



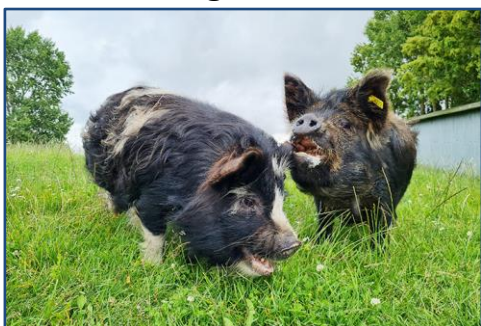
**WILLOWBANK WILDLIFE RESERVE** is one of Christchurch's most popular visitor attractions and, with some 500 animals in residence, there is something of interest for each and every one of the 120,000 annual visitors to take in, as they stroll through the privately-owned property.

Opened in 1974 and still owned by the Willis family, Willowbank is committed to preserving New Zealand's rare breeds and native wildlife.

As well as having public displays of various animal species, it also carries out conservation of native species, including tuatara, kiwi, brown teal and Duvaucel's gecko. Willowbank is a New Zealand leader in conservation, with successes in many national, Australasian and in-house breeding programmes focusing on New Zealand native and endangered species, as well as many rare and heritage breeds of farm stock.



Kea by Rosemary Allen



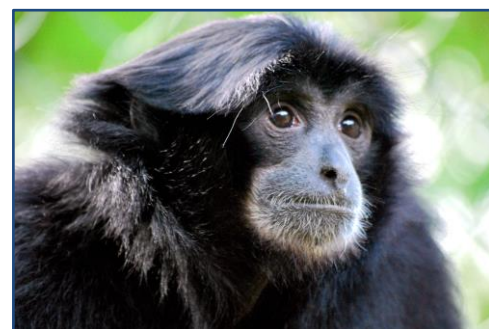
The Willowbank experience tells the story of this country's natural heritage. Using pioneering and innovative display techniques, with an emphasis on creating a natural environment and an up-close and personal interactive experience, the reserve showcases one of New Zealand's best



displays of native species. Willowbank was the first to open a glass-free nocturnal house for kiwi in a natural environment, guaranteeing viewings every time.



The reserve has a Heritage Farmyard section, a New Zealand Natives section and a Zoo/Exotics section. It offers great family entertainment, an award-winning restaurant, a kiwi breeding and conservation programme, rare breeds farmyard area and much more.



Scientific research projects, and local partners including the Department of Conservation, the Styx River Living Laboratory, the Rare Breeds Society, the NZ Conservation Trust and the South Island Wildlife Hospital, are supported by and work alongside Willowbank.



I was interested to see on its Facebook page that HRH The Princess Royal and her husband, Vice Admiral Sir Timothy Laurence called in during their New Zealand tour in February. This was Princess Anne's third visit to Willowbank, which I think says a lot about the place.

There's a cute video on its Facebook page of baby capybaras swimming. These are the largest of the cavy rodents and are native to South America.

I also read many favourable comments on Trip Advisor so, hopefully, next time you visit Christchurch, you can add Willowbank Wildlife Reserve to your list of things to do while in the lovely garden city.



**Prices: Adults, \$34; Seniors and Students, \$28; Children 5-15, \$13 and under 5's are free.**





**PACKING A PUNCH:** Recently retired geotechnical engineer, William Gray, has joined the team of volunteers helping to maintain the gardens at Duart House.

William's first task was to uplift and replace each of the old red brick paving stones which had become buried in grass and soil round a rather special flower bed. In it is a memorial stone, dated August 30, 1902, dedicated to Punch, the much-loved dog of the original owner of the property, Hannah McLean.

Hannah's husband Allan, who died in 1898, didn't want a garden, instead allowing his horses and sheep to graze right up to the front door. It is said that, on the morning after he died, Hannah went down to the village wearing a straw hat decorated with red

geraniums and then, with the help of her children, began to establish the gardens we all enjoy today. The epitaph on the stone reads... *"Plus je connais les hommes, plus j'aime les chiens,"* which translates as, *"The more I know of men, the more I love dogs."*



**SAVE THE Dotterels**  
Te Matau-a-Māui

Just space to provide a link to a very informative report written by Marilyn Scott regarding the protection of the dotterels which breed in Hawke's Bay. Click on: [Waipūreku-Clive Dotterel Report 2022-2023.pdf](#).

**LET'S GO TRAMPING:** Glenda Hooper, who is secretary of the Heretaunga Tramping Club, tells me a bit about the club which has three huts; one in the Kaweka Forest Park and two in the Ruahine Ranges.

"Our members have a passion for the outdoors and we're keen to pass on some of our accumulated knowledge to new members, be they teenagers, retirees or somewhere in between," she says.

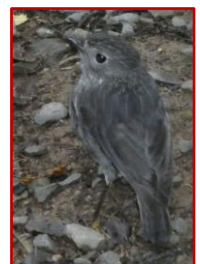


The current Waikamaka and Kiwi Saddle Huts were built by club members in 1966 and 1988 respectively, while Howlett's Hut was enlarged and extensively renovated by the Club in 1979. The Club is responsible for their ongoing upkeep. As they aren't part of the DOC hut network, the club doesn't receive any funding from DOC and expenses are covered by donations from hut users.



Last year, the club relocated the toilets at both Waikamaka and Kiwi Saddle huts as well as doing some minor maintenance.

"Our members have a range of abilities," Glenda explains. "Some like to tramp long distances, while others don't venture as far, preferring instead to take time out enjoying the native fauna and flora by the tracks. On recent trips we have seen many birds, including shags (and a seal) on a trip to Red Island, robin on the Sunrise Hut Track, kōkako, weka and takahē on Kapiti Island."



"During the club's annual memorial trip to the cairn at the top of Kaweka J, we enjoyed seeing the beautiful mountain buttercup."

Also known as Mount Kaweka, Kaweka J is the highest point in the Hawke's Bay region at a height of 1,724 metres.

Every second Wednesday evening, the club holds meetings at the Hastings Harriers Hall, 803 Sylvan

Road in Parkvale and Glenda says that visitors are welcome to come along to get more information before making any decisions about coming out tramping with members. Interested? Contact Glenda on (06) 8774183 or email: [tramphtc@gmail.com](mailto:tramphtc@gmail.com) or head to the website: <https://htc.org.nz>





**PICTURE PERFECT:** A reader's grandson who lives in Australia sent her this lovely photo of a kookaburra, which she then forwarded to me. What a great shot!

Vance Lowe was visiting Moreton Island in Queensland when he saw the bird nearby and seized the moment.

As the largest kingfisher, it certainly is a handsome bird.

While native to eastern Australia, kookaburras were introduced into New Zealand's Kawait Island in the Hauraki Gulf, by Sir George Grey in 1866 and to Wellington, Nelson, and Otago between the 1860s and 1880. Only the Kawait population successfully established and subsequently colonised the adjacent mainland. I didn't know that.

Currently, it is thought the population in New Zealand is stable at around 500 birds.

Kookaburras live in family groups, are strongly territorial and are 'perch-and-pounce' predators.

A bird will sit on a prominent perch when foraging, often for long periods, until prey appears below and then it swoops.

Once it has snatched its victim, it returns to its perch, where the prey is stunned repeatedly until it is immobilised and then swallowed whole.

Kookaburras are monogamous and long-lived, with individuals living for at least 12 years in the wild.

In Australia, snakes and reptiles form about one third of a kookaburra's diet and the absence of snakes in New Zealand may well be a limiting factor in the expansion of this species. Its diet includes earthworms, snails, insects, freshwater crayfish, frogs, lizards, rats, mice, and small birds.

Find out more about this and other birds at:- <https://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz>



**STAGLANDS AVIARY ACTION:** I heard that Staglands, the very popular wildlife reserve close to Upper Hutt, had some new kea residents, so asked its Marketing Manager, Wendy Robinson, for an update.

Wendy told me, "After many months of hard mahi, our new Pond Aviary (left) is complete and now home to a beautiful array of birds."



"Our resident pair of sulphur crested cockatoos, Sonny and Peppa, have been joined by their Australian galah cousins (bottom right) in the new aviary. There are also Reeves pheasants and Carolina wood ducks to complete the colourful scene. Next time you visit, make sure you rest awhile by this gorgeous new aviary and enjoy the antics of its new family of birds."



The centre's recently redeveloped walk-through Kea Aviary (above right) has also welcomed some new residents. Wendy explained that this gold standard aviary opened just over a year ago, after extensive renovations. "At roughly three times the size of the original aviary, featuring an expansive roof, viewing windows, ponds, bespoke housing and natural planting throughout, it really is a future-proofed design."



The aviary is home to the kea; Keko, the hand reared pukeko and a pair of pāteke, New Zealand's rarest duck on the mainland. The circus of kea expanded by two in February with the arrival of Blofeld and Moriarty, from Willowbank Wildlife Reserve.

These handsome boys are named after the villainous archrivals of James Bond and Sherlock Holmes... let's hope they don't live up to their monikers too much! Info @ <https://www.staglands.co.nz>



**TRAMPING TOGETHER:** For the fit and able, Hawke's Bay has a fabulous choice of tracks and trails for those wanting to go for a tramp. Some tracks are short, easy walks while others, which venture into the remote back country are more demanding and can extend over a number of days.



I asked the Napier Tramping Club's President, Di Reid, to tell me a bit about the club and what members get up to and she sent me some photos that would make you want to put your boots on.

"We're a group of like-minded people who love the great outdoors," Di told me. "We tramp mostly in the Hawke's Bay province, in remote areas such as the Kaweka and Ruahine ranges, but sometimes we travel further afield to new places for longer walks and some three or four-day trips are arranged."

Club meetings are held on the Thursday evening before the weekend tramps, at 7.30 p.m. in the Hawke's Bay Cricket Association Rooms in Nelson Park, Napier (Jull Road entrance).

The club welcomes new members. Di said that, if you are interested, do please come to a club meeting. "We will invite you to come out on three single-day tramps with us before you make a decision to join - so no pressure!"

Tramps are typically five to six hours and club members can advise which walks to start with and what to bring, because safety is paramount.

Di also let me know that there are regular weekly bike rides all around the Bay. The advent of e-bikes has certainly opened up a whole new world for those of us who are not in the first flush of youth and it's great to have the camaraderie of riding with a group of kindred spirits.

The Napier Tramping Club website has a wealth of information and you can read reports of previous tramps. Committee contact details are also there and, if you'd like to get in touch, the club would love to hear from you. Go to:- <https://www.napietrampingclub.org.nz>



**SIGNING OFF:** During the past three years, while showcasing many wonderful destinations, mostly in Hawke's Bay and hoping to encourage people to get out and about to enjoy nature, I have visited more amazing places and met more like-minded people than I could have possibly imagined.

We share a love of the land and an admiration of the people who give so much of their time in a voluntary capacity to make things better - and we love animals.

Huge thanks to everyone who has provided interesting stories or sent me their fabulous photos which helped make the newsletter uplifting and easy to read. *Jessica*



*'If there were to be a universal sound,  
depicting peace and contentment,  
I would surely vote for the purr.'*

Barbara L. Diamond

