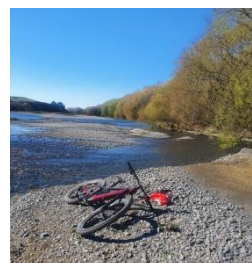




**MKK NGARURORO RIVER WALK:** A scenic, braided river to explore, an endless choice of perfect places to pause, relax and have a picnic and new trails to discover. These are just some of the delights which await walkers and cyclists who venture out to the thriving rural settlement of Maraekakaho, twenty kilometres south-east of Hastings.

The Ngaruroro River starts in the Kaweka Ranges and along its 164 km length, before it flows into Hawke Bay at Waitangi Estuary near Clive, it supplies water to the Heretaunga Plains underground aquifer through its gravel beds between Maraekakaho and Fernhill.



Having a pristine river on their doorstep, one teeming with trout as well as being a popular recreational playground for jet-boaters, was the incentive for members of the very progressive Maraekakaho community group, Focus MKK, to create new and interesting walking and cycling tracks along the river, linking into the existing Hawke's Bay Regional Council service trails.

It has been a three year labour of love for a local mountain biking couple who saw potential for cycle trails and established them through existing jungle and weeds. Once the community discovered them, they used them for access into the service tracks and these family-friendly tracks are now really popular.



Starting off in the carpark beside the school and historic community hall, a noticeboard has a map showing the trails and the distances associated with each. There are three short mountain bike tracks (Pegs, Spine and Wasp which are listed on the Strava GPS and Running App) and walking trails of 4.5 km, 7.5 km and 9.5 km.

You can walk (or drive) to the vacant ground on the other side of the Maraekakaho River where the recycling bins are and, either walk, cycle or drive for around a kilometre, then take the right fork and head on down to the river. Best not to leave valuables in the car as the area down the track is isolated.



The gravel path leads onto the river board plantings of willow, acacia and alder and there are residual plantings of native vegetation from historical efforts. Passing the quarry, the trail heads continually downstream and ends at the exit point of an irrigation canal system.

Last November, Focus MKK organised a community walk along the trails when around eighty people took part and students from the local school acted as marshals.



HBRC's Antony Rewcastle tells me that the council has been working with some of the passionate and talented individuals who make up the Maraekakaho community to improve recreational values through trails along



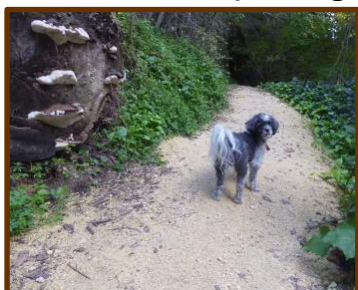
the river edge protection, planting and by enhancing the connection to the village, while at the same time managing a busy gravel extraction area and irrigation take.

The community has planted the entrance from Maraekakaho Road and this is looking great.

To watch an interesting video about Focus MKK go to:- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u\\_KrZEsPOvk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_KrZEsPOvk)

**KEIRUNGA PLANTING:** Hard to believe it's more than three years since the *Stand Up for the Keirunga Oaks* community group had to raise some \$9,000 to challenge HDC and successfully stopped its plan to clear-fell the much-loved oak woodland alongside Arthur's Path in Keirunga Gardens. The trees had been planted in the 1930's by Keirunga's then owner, George Nelson and are in their prime.

The oaks were saved and since 2019, a Steering Group and then a Care Group has taken on the responsibility of working with the council to establish new plantings and enhance biodiversity within the reserve.



The path from Crab Apple Corner (the grassed area adjacent to the Tanner Street/Puflett Road junction) to the playground beside the carpark has been upgraded to a limestone surface and part of the hillside beside a now gravelled path at the southern end of Arthur's Path has been planted with natives. Fruit trees and walnut trees have been planted to provide an edible, community orchard at Crab Apple Corner.



The crab apple tree there is hugely popular with the birds and is a great source of food for them. I have seen literally dozens of little waxeyes (and other birds) feasting on it as the fruit ripens.

**Fun Fact:** Arthur's Path is named after Arthur Morris, who drained the lower part of the gully and formed the track through the oak woodland.

**GOOD SORT:** For the past three years, volunteer and modest community hero, Peter Egerton, has been identifying and marking well-sited, healthy-looking oak saplings which he says are worth monitoring. He and his canine companion Gyp are in Keirunga every day keeping an eye on the place, with Peter slashing ivy from around trees when needed, clearing weeds and doing a myriad of other maintenance chores.

Keirunga supporter, David Cranwell, who donated home-grown walnut and pear trees for the edible orchard and gifted sixty oak saplings which he grew from acorns collected along Arthur's Path told me, "Peter deserves a huge vote of thanks for all the effort he puts into Keirunga and, in my view, no-one does consistently more than Peter does." Well said!



**CAR v CHEETAH:** Cheetahs are the fastest land mammal with a top speed of 98 km/hr officially recorded in 2012 when a cheetah called Sahara, aka Sarah, (left) at Ohio's Cincinnati Zoo was timed while chasing a furry dog toy over a 100m dash. Comparing this speed to humans, Sarah completed the 100m in 5.95 seconds, considerably faster than Usain Bolt's record-breaking run of 9.58 seconds in 2009.

The big cats have remarkable acceleration too, able to go from 0-98 km/hr in around 3 seconds. However, that extraordinary feat has now been eclipsed by Ferrari's new production SF90 EV model which has recently recorded 0-100 km/hr in 2.5 seconds. So while, the late Sarah would have passed (or stopped to eat) Usain Bolt over a 100m course, she would now be overtaken by \$910,000 plus worth of Italian electrified horsepower!

**Besties**

Sarah was raised alongside an Anatolian Shepherd Dog called Alexa (Lexi) and they were life-long companions and ambassadors for the zoo. Cheetahs can reach the high speeds needed to out-run and catch prey due to their unique physique. They have long, thin legs and a flat ribcage which offers less wind resistance; their 80 cm tail acts as a rudder, helps with direction and stabilises the animal at high speed; during their powerful strides, for more than half the time, they are airborne with all four feet off the ground; they have a flexible spine, hips, and shoulder blades which store and release energy like springs and they have an enlarged heart, lungs and nasal passages which supply and circulate more oxygen. You can view Sarah's record run on YouTube.



Life-long friends Sarah and Lexi in 2001

## PICTURE PERFECT

This photo of a New Zealand (North Island) dotterel was taken recently at Te Whanganui-a-Orotū, the Ahuriri Estuary, by Lynne Anderson, secretary of the National Council of Birds NZ. Thanks Lynne.

It is one of our special endemic birds and likes to nest on beaches and river beds – creating a simple scrape, maybe lined with a few twigs, or just sited among the stones with a driftwood marker.

These nests are often disturbed by dogs running off-lead or vehicles on beaches. Sometimes, they can even be destroyed. Unrestrained dogs can eat the eggs and/or chicks and careless owners often don't even realise what their dog is doing.

The birds start to nest about August and continue on through summer. They use distraction displays to lead intruders away from nests and chicks, including 'rat-runs' and injury-feigning. Small chicks crouch and 'freeze' when danger threatens; older chicks typically run to the nearest cover and hide.

The birds eat a wide range of suitably-sized marine, shoreline and land invertebrates, and occasionally small fish. Sand hoppers are a common prey item and small mussels are taken from rocks. Tiny crabs and annelid worms are among prey on estuaries while, on grass, crickets, flies, beetles and earthworms have been recorded. Its current DOC Conservation Status is 'At Risk/Recovering'.



**ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS:** While watching 'Joanna Lumley's Britain' TV series, I was interested to see her visit a very successful red kite conservation project in the Brecon Beacons.

The birds of prey, slightly larger than a buzzard and with a wingspan of 1.5 m, are native to the

Welsh countryside but, by last century, had been hunted to near extinction. At a feeding station in a field, about 100 birds circled overhead before swooping down to pick up scraps of carrion prepared by volunteers to take back to their nests. With better nutrition, more chicks survive.

From an estimated 200 birds in the 1980's, there are now thought to be more than 1,800 breeding pairs in the UK. This goes to show how, when given a helping hand by dedicated conservationists, the future of an endangered species which looked dire only a few decades ago can be turned around.

**SUCCESSFUL SEABIRD TRANSLOCATION:** Closer to home, Bernie Kelly, Birds NZ's Regional Representative for Hawke's Bay, told me of the excitement and relief last November when an egg was discovered beneath an adult Titi/Cook's Petrel in an artificial burrow located on the Maungaharuru range, not far from Bell Rock at Boundary Stream.

From 2013-2016, 336 Titi/Cook's Petrel chicks were translocated from Hauturu-o-Toi/Little Barrier Island to Maungaharuru. Expert bird feeders and volunteers fed and cared for each batch of chicks until the time came for them to fledge and head out to sea.



The birds remain at sea until reaching breeding age (6 to 10 years), when they return to their breeding site. Bernie says that their first returnees were captured on cameras during the 2017-2018 season.

Gradually, over time, more birds were detected returning to the site. The use of a pre-recorded sound track of Cook's Petrel playing continuously through the hours of darkness has been a very useful tool, helping the returning birds hone in on the artificial burrows on the ground beneath the bush canopy.

On night visits to the site, at about 9.30 pm the first birds arrive. Bernie explains that the use of thermal imaging binoculars has been very helpful in counting the number of birds, (up to 22) as even on a moonlit night it's impossible to see them with the naked eye.

Each year the number of pairs has increased. To have a chick hatched and raised to finally fledge on 19 March was cause for celebration for all the partners and people involved in getting the project to this point:- The Maungaharuru-Tangitū Trust, Ngāti Manuhiri and the Department of Conservation.

**COMMUNITY CHAMPION:** The saying 'Great oaks from little acorns grow' is so true and local horticultural consultant and environmentalist, David Cranwell, has been producing and nurturing over 1,000 Himalayan Oak Trees annually for the past twenty-five years while, at the same time, growing funds for regeneration projects in the country the trees originate from.



Not only has the equivalent of a large forest of oak trees been planted in New Zealand, but over \$100,000 has been raised through the Himalayan Oak Trust which David founded in 1994. These funds are invested into conservation projects in an area of North West India where the trees used to flourish but where the environment had been degraded by the need of poverty-stricken locals to clear the hillsides for grazing stock or to use the foliage for cattle fodder.

The establishment and on-going operation of the Trust has been a passion project for David after he was super-impressed on first seeing a Himalayan Oak at Eastwoodhill Arboretum in the 1980's.



A Himalayan Oak opposite HDC

Unable to source any of the trees here, he was re-introduced to them in 1995 while in India on a NZ Apple and Pear Board work-related feasibility study to the foothills of Ranichauri, some 270 kms NW of Delhi.

This was their home but David was shocked to see that the hillsides, which were once covered in the trees, were bare and overgrazed. The loss of the deep-rooted species which draw water up closer to the surface to sustain shallow-rooted plants and whose deep layers of leaf-litter mulch helped absorb and retain the moisture from monsoon rains had a devastating effect on the ecosystem.



Instead of allowing the rain to gently filter into the subsoil and recharge springs, topsoil from the poorly covered hillsides was washed away and the balance of the previous symbiotic ecosystem destroyed.

The Trust has helped with educational projects and now works with the Himalayan Consortium for Himalayan Conservation (HIMCON) which ensures that the donated funds are spent on worthwhile

projects which most benefit the local community and tick all the boxes.



Now in Ranichauri, the dried-up springs have been identified and oaks replanted close by. The result is that the springs are replenished and the ecosystem rebalanced. As part of the project, the Trust, with assistance from the New Zealand High Commission, has helped fund a reservoir. In the photos above, locals are creating water recharge pits.

David told me that, after a quarter of a century growing the oaks, he had been looking to pass the baton on for several years and that now Marie Taylor of Plant Hawke's Bay has taken over the raising and selling of these special trees.

There's some wonderful information on the Trust's website:- [www.himalayanoakstrust.com](http://www.himalayanoakstrust.com) and, if you're interested in purchasing any number of Himalayan Oak trees, you can contact Marie on 0274 424 536 or go to:- <https://www.planthawkesbay.co.nz>

**BEACH CLEAN-UP:** After the torrential rain in March, Marilyn Scott from Sustainable Coastlines organised a beach clean-up at Clive. Andrew Clibborn, who organises the Clive Residents Group, posted about it on their Facebook page and volunteers responded to help. Andrew says there are quite a few 'good buggers' who pick up rubbish on their walks, so with more hands on deck, trailer loads of garbage were removed. HBRC's Open Spaces Team Leader, Russell Engelke told me that, while the council supported the roll-out, it was the volunteers who did the real work. Helpers carted away the majority of the detritus and the council collected and disposed of five piles of left-overs. Community pride is alive and well in Clive.



If you're aware 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](mailto:jessicamaxwell2017@gmail.com)



*"If you truly love nature,  
you will find beauty everywhere."*

**Van Gogh**

