree roots along the paths. If you can manage to overcome those obstacles, you'll enjoy a peaceful stroll through a tranquil oasis of native bush that has benefited from extensive pest control.



TOP TEN GREAT WALKS IN NZ

While *Wings and Wildlife* has so far showcased about twenty lovely reserves worth visiting in Hawke's Bay, 2021 offers the best opportunity in years for kiwis to venture further afield and experience some, or all, of the country's Ten Great Walks. These are:-

Abel Tasman Coast Track; Heaphy Track; Lake Waikaremoana; Kepler Track; Milford Track; Paparoa Track; Rakiura Track; Routeburn Track; Tongariro Northern Circuit and the Whanganui Journey. 'Google' for more details or go to www.doc.govt.nz to learn more. Due to high demand, bookings are essential.



Magnificent Mitre Peak at Milford Sound



A group of five intrepid trampers, including members of the Napier Tramping Club - www.napiertrampingclub.org.nz ventured down south for a mid-summer jaunt along the beautiful Routeburn and Greenstone Tracks in January. The party was grounded at the Falls Hut for two nights due to heavy snow, closed tracks and the sound of avalanches but this gave them extra time to wander around and admire the snowy landscape at Lake Harris. Tony Wrightson told me that kea

provided strong input to the early morning and evening cacophonies and that they had recently damaged newly installed signage. The pineapple shrubs provided a powerful entry to the Lake Mackenzie Hut area (photo) and Tony described it as a wonderful summer trip mixed with a real hint of winter.



Wetlands at Waitangi: The Railway Wetland opposite Waitangi Regional Park is predominantly KiwiRail land, leased by Fish & Game, but falling within the Waitangi Regional Park boundary, now including Waikahu Wetland. It is highly visible to motorists travelling along SH 51 between Clive and Awatoto. The Railway Wetland is vital to HBRC's management of both the Horseshoe and the new Waikahu Wetlands with all three connected via pipework. The overgrown willow area alongside the state highway was cleared, as were invasive silver poplar and willow stands.



Drone photos by Stevie Smidt

The wood was chipped for mulch to be used during winter planting in association with Fish & Game.



HBRC manager, Rod Dickson, worked tirelessly with KiwiRail to undertake and project-manage this venture. HBRC also worked with Forest & Bird's Napier Branch to further enhance the planting alongside the Tūtaekurī backwash. This was further supported by the Waitangi Shooters Association, DOC and the Ātea a Rangi Educational Trust. Advice from ecologists Hans Rook and John Cheyne was invaluable as was best practice information from HBRC scientists.

In February, 180 Dulux employees hand-released, (weeded, cleared and placed mulch around) thousands of native plants in the park. While there, they learnt interesting facts about wetlands and the environment.

Waitangi Regional Park is a unique melting pot of groups and communities coming together, including NCC, HDC, NZTA, Clive Community Group, Waka Ama, HB Rowing Club, HB Kayak Racing Club. Thanks to HBRC's Open Spaces Planner, Russell Engelke, for the information.



PARROT UPDATE: The future is brighter for the two old, distressed parrots, which HDC had inhumanely kept in cages so small they couldn't fly for decades. Thanks to a 1,829 signature petition, my complaint to the SPCA and WATCHDOG!'s full-page ads highlighting the birds' plight, council canned its bird-brained idea of spending \$75,000 to build them a new cage and handed them over to the SPCA. This means Mate and Stevie Nicks can enjoy their twilight years in their wonderful SPCA-approved foster home. Read a great article on:- <https://baybuzz.co.nz/parrots-of-the-world-rejoice/>

PICTURE PERFECT

Noel O'Riley from Napier takes a lot of really nice wildlife photos and this well-timed shot of an Australian coot feeding its young caught my eye on his Facebook page.

The Australian coot has a DOC Conservation Status of 'Naturally Uncommon'. It is a recent arrival in New Zealand and was first recorded breeding here in 1958 at Lake Hayes. As a self-introduced species, the birds are automatically protected by the Wildlife Act.

Coots eat mainly vegetation – algae, seeds, fruit, grass, leaves and shoots, but also feed on invertebrates and, occasionally, eggs. They will also eat bread thrown to ducks but as it lacks good nutrition, it's not healthy for them or the ducks.



They are related to the branch of the rail family that includes pukeko and takahe. On land, the coot's stance is more like a small pukeko than a duck. But instead of the pukeko's long thin toes, they have broad fleshy lobes on their short toes, which help provide propulsion when swimming. They are good, strong fliers once they get airborne but they patter across the water with a lot of splashing first.



For April 1st, here is a photo of a very rare, four-legged hybrid, dropped-wing seagull, which visited Noel's property briefly last year. It was only spotted once in the Onekawa area of Napier and no-one else has reported further sightings of the oddly-designed species. If you see it - or any other four-legged bird in your area, please send me a pic.

Botanical Budgies Update: It was really nice to see that the little budgie which my neighbours found in their hedge a year ago was still alive and well in the aviary at Napier's Botanical Gardens when I visited in January. We registered him as found with the SPCA but when he wasn't claimed he went to live there with some new-found friends. Bluey is very easy to spot as he is the only bright blue one with a yellow head and black spots – the others are pastel blues, greens and yellows.



I follow the good work of the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre in North Carolina (I met the director, vet and a dozen students in December 2019 while they were on a tour of NZ) and they post some neat photos on their Facebook page. This cool pic of Bean, the Eastern screech owl, was taken by staff member, Tara Frost.

Bean, who was hit by a car and sustained a broken wing which didn't heal 100%, can't be released back into the wild.

While we don't have these beautiful owls here, the centre's message is still very much the same for all of us. *'Let this face be a reminder not to litter! It attracts prey items to the road and these guys don't look both ways before flying over to make their catch.'*



Ups and Downs: In the January newsletter, Sugar Loaf was featured as a great local destination and Dolbel Reserve was showcased last August.

So much of the Hawke's Bay track work is carried out by volunteers. Here, Taradale Rotarians and Dolbel/Halliwell volunteers are hard at work upgrading the pathway from the top of Cumberland Rise to Church Road Winery. The weather was stinking hot but, despite this, they carted limestone and other such materials from the top to the bottom to complete the upgrade of



the track. Members hope you'll enjoy the upgraded pathway when you next visit the area.

Thanks to Claire Connor, Rotary Taradale President, for the information and photos.



The extent and importance of the ecosystem within sand dunes was something I was unaware of until recently.

It turns out that sand dunes are the most critically endangered environments and contain 23% of New Zealand's threatened plants.

At Ocean Beach, the dunes stretch for some 9.5 kms and, in areas where there has been restoration and replanting, they are now up to 500 m wide. The Ocean Beach dune system covers some 290 hectares and it and neighbouring Rangaiika are among the largest in the North Island.



Photo by Carol Rimmer



For the past ten years or so, The Cape Sanctuary's dune restoration programme has been led by Ben Doggett, a long-term employee who has a real passion for the beach and dunes. First it was a case of removing stock, wilding pines, other trees and pest weeds such as marram grass. This was planted in the 1930's for stock feed and to stabilise the dunes – quite the opposite of what should be planted.

Rather than be static, Ben explained that dunes should be dynamic and mobile, ever evolving and changing, hence the term 'shifting sands.' In order to achieve that movement, thousands of native

grasses such as spiniflex and pingao have been planted. These plants have let the area regain its heartbeat.

Apart from weeds, the biggest threat to the dunes comes from the irresponsible actions of some people who either don't understand the fragility of the area or who don't care and speed through it in four-wheel drive vehicles, on motorbikes or riding horses. Dogs are another menace.



As the success of the restoration programme has improved the eco-system, wildlife has returned and there are actually kiwi nesting in burrows within the dunes, along with banded dotterels and little blue penguins which occupy some of the 150 nesting boxes. As well as the bird life, native lizards, skinks, snails and katipo spiders are thriving.



The dunes are also historically significant to local Māori, with many pa sites and middens located throughout them, along with lots of fossils. The fossils contain the remains of at least 30 species of birds, bats, tuatara, skinks and moa eggshells. Within the wetland zones, key natives, such as manuka, cabbage trees, flax, and pohutukawa have been planted. These plantings are just one reason wildlife is returning.

Where the dunes inside the predator fence have had stock removed, been replanted and the eco-system restored, the beach has actually extended some 20 metres further into the ocean. This is the opposite of erosion and a visible sign that the restoration programme is working.

The initial back-breaking work has been done but on-going maintenance and weeding needs to be carried out on a regular basis. This is another area where the input of willing volunteers is invaluable and their contribution appreciated. It is their efforts which have helped bring about the changes.

The Ocean Beach dunes have national significance. Their importance has been recognised by DOC and they are listed as one of the nation's top 150 habitats. Congratulations to all involved.

**Would you like to volunteer your time and energy in this amazing place?
Just e-mail:- volunteer@cape-sanctuary.co.nz**

If you know of a conservation champion or something relevant going on in Hawke's Bay, please let me know and I'll be happy to follow it up:-

jessicamaxwell2017@gmail.com



**When I needed a hand,
I found your paw.**

