

FERNGLEN NATIVE PLANT GARDENS NEWSLETTER

Winter 2021



Table of Contents

News from Fernglen.....	2
Book review: <i>Down the Bay – A Natural and Cultural History of Abel Tasman National Park</i> , by Philip Simpson.....	5
The elusive <i>Metrosideros parkinsonii</i>	6
Why are Silver Ferns silver?.....	7
The use of drones for revegetation in the Hunuas.....	8
A brief look at our native lichens.....	9
A look at some of the “hidden gems” in the old part of the garden.....	10
What's happening at Fernglen?.....	11

News from Fernglen

by Kelly Hayward, photos by Steve Cook

Sometimes new visitors are perplexed as to why there is a large grass area between the top drive and the rockery area. The grass is in contradiction to the rest of Fernglen's twisting tracks and stone pavers flanked with special and some rare native plants.

Throughout the gardens are signs identifying the common and botanical names of species, but there is none about the history of the property. Until now. This has been rectified thanks to a grant from the Lion foundation financing a large storyboard about the humble beginning of Fernglen. It is located in the grass area, once the site of the Fisher family home. The storyboard is split into three sections, the first tells of the Fisher family and their work on the land regenerating the bush, how Frank Fisher taught bush craft, astronomy and swimming to local boys in the area. The second panel tells of Frank and Jane Fisher's eldest son Bill and his wife Muriel, and their days as active, early members of the North Shore Forest and Bird Society. They carried out conservation work and, in 1970 won the Loder Cup. Bill and Muriel, with Malcolm ran a nursery at Fernglen selling native plants.



The third panel tells of Muriel Fisher's conservation work, her vision to transform the nursery into the gardens they are today and the successful books she wrote to encourage the planting of natives. Her books are still very relevant. The panel acknowledges the Council's commitment to the gardens since it was mostly gifted to them in 1991. Also it acknowledges the dedication of the Fernglen committee, trust members and volunteers who faithfully continue to enhance the gardens.

Today the grassed area is useful for the gathering of large groups. It is a peaceful place to contemplate, looking down over the layered rockery garden whilst listening to water flow along the channels of the water feature. Soon, thanks to the Lion Foundation, there'll be a wooden bench seat near the camellia tree. The very large camellia tree is one of the very few non-natives in Fernglen. It was the largest camellia tree Muriel had ever seen, when she first visited the property in the 1950s. While sadly the Fisher family home is no longer there, its branches once over hanging a corner of the house, remains part of Fernglen.

The track work is almost done. The Council and Local Board are keen to thank neighbours, visitors and volunteers at Fernglen for being so patient while the tracks have been closed for extended periods over the last year. We'll keep you posted as to when there's an open day and sausage

sizzle celebrating new additions to Fernglen like the ceiling in the education room, the storyboard panel and completion of the tracks.

Since writing this we are now in level 4. For Fernglen it is disappointing the expected school groups are unable to visit at this time, but we look forward to seeing them when there is a change in the alert levels.

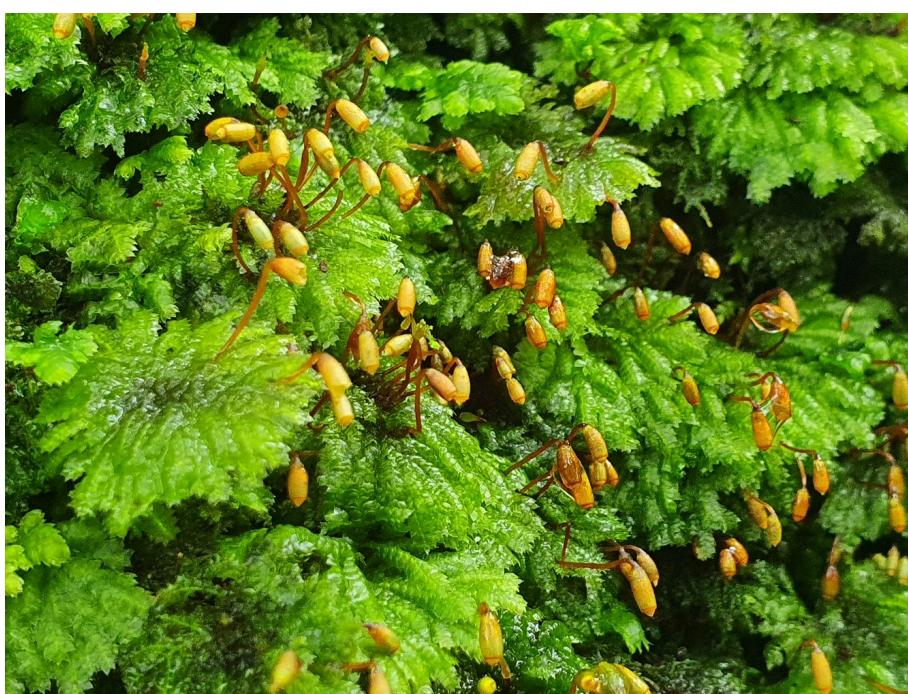
Thanks to Romily Atkinson for her contribution of the storyboard and Bill and Muriel's children Malcolm and Mary for providing the text for it.

Best wishes

Kelly



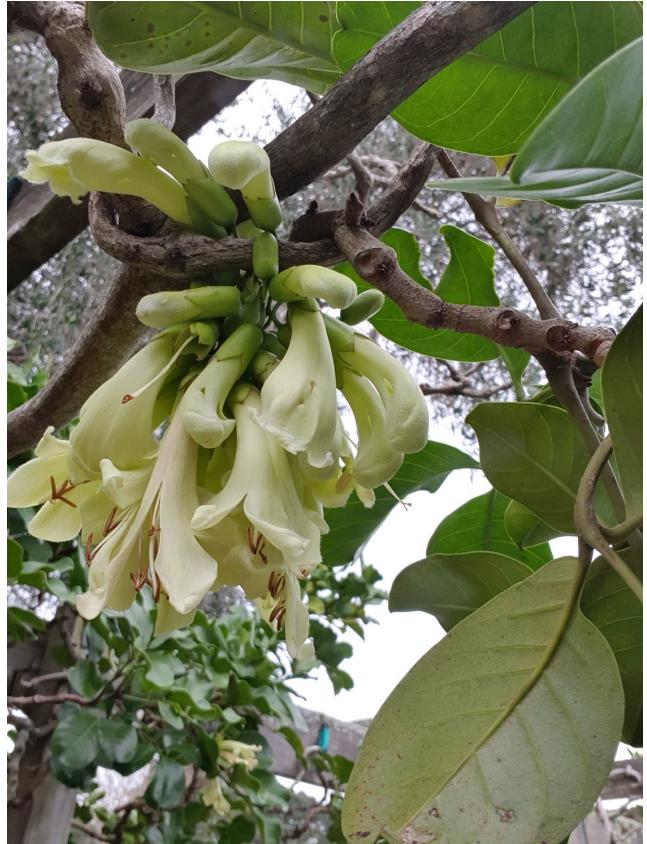
Pittosporum pimelioides



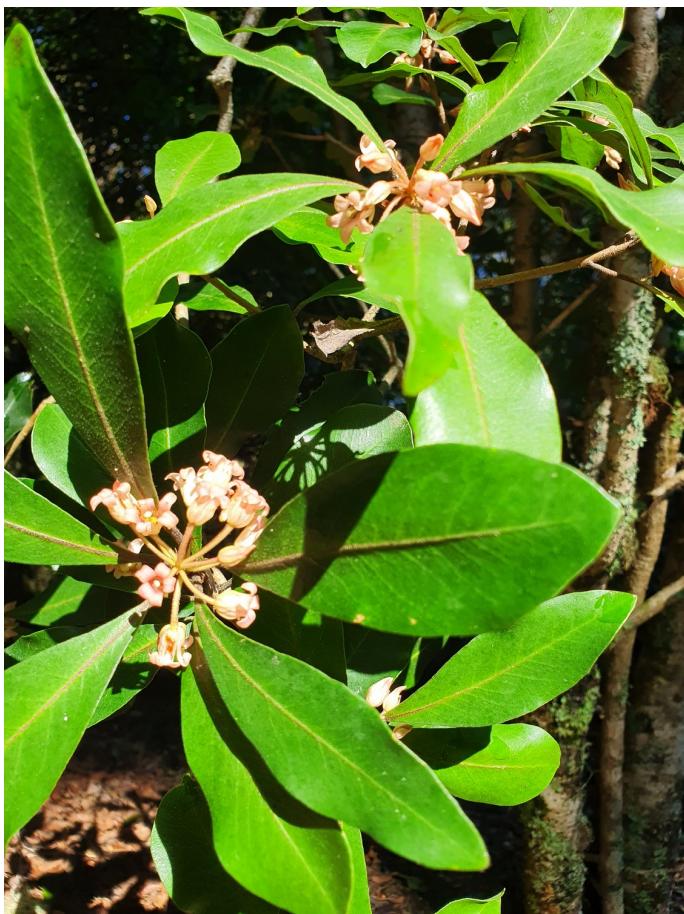
Umbrella moss



Astelia hastata



Tecomanethe



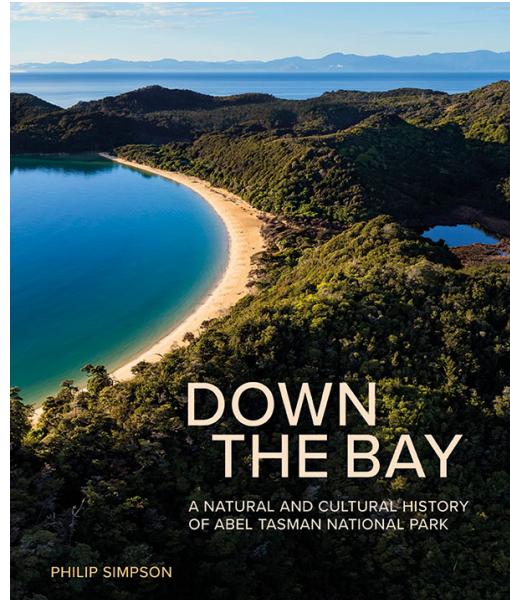
Pittosporum umbellatum

Book review: *Down the Bay – A Natural and Cultural History of Abel Tasman National Park*, by Philip Simpson

by Neville Arbury

Another outstanding publication by writer, ecologist Dr Philip Simpson, following on from his previous books on cabbage trees, pohutukawa and totara. This book is a cultural and natural history of the Abel Tasman National Park, at 23,000 hectares one of our smaller parks but my favourite! This is the first authoritative account of the Abel National Park to be published.

"Presents a comprehensive picture of the distinctive landforms of Abel Tasman. From the granite headlands and golden-sand beaches of the coast to the deep caves of the uplands, the diversity of plants and animals, the marine environment and the overlay of both Maori and European history."



As with all Philip Simpson's publications, the photography is exceptional, portraying the stunning coastline and amazing close-up images of many plants, especially ferns, orchids and mosses.

The book is divided into twelve chapters covering the birth of the park, the origin and structure of the land, the climate, soil and vegetation, the bush and wetland, ferns in the park, native fauna, the coast and sea, place names of the park, archaeology, the peoples' park and Project Janszoon.

The first chapter describes in considerable detail the background and eventual scheduling of the park in 1942. Largely through the effort and energy of an English woman Perrine Moncrieff who moved to New Zealand in 1921 and settled in the Nelson area.

The final chapter, Project Janszoon outlines a privately funded ecological restoration strategy for the park, working in cooperation with the Department of Conservation. Project Janszoon's vision is that after a thirty-year programme 2012-2042:

- Biodiversity values in the park are no longer threatened by invasive weeds and pests.
- Populations of key indicator species are robust and show favourable trends in all vital measures.
- Strong community and investor interest ensure the improvements are safe.
- The model created by this project is being used in other areas of New Zealand's conservation estate.

As with all Philip Simpson's previous publications, this book is highly recommended. A must for lovers of native plants and the beautiful Abel Tasman Park.

The elusive *Metrosideros parkinsonii*

by Neville Arbury

Of the twelve species of the genus *Metrosideros* found in New Zealand, we have the following growing at Fernglen: *Metrosideros bartlettii*, *Metrosideros carminea*, *Metrosideros excelsa*, *Metrosideros fulgens*, *Metrosideros perforata* and *Metrosideros robusta*.

We would love to add *Metrosideros parkinsonii* to our collection but years of searching for a plant have so far been unsuccessful. This species was first discovered in 1882 near Collingwood by Henry Travers. It was named by botanist John Buchanan after Sidney Parkinson, the botanist on Cook's first voyage to New Zealand. Initially, it was thought to grow only in the north-west Nelson area but was later found on Great Barrier Island in 1916 and in 1959 on Little Barrier. Over the years further duplications have been found on the West Coast of the South Island, as far south as Hokitika.



Parkinson's rātā (*Metrosideros parkinsonii*), © Chris Ecroyd (CC)

Interestingly the plant grows in a wide range of conditions. From 60 metres to 1,000 metres altitude. The preferred site can best be described as "elevated, wet forest", thriving as an understory plant beneath beech, kamahi, rimu and Southern rata. The form of Parkinson's rata is variable, as an understory plant, the form is a sprawling shrub with branches that can form roots where they touch the ground. In an open position, the rata has an upright form growing to 7 metres tall. Flowering occurs in spring and summer, a deep red colour. Leaves are larger than other ratas and have a distinct red colouration.

In the 1975 revised edition of "Gardening with New Zealand Plants, Shrubs and Trees", Muriel Fisher writes

"I have just recently been able to buy a young plant of this beautiful species and have planted in semi-shade. It looks hardy enough but I expect it will be like other members of the family and not flower for about eight years."

Unfortunately, this specimen died over twenty years ago.

Why are Silver Ferns silver?

by Neville Arbury

It is commonly understood, that the silver fern, ponga or *Cyathea dealbata* is the hardest of our tree ferns, by a considerable margin. Possibly the only tree fern to survive on more exposed sites during the hot dry summers that we are now experiencing.

The undersides of the silver fern leaves are coated with a layer of wax that is known as fernene, a compound that can be chemically effective against bacterial and fungal infections. In pongas, the fernene mixes with several other chemicals and appears silver. The silver colouration works as a survival blanket under the leaves, helping to keep the leaves warm and slowing down the rate of evaporation of water from inside the leaves. Silver ferns acquire the silver colouration gradually as they grow and mature.



Silver fern (*Cyathea dealbata*), © Leon Perrie ([CC](#))

The use of drones for revegetation in the Hunuas

by Neville Arbury

Last year in a newsletter I reported on the use of drones in Victoria and New South Wales, to deposit seed into rugged terrain to speed up the regrowth of vast areas of bush destroyed by wildfires.

Recently trials have begun in the Hunuas to achieve a similar outcome. The seed of up to five native species is mixed with clay and compost, compressed into a small ball that can then be dropped onto a specific target by the drone. Areas up to a hectare have been targeted and will be carefully monitored to assess the success or otherwise of this experiment. It is hoped that this will speed up the process of revegetation in difficult to access areas. Seed was collected throughout the Hunua Ranges for the experiment. This is certainly a novel approach to revegetation. It will be interesting to learn of the outcome in the coming years.

Here you can read and watch a feature on TVNZ about the project:

<https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/drone-project-hoping-revitalise-hunua-ranges-water-supply>

A brief look at our native lichens

by Neville Arbury

Amazingly, there are over 1,000 lichen species in New Zealand! They have often been described as one of the wonders of the world as they can be found from Antarctica to near the summit of the highest mountains.

Lichens are natures' pioneers. The first colonisers to begin the process of habitation. They can be the slowest growing of all classes of plant life, with the ability to shut down completely in unfavourable conditions and then recommence growth when light, moisture and air quality improves.

Although lichens depend on photosynthesis to survive, they are not plants, they are the result of symbioses which have developed between fungi and algae or fungi and cyanobacteria.

There are three main groups of lichens based on appearance, crustose, fruticose and foliose. Foliose lichens are very common on the trunk of trees and fruticose lichens have a branched habit, either upright or hanging. Crustose lichens are the most common, as they occur not only on tree trunks or branches but on bare soil and exposed rock.

The survival of lichens is helped by their ability to produce unique biochemicals that control exposure to light, kill attacking microbes, repel herbivores and discourage competition from plants. Amazing!

An aside..., many years ago I had a 1972 Volkswagen Beetle. While not the most practical vehicle for landscaping, I loved its many unique characteristics. Eventually, on the front bonnet, a patch of lichen began to grow. I was so excited to see nature at work! Alas, on collecting my Beetle from the garage where it was regularly serviced, I noticed that the lichen had disappeared. On enquiring, a young mechanic informed me that he loved Volkswagens and had given my car a thorough wash including removing that "grey thing" on the bonnet. I was gutted!

A look at some of the “hidden gems” in the old part of the garden

by Neville Arbury

At the entrance to the gardens, on the left-hand side is a large specimen of *Pomaderris hamiltonii*, the big brother of the more common *Pomaderris kumerahou*. The flowers form very early before opening in spring, a creamy-yellow colour. The plant has a very limited natural distribution from Warkworth to Omaha and two further populations on the west coast of the Firth of Thames. Fortunately, seedlings arise in surrounding gardens each year as the species is not exceptionally long-lived.

Near the entrance is a rather “unlike native” plant, *Euphorbia glauca*, commonly known as Maori spurge or sand milkweed. With its distinctive blue-green leaves and red stems, the plant slowly moves around the garden by producing underground suckers. While there are a number of colonies around the coast of New Zealand, they are often small and easily destroyed by trampling animals or overgrown by exotic weeds.

Behind the alpine house is a magnificent specimen of a female *Elingamita johnsonii*, at present covered in large red fruit. There are three other specimens near the entrance to Fernglen, alas all males so no fruit. Elingamatas are only found growing naturally on the Three Kings Islands where it was discovered in 1950 on West Island.

Taking the first track to the left when entering the gardens, just past some flax bushes, hiding away is a superb specimen of *Pittosporum obcordatum*. This rare Pittosporum has a very distinct upright, divaricating form. Possibly one of the most unique distribution patterns of native plants. Small populations are found in Kaitaia, Wairoa, Wellington, Akaroa and Manapouri.

Further up this track on the left-hand side is a healthy clump of *Davallia tasmanii*, a fern only found on the Three Kings Island - similar to “rabbit foot” fern, *Davallia fijiensis*. This low-growing clumping fern is exceptionally slow growing. This clump measuring around 300mm x 200mm has been here for many years. There are two other small populations of this fern in the old part of the garden.

At the top of this path, you will encounter two “dangerous” looking plants: *Rubus cissoides* and *Rubus schmidelioides*, commonly known as bush lawyers. Found on bush/forest margins, the hooks on the underside of the leaves are used to attach the climbers to surrounding plants.

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: fernnglen.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: fernnglen.nz@gmail.com

or phone: 021 236 5800

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**



Botanical Art at Fernglen

Interested?

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