

# FERNGLEN NATIVE PLANT GARDENS NEWSLETTER

Summer 2024

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# News from Fernglen

*text and photos by Kelly Hayward*

The beauty of autumn has arrived in Fernglen. The walking tracks nearest to the fern house are littered in bronze coloured leaves, while at Ben's Ridge they are copper with fallen tanikaha and kauri leaves.

Last weekend, we were again grateful to St Mary's Youth group for their work in shifting much needed mulch to Ben's Ridge. We're very fortunate that regular volunteers contribute so much of their time to enhance the well-being of plants at Fernglen. This is reflected in the gardens looking really good.

We're excited to again partake in Ecofest [ecofest.org.nz](http://ecofest.org.nz). This year the Fernglen Open Day is Sunday 14th of April 2024, 10am – 3pm. It is a special day for the Fernglen committee and trust to showcase the uniqueness of the gardens. Nev will be operating 2 botanical tours, at 10:30 and 1pm; they are always informative and tailored to the groups' interests. Want to go it alone? There is now a self-guided tour encompassing some 25 species. Written guides are available at the kiosk and it is a matter of following directions to the numbered markers. Plenty of supervised, conservation themed activities for children of all ages will be available on the grass area. In the education room artist and educator Lesley Alexander [lesleyalexanderart.com](http://lesleyalexanderart.com) will be demonstrating nature journaling, she says its a good starting point to build artistic skills and gain confidence before embarking on larger pieces of botanical illustrating.

We look forward to meeting you there and offering a cup of kawakawa tea (or regular tea or coffee if you prefer).

**FERNGLEN**  
NATIVE PLANT GARDENS  
**OPEN DAY**



Sunday 14th April 2024  
10 am-3 pm  
36 Kauri Road Birkenhead



- Speciality garden tours by gardening guru
- 10 am and 1pm Book ahead at [fernflen.nz@gmail.com](mailto:fernflen.nz@gmail.com)
- Self-guided tours at your own pace
- Lesser-known native plants for sale
- Nature journaling by botanical artist Lesley Alexander
- Historic information
- Educational, fun activities for children of all ages
- Kawakawa tea and refreshments available

This event is part of EcoFest 2024



Fernglen crossing boardwalk



Nev taking garden tour



Lesley Alexander - Nature journaling



*Dracophyllum sinclairii*



*Dracophyllum sinclairii* close-up



*Dracophyllum viride*



*Dracophyllum viride* flowers



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## The Flowering of Pōhutukawas, Late 2023

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by Neville Arbury

Having observed and recorded the flowering of pōhutukawas for over twenty years, attempting to understand what factors promote flowering, I was fascinated to study the impact of continual rain throughout the year on the blooming of Auckland trees. Of course, as we all now know, this was the most prolific year of pōhutukawa flowering that I have ever observed. We experienced what botanists describe as a "mast seeding event". This begins with prolific flowering, followed by the production of huge amounts of seed. This phenomenon happens with a number of native tree species, e.g. 2019 beech trees in the South Island.

Interestingly, in mid-November there was no sign of the season that was to follow, with random trees displaying moderate displays of flowers. By 5th December there were numerous trees resplendent in flowers. However, just five days later it was becoming apparent, that a significant event was unfolding with many trees smothered with deep red flowers. Later by 14th December, pōhutukawa flowering, not only in Auckland but throughout Northland and the Coromandel Peninsula, was being shown on television and photographs in newspapers. The spectacular flowering of pōhutukawas was being noticed and documented. Even the 180 year old pōhutukawa named Te Ha in the Parnell Rose gardens was covered in flowers, especially on the north side. As is usual, by 18th December, many of the pohutukawa flowers were beginning to fade, a reminder that there are usually few flowers blooming on Christmas day.

It will be interesting to observe if Auckland will be covered in the very fine pohutukawa seed in the next few months, as a result of the abundant flowering. I wonder how long we will wait for the next spectacular flowering season. I hope not twenty years!

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## Book Review: Great Stories of New Zealand Conservation by Alan Froggatt

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by Neville Arbury

This is a book that needed to be written! As written on the back flap, the stories he tells are fascinating and important in their own right, but collected together like this they become almost a manifesto for all those who love nature! The book details fifty inspiring and thought provoking stories illustrating the importance of the threat to the environment from global warming and habitat destruction. On a positive note, numerous conservation and ecological restoration projects are described.

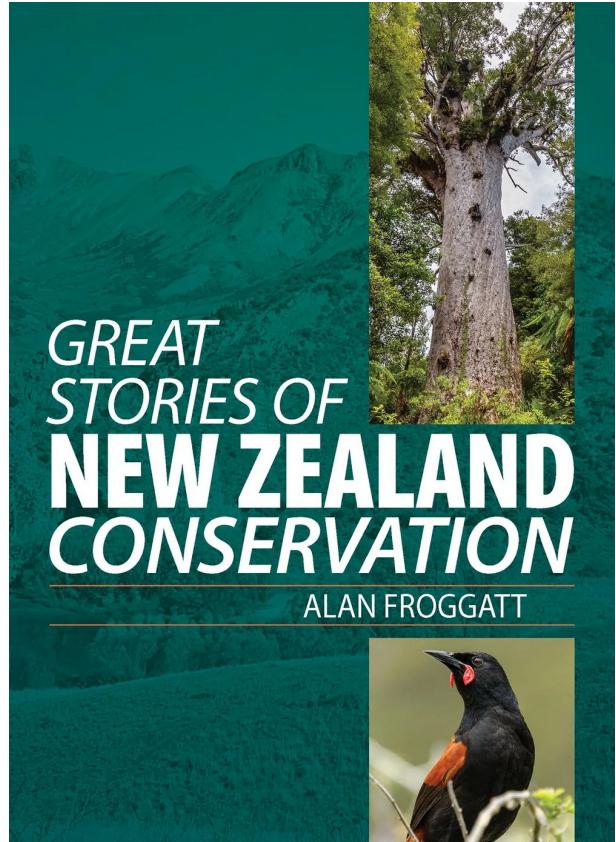
The first section of the book details the continual introduction of destructive animals and the rapid removal of native forests and draining of swamps. This is followed by an examination of the rule of the Department of Conservation and the New Zealand Forest and Bird Society. The author questions whether the aim to make New Zealand predator free by 2050 is achievable, no matter how laudable and desirable.

Subject matter for the fifty chapters, vary from national projects to others that have been carried out by local volunteers. Some I found absolutely fascinating include "*Rediscovering the takahē*", "*The amazing rescue of the black robin*", "*The world's first predator-proof fence*", "*Eradicating possums from Kāpiti Island*" and a look at "*The hunt for the South Island kōkako*".

In chapter fifty-three, titled "*Final word*", the author quotes Sir David Attenborough, a quote worth rewording here:

*"The truth is the world is changing and we are dependant on that world. It provides us with food, water and air. It is the most precious thing we have and is worth fighting for – the whole thing – rather than a few stars."*

A very easy read, a necessary reminder of what is happening in our country. Highly recommended.



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## *Machaerina Sinclairii* – A Long-Term Resident at Fernglen

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by Neville Arbury, photo by Kelly Hayward

As you walk around the old part of the garden, you will encounter a number of thriving specimens, often displaying their droopy rusty-brown flower heads. They grow from 30cm up to one metre in height. While preferring an open, full sun position, they can be successfully cultivated in a dappled light position. A North Island plant, they naturally occur from North Cape to the Tararua Ranges, sea level up to 900 metres. Commonly found thriving in a damp position, but not an overly wet one, they will also grow in normal garden conditions.

As the flower heads remain on the plants for many months, from time to time the older flower heads should be removed. The plant can be propagated by division or by sowing seed. Plants germinate quite freely when propagated from seed. The large clump near the path leading to the building has been there for many years, cut back frequently and yet it continues to thrive.

*Machaerina sinclairii* is an incredible underutilised grass in New Zealand landscaping. Available from time to time in Auckland Garden Centres.



*Machaerina sinclairii*

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## Why is There No Hebe Collection at Fernglen?

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by Neville Arbury

With at least 800 hebe species and cultivars in existence, it must be wondered why there is no hebe collection at Fernglen. Over the years numerous hebes have been planted at various sites in the garden, with mainly mixed to poor results. Among the few remaining are our two naturally occurring Auckland hebes, *Hebe bishopiana* and *Hebe obtusata*. To be successful as a garden plant, the species or in this case often a cultivar, must be suitable for the local climate. Without exception, hebes prefer a dry, free-draining position in full sun and exposed to the elements. All hebes are prone to root rot, the main factor in the death of many hebes planted in Auckland gardens.

For a number of years, two hebe species, *Hebe barkeri* and *Hebe parviflora* thrived near the top of Ben's Ridge. However, the *Hebe barkeri* (from the Chatham Islands) eventually died and the *Hebe parviflora* is still suffering from all the rain we received last winter. Before dying the *Hebe barkeri* flowered then produced seed, so in this part of the garden there are young specimens growing happily.

While we would like to display a greater range of hebes, a successful site has yet to be located. Various hebes have been planted in the old garden in raised beds to ensure sharp drainage. Sadly the plants grew for a few years before dying, presumably because of root rot.

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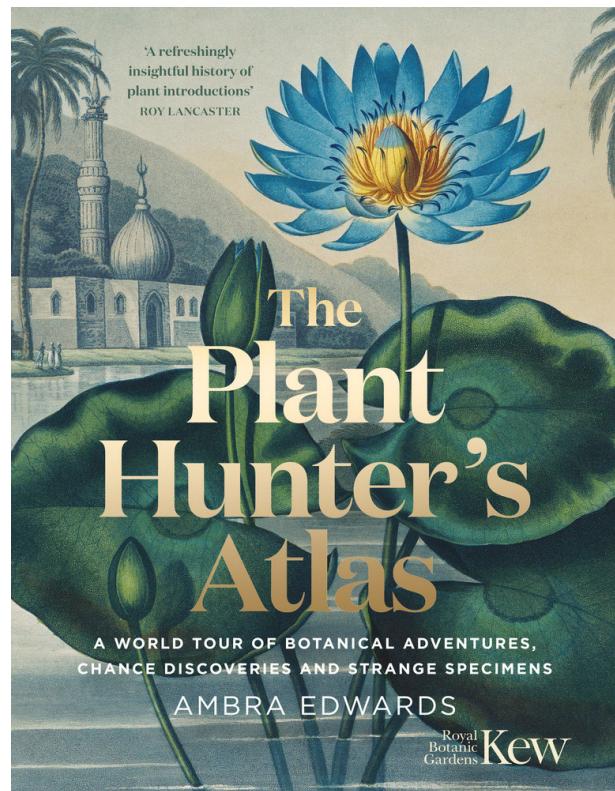
## Book Review: *The Plant Hunter's Atlas* by Ambra Edwards

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by Neville Arbury

This intriguing book can be best described as, "A world tour of botanical adventures, chance discoveries and strange specimens." The author focuses on discoveries that have shaped empires, built and destroyed economies, revolutionised medicine and advanced our understanding of science.

Ambra Edwards is a garden historian. Her two previous excellent publications are "*Head gardeners*" and "*The Story of the English Garden*". Chapters in this book concentrate geographically, with sections on Australia and the Pacific, Asia, Europe and the Mediterranean, Africa and Madagascar, North America and Mexico and South America. Each section relates the story of a particular plant and often the role of a significant botanist.



The chapter titled "*New Zealand Flax*" looks at the journey of Cook's Endeavour, specifically the role of botanist Joseph Banks. Of all the plants banks collected in New Zealand, flax, *Phormium tenax*, made the deepest impression on him. He observed the multiple uses of flax by Maori, basket making, fishing equipment, mats, shoes, ropes and clothing. In the book is a portrait of Banks wearing a flax cloak, painted in 1773. He felt that flax would be very useful for both constructing sails and ropes. Banks considered the possibility of growing flax in the new colony of New South Wales.

The final chapter titled "*Orchidelirium*" is possibly the most fascinating of this superb publication. During orchidelirium, an almost fanatic desire to own new orchids in the nineteenth century, wealthy plant collectors sent out plant hunters to scour jungles in search of new species. By the end of the nineteenth century many tropical forests were swarming with plant collectors, competition was cut-throat, collecting practices were lamentable, as thousands of trees were cut down to reach the orchids growing in their canopies. By 1910 orchid collectors would pay over 1,000 Guineas for a new variety. Fortunately, world war one put paid to orchidelirium.

A fascinating publication, exceptionally well written, very readable. Highly recommended.

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## *Coprosma Propinqua* var. *Latiscula*, A Lesser Known Coprosma Thriving at Ben's Ridge

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by Neville Arbury, photos by Kelly Hayward

This spreading, highly branched, small-leaved prostrate plant has been one of the success stories of the coprosma collection at Ben's Ridge. Spreading over two metres in all directions, the plant is in excellent health with dark green glossy leaves. This coprosma naturally occurs in coastal, lowland rocky and gravelly soils. While not an endangered species, I have only encountered one specimen growing in the wild on Kāpiti Island where it was thriving.

Very sadly since the closure of the Oratia Native Nursery in Oratia some years ago, I have never seen this plant for sale anywhere in New Zealand.



*Coprosma propinqua* var. *latiscula*



*Coprosma propinqua* var. *latiscula* close-up

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## Nature Healing the Parataniwha Glade at Fernglen

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by Neville Arbury, photos by Kelly Hayward

After the devastating floods of anniversary weekend 2023, probably the worst affected area at Fernglen was the parataniwha glade - home for our native begonia, *Elatostema rugosum*. What is normally a trickle of water under the walkway became a raging torrent with water flowing over the walkway, carving new waterways. Fortunately, the main track to Ben's Ridge was not damaged, however many of the parataniwha plants were simply washed downstream to never be seen again! The result of this devastation was that in many parts of the previous glade there were few plants remaining.

Since the time of the floods, slowly but surely new plants have appeared. Often from seemingly bare earth and by February this year, the glade was beginning to resemble its former glory! The only concern now is if we experience a prolonged very dry summer. By late February the creek that flows through the parataniwha glade was barely a dribble, as low as I have previously observed. The wish is for considerate autumn rain to sustain this quite unique native plant.



Parataniwha close-up

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## What's Happening at Fernglen?

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### Working bees

Regardless of the weather, working bees occur at Fernglen **on the second Saturday of every month from 9am onwards, until about 12 noon.**

The working bee is a great way to meet others, learn more about native plants, weeds and pest control. There is always a job to be done in the garden or in the education room.

No gardening experience is necessary and all ages and abilities are welcome. Gloves and gardening tools can be supplied.

Looking forward to seeing you there.

### Educational tours

Are you involved with a school or an education group and would like to learn about New Zealand native plants? A unique collection of plants from all over New Zealand grows at Fernglen. To see what is on offer please contact us

on email: [fernnglen.nz@gmail.com](mailto:fernnglen.nz@gmail.com)

or phone: 021 236 5800

### Room hire

The Fernglen Education Room is available for hire at very competitive rates. Please contact us

on email: [fernnglen.nz@gmail.com](mailto:fernnglen.nz@gmail.com)

or phone: 021 236 5800

## Blissful - Quiet Office for Hire in Garden Space

Best suited to ecology minded person(s)

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# Botanical Art at Fernglen

Interested?



contact  
Lesley Alexander  
021 161 7070 or  
email [lesley.alexander.smith@gmail.com](mailto:lesley.alexander.smith@gmail.com)

## Naylor Love

Naylor Love are committed to seeking sustainable construction practices. Their history in New Zealand makes an interesting read on their website:

<https://www.naylorlove.co.nz/about-us/our-history/>



# Naylor Love

## Naturally Neem

<https://www.naturallyneem.co.nz/>



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