

FERNGLEN NATIVE PLANT GARDENS NEWSLETTER

Spring 2020



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News from Fernglen

by Kelly Hayward, photos by Steve Cook

A resident from Balmain Road (near Fernglen) was recently in email contact and reported she regularly sees a lone kaka fly from Fernglen over her home towards Chatswood and Kauri Point. How nice it would be, she wrote, if it met a mate.

A few days later, another email advised a pair of kaka were now seen flying about. What joy, it appeared the lone kaka had met a mate after all. That was until recently when Steve, working at Fernglen, heard terrible screeching and looked up to see three kaka tumbling in the air. It seems the lone kaka was guarding his territory from a pair of kaka birds.

In Lynnette Moon's book "Know Your New Zealand Birds", she says kaka will only nest in mature forest trees. Thankfully this is something Kaipatiki can offer these interesting birds. Their antics are a pleasant distraction. Nev tells of his recent experience on page 6.

Early in October, Auckland Council in consultation with Fernglen committee are going to begin the preplanning phase of upgrading Fernglen's tracks to kauri die-back standard. Within the scope of this work is to construct a properly formed track in the open area of Ben's Ridge, this will be a vast improvement from the sometimes slippery clay track. The actual track work will be done in phases and is expected to take approximately 10 weeks. We don't have a start date yet, however we've been told the park will remain open while the track upgrade is carried out.

The gated entrance is framed by the kumarahou in flower. It's wonderful to see the colour and scent of spring around as flowers appear throughout Fernglen gardens, some of them are listed below:

- Various Hebe and Pittosporum species
- *Alseuosmia macrophylla* - toropapa
- *Earina mucronata*
- Kowhai
- Kumarahou
- *Metrosideros carmina*
- *Olearia cheesemanii*
- Poroporo
- *Rhabdothamnus solandri* - taurepo
- Wharangi
- *Xeronema callistemon* – Poor Knights lily



Hebe diosmifolia



Karo



Kumarahou at Ben's Ridge



Metrosideros carminea



Olearia cheesemanii



Pittosporum cornifolium



Rhabdothamnus solandri

Kaka sighted at Fernglen

by Neville Arbury

While working at Ben's Ridge on Saturday 8th August, during our monthly working bee, my nine-year-old granddaughter Adele alerted me to the appearance of a different bird that had just flown low along the path through the coprosma collection.

"What was that?", she asked. All around us the trees were loaded with Tuis. "A funny looking Tui", I suggested. But it was brown, not the dark black/blue plumage of our beautiful Tui. We then looked up at the branches of a large kanuka and there perched was the very distinctive form of a kaka. With its classic hooked beak!

I thought back to when we last had a visit to Fernglen by a kaka. It was around 2005, when our previous curator, Malcom Fisher reported a sighting. It was suggested at the time that the kaka had flown over from Great Barrier Island. According to a neighbour, Simon, there are two kakas and they have been in residence for the past few weeks making their presence known by their distinctive screeching call.

I told my granddaughter about a visit I made to Kapiti Island a few years ago, where I was 'mobbed' by kaka while eating my lunch at the summit of this amazing island, with a takahe under the table! The kakas ate most of my sandwich, but I was in native heaven.

The loss of Auckland's canopy cover

by Neville Arbury

With the passing of the resource management act in 2012, blanket protection of trees on private land was removed and the result have been devastating. Prior to this legislation it was difficult to obtain council permission to remove large trees from private land. A case had to be made that the tree was a danger to human lives from falling or was the cause of major drainage problems.

Since 2012 there has been a substantial decrease in the overall height of remaining trees indicating that many mature trees have been felled. The proportion of trees less than 10 metres has increased by 11% since 2013 to 75% of the present urban canopy. By 2016 only 17% of trees were higher than 10 metres, 10% over 20 metres, and 1% over 30 metres. Unless blanket tree protection is reinstated there will soon be very few large trees remaining in Auckland.

Book review: Alien Plants by Clive A. Stace and Michael J. Crawley

by Neville Arbury

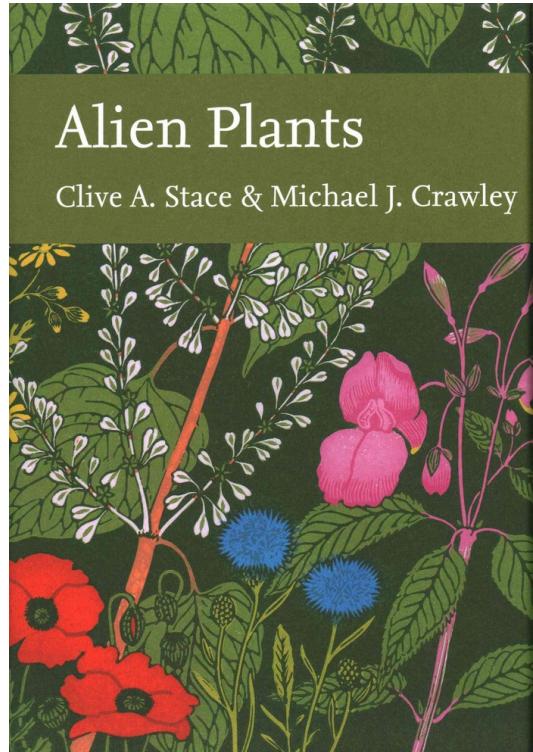
While this publication of over 500 pages is an incredibly comprehensive study of alien plants in Great Britain, a similar publication could easily be produced documenting the profusion of alien plants that are found throughout New Zealand.

In their “hard hitting” introduction what the authors write so easily applies to New Zealand! I quote:

“Alien plants are today the topic of interest of many professional research teams and enthusiastic amateurs around the world. As a group these plants are common, conspicuous, pestiferous, beautiful, edible, and otherwise useful or harmful. In the British issue there are roughly as many species of naturalised or frequently recurrent alien plants as natives. Many of them have profound effects on the environment by competing with native vegetation or by populating empty ground. Others have altered the course of evolution by their genetic interaction with natives. Alien plants in the British Isles, whether they be food plants or pests, are a major and measurable factor in our economy.”

Incredibly detailed in both research and documentation this book holds your interest with some of the more intriguing chapters covering the following topics:

- What are aliens and how many are there?
- The alien hunters.
- The discovery and documentation of alien flora.
- Accidental introductions.
- Deliberate introductions.
- The ecology of establishment.
- Habitats of alien plants.
- Environmental and economic impacts of alien plants.



It is interesting to note that New Zealand plants are listed in this book. They include:

- *Acaena spp.*
- *Anemanthele lessoniana*
- *Brachyglottis repanda*
- *Cortaderia richardii*
- *Hoheria populnea*
- *Muehlenbeckia complexa*
- *Olearia paniculata*
- *Pittosporum crassifolium*
- *Pittosporum tenuifolium*
- *Tetragonia tetragonoides*
- *Veronica dieffenbachii*

Not a publication for a light holiday read, but I found it very hard to put down. So much information provided is relevant to New Zealand. Highly recommended!

Why are so many of our native plants evergreen and so few deciduous?

by Neville Arbury

Roughly 5% or 27 of our native plants are deciduous including tree fuchsia, mountain lacebark, salt-marsh ribbonwood, and lowland ribbonwood. Some other species can be described as semi-deciduous e.g. wineberry, some beech, and kowhai that lose their leaves briefly in spring before flowering.

There are three main “schools of thought” why the majority of our plants are evergreen:

1. That New Zealand has been for so long isolated from sources of deciduous plants that are mainly found in the northern hemisphere.
2. That climates like that found in the New Zealand favours evergreens. In colder climates plants protect themselves by losing their leaves in cold winters. This is well illustrated by the fact that wineberries and tree fuchsia that are deciduous in the lower South Island are evergreen in the warmer North Island.
3. The third hypothesis is possibly the most interesting of the three. It argues that New Zealand has a preponderance of evergreens because of its poor soils. With 10% being alpine or coastal, 70% of the soils being shallow or lacking in nutrients, there is only 20% of what could be described as a rich soil. As evergreens have a strategy of retaining nutrients in their leaves, it follows that they should retain their leaves as long as possible.
– Makes sense to me!

Replanting of the native grass collection at Ben's Ridge

by Neville Arbury

As part of the monthly working bee on September 12th, the native grass collection was largely replanted. As our native sedges (*Carex spp.*) are relatively short lived, 2-3 years maximum, this area needs to be replanted quite regularly. The exceptions are the giant gahniyas that have thrived since being planted 6-7 years ago.

The soil in this area is quite unlike other parts of Fernglen. In fact, the North Shore. Ben's ridge was a dairy farm (small) many years ago, resulting in a soil that is a friable loam. This no doubt explains why so many of our native planted in that part of Fernglen have been successful.

The new grasses are small specimens as they grow so quickly. The only species that may prove difficult to cultivate is *Uncinia rubra* which naturally grows at high altitudes and may well suffer in summer from our high humidity. Below are listed the grasses planted 12/9/2020:

- *Carex buchananii*
- *Carex comans*
- *Carex flagellifera*
- *Carex testacea*
- *Carex trifida*
- *Carex virgata*
- *Uncinia rubra*

How many native tree species are there in New Zealand?

by Neville Arbury

When talking to school children about native plants I am often asked "How many tree species are there in New Zealand?" I reply that there are 215 tree species, often surprising children - especially when I tell them there are only 186 tree species in all of Europe and 582 species for all of North America.

Being children, they want to know why we have so many tree species in such a small country? In simple terms I answer that during the past 5 million years when most of the trees evolved, New Zealand was divided into a number of islands, some that were quite mountainous. As many of our trees are reasonably small, under 15 metres, they had a distinct evolutionary advantage in that they reached reproductive maturity fast and could maintain large populations in small areas. And most importantly, they could withstand exposed coastal conditions and cooler mountainous areas. As well, many of our native trees have small leaves that enable them to flourish in the dappled-light understory.

What's happening at Fernglen?

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: fernalen.nz@gmail.com
or phone: 021 236 5800

Pest Free Kaipatiki

Did you know Pest Free Kaipatiki Restoration Society are located in the Fernglen education room office? Check out news about pest plants, kauri dieback prevention, pest animals and events at www.pestfreekaipatiki.org.nz

Room hire

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

on email: fernalen.nz@gmail.com
or phone: 021 236 5800



Botanical Art at Fernglen

Interested?

contact
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