

FERNGLEN NATIVE PLANT GARDENS NEWSLETTER

Winter 2022

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News from Fernglen

by Kelly Hayward, photos by Kelly Hayward and Steve Cook

Most mornings, sometime shortly before or after 7am a series of sharp croaks, creaks or maybe a piercing squawk comes from somewhere within the Fernglen canopy. The sounds are like no-other. On foggy mornings these sounds generate thoughts of a prehistoric creature awakening into the modern era. The guttural calls are from a roosting kākā. Pest Free Kaipatiki have been busy preparing kākā nest boxes, strategically placing them in private properties near Fernglen. They are placing them in large diverse tree species, encouraging what we hope will be multiple juvenile squawks in the near future.



Kākā nest box at Fernglen Gardens

While we wished for rain over the autumn months, receiving so much of it, intensely in a short period of time has scoured some parts of the newly restored tracks, leaving deep pits. Do keep an eye out when walking on the tracks. Steve has placed some orange cones about and there is a little step over one trench but there is other unmarked damage and we are waiting for the Council to assist.

This month's working bee had volunteers amend some of the scoured path that leads from the grass area, site of the old Fisher family home, to the education centre and alpine house. It is always difficult to know whether to cancel a working bee due to rain, but Fernglen working bees go ahead in most weather (except in a thunder storm) as there is always a job to be done and on most occasions the rain abates. Thirteen hardy volunteers appeared at 9am on the second Saturday and, through some periods of drizzle, cleared dead winter foliage and tidied the grounds in preparation of spring being around the corner.

We hope you enjoy visiting Fernglen during this wet period when everything appears so green and lush. If you can't make it in person, below are some recent photographs.

Keep dry

Thanks Kelly



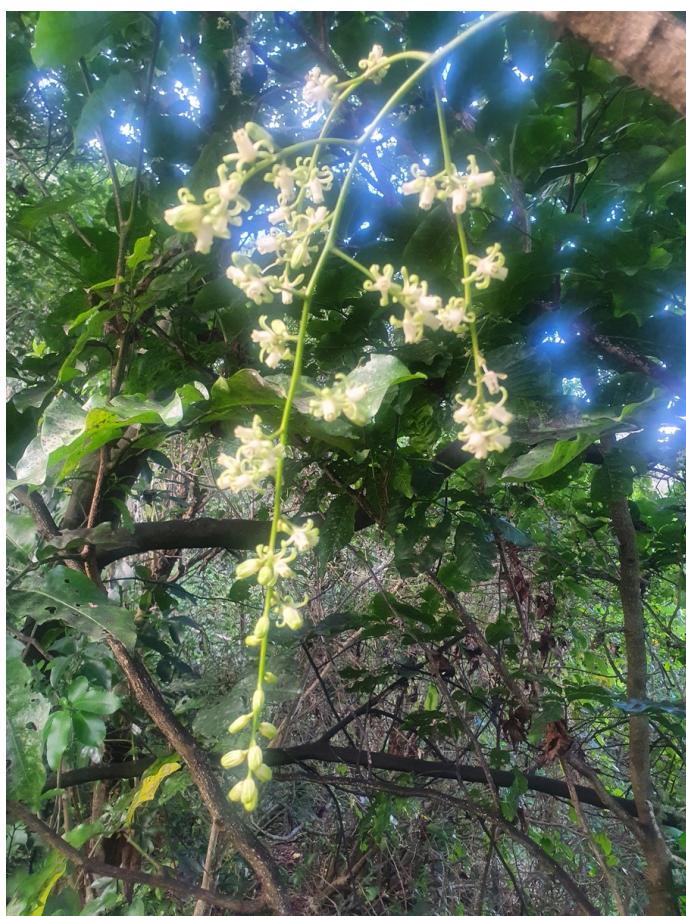
The rain has seen the old cattle water pond at Ben's Ridge fill up for the first time in some years.



Elingamita johnsonii



Male kawakawa flower with intricate patterns on spikes



Spray of kohekohe flowers (growing out of the bark on a branch, known as cauliflory)



King ferns sprouting



Wood ears on a dead lacebark tree

Replanting of the Native Grass Collection at Ben's Ridge

by Neville Arbury, photos by Kelly Hayward

As the grass collection consists of mainly native sedges (*Carex* species), there is a need for the regular planting of new specimens as our native sedges are not long-lived. Those planted at our July working bee are sedges that grow well in this Auckland district. The one exception is *Carex trifida* which is only found in the Chatham Islands.

Meanwhile adjacent to the new grasses is the giant *Gahnia xanthocarpa* which has thrived for the past ten years or more. If you have room in your garden for this impressive 'monster', I would highly recommend it, both for its longevity and stunning flower plumes.

Grasses planted were:

- *Carex buchananii*
- *Carex comans*
- *Carex dipsacea*
- *Carex flagellifera*
- *Carex solandri*
- *Carex tenuiculmis*
- *Carex testacea*
- *Carex trifida*
- *Carex virgata*



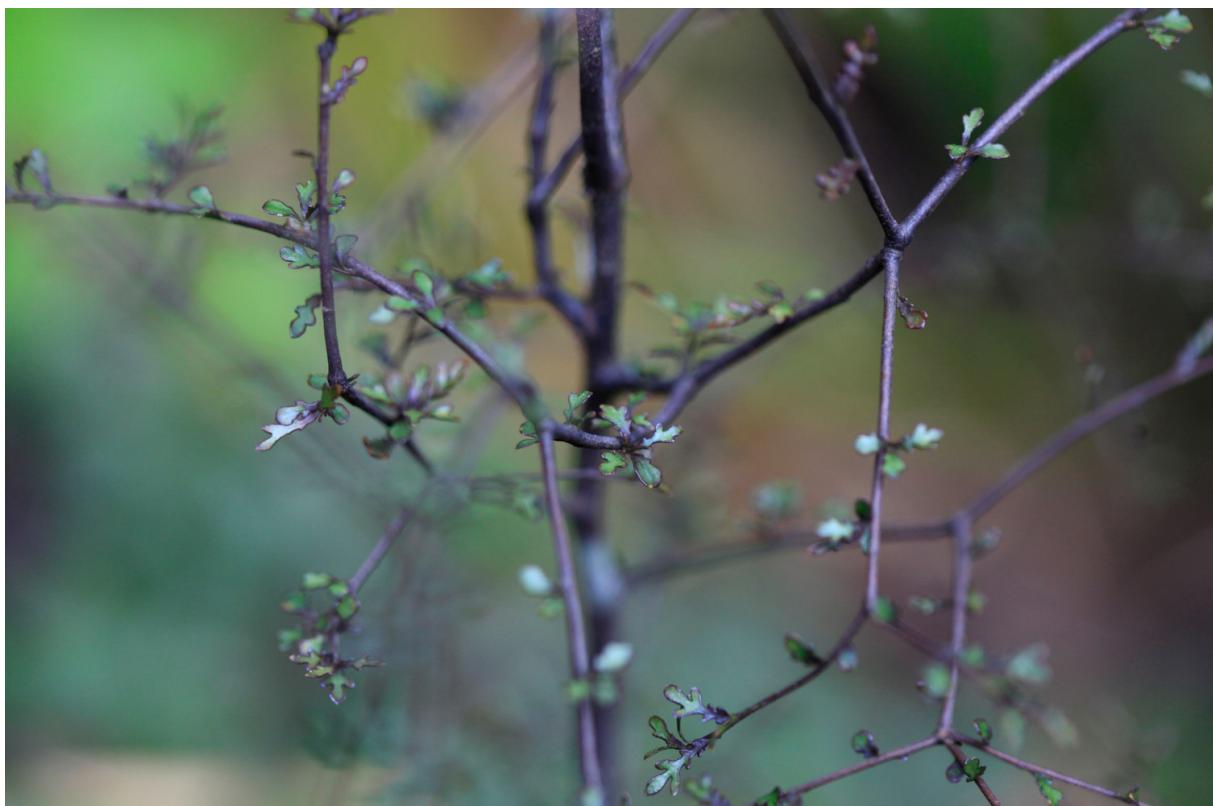
The new grass collection at Ben's Ridge



A Recent Addition to our Pittosporum Collection: *Pittosporum turneri*

by Neville Arbury, photo by Kelly Hayward

New Zealand has twenty-five pittosporum species, most are small to medium-sized trees. Six species are shrubs with distinctive twiggy growth. Three species display that distinctly New Zealand native characteristic of juvenility, where the young plants have quite small leaves that are replaced with larger leaves as the plant reaches the adult form. These pittosporums are *Pittosporum patulum*, *Pittosporum turneri* and *Pittosporum virgatum*.



Pittosporum turneri

Our new acquisition for Fernglen, thanks to Terry Hatch at Joy Plants, *Pittosporum turneri*, naturally occurs in the central volcanic region of the North Island, growing on forest margins and the sides of streams. The juvenile form grows to about two metres with very distinctive interlacing branches. The adult plant can reach up to seven metres with significantly larger leaves. Flowers appear in spring/early summer, pink to light red in colour. The plant's status as a threatened species is "nationally vulnerable". The new specimen has been planted in the 'old garden' near the *Pseudopanax ferox* that is just entering its adult form. It will be interesting to observe how many years before this particular pittosporum changes from its twiggy juvenile form into an adult small tree.

Book Review: *The Ferals that ate Australia* by Guy Hull

by Neville Arbury

While this fascinating book details the tragedy of introduced animals and birds to Australia, so much applies to New Zealand! With the arrival of Europeans over two hundred years ago, came foreign animals that now dominate Australia's ecosystem. In a similar vein to what happened in New Zealand, the great feral story is one of acclimatisation, as new settlers deliberately set out to make their new country more like their homeland.

Guy Hall details the history of the introduction of horses, rabbits, goats, pigs, sheep, camels, donkeys, foxes, deer and how they have contributed to the destruction of many of Australia's native species, and the assault on both land and agriculture.

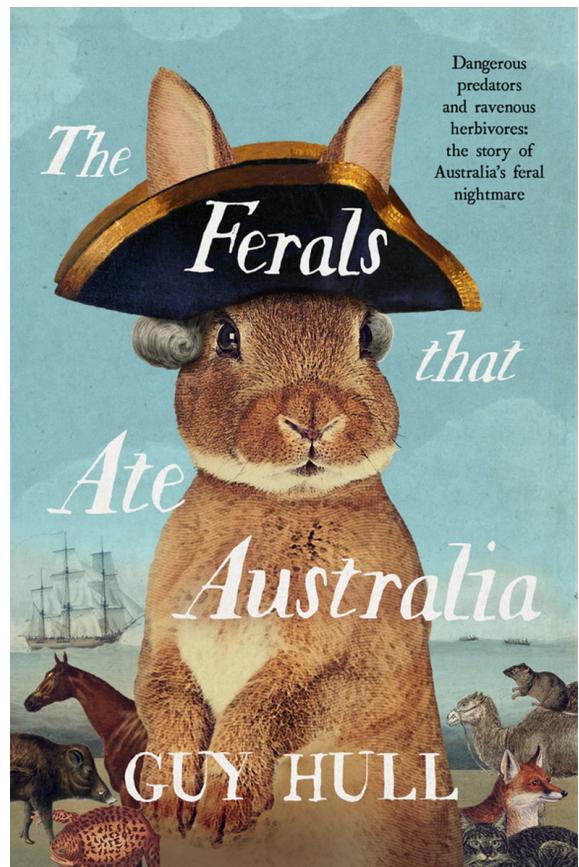
A considerable portion of the book is devoted to, what is termed "searching for the magic rabbit cure". Even as far back as 1887, a £25,000 prize was offered for a cure problem, such was the enormity of rabbit populations in many parts of Australia. Both the myxoma virus and calicivirus are discussed, especially how the rabbits eventually developed immunity. As the author states,

"The war against the rabbit continues. It is an enemy that will never know total defeat!"

Perhaps the most intriguing chapter in the book is titled, "The Great Cane Toad Con Job!". In the author's words,

"It is hard to accept, given the circumstances leading to the cane toad's liberation in Australia, that their release was an act of good faith. It was an act so lacking in scientific foundation and process, so reckless, so arrogant, and so aggressively dismissive of rightful criticism that it defies belief that it was the project of Australia's scientific community".

The book concludes on a slightly optimistic note, that Australia is slowly clawing back from the grasp of ferals. Although it is unreasonable to expect complete victory in the feral wars, rabbits, dogs, pigs, cats, foxes and cane toads need to go. But, for the others, it is envisaged that the Australian ecosystem will adapt to living with controlled numbers of introduced species. This is yet another must-read. Highly recommended!



The Movement of the Parataniwhas Upstream at Fernglen

by Neville Arbury, photo by Kelly Hayward

Now that rain has finally arrived and in great quantities, the creek you cross on the way to Ben's Ridge is really flowing and the parataniwhas are thriving with "their feet in water". *Elatostema rugosa*, native begonia or parataniwha, continue to spread downstream as outlined in the autumn newsletter.



Parataniwhas near stream

However, it is interesting to observe how far the plants have migrated upstream from the walkway across the creek. They can now be seen covering both sides of the creek for over 50 metres upstream. It would be interesting to note if there are any natural springs in this area as by mid-summer this area becomes very dry, and not a preferred habitat for parataniwhas. Possibly shade from large native tree canopies cools this area. Whatever the reason, they certainly make an impressive sight.

Native Plants NOT so Successful at Mangawhai Heads

by Neville Arbury

In the autumn newsletter, I commented on those native plants that have thrived at my coastal holiday home, situated on an exposed ridge overlooking the estuary at Mangawhai heads. There have been some real disappointments, mainly due to exposure to strong south-westerly winds, and for the past few summers, exceptionally long, dry conditions. Planting is annually carried out in the winter months, May to August. And while plants are mulched when young, they are not watered over the summer months.

Karakas, *Corynocarpus laevigatus* – They have struggled, probably because of the exposed site and heavy clay soils. A small grove of karakas sheltered by a large shed has thrived and are now 3-4 metres.

Mahoe, *Melicytus ramiflorus* – A big disappointment. I initially thought they would be a major part of my shelter planting, however, they have really struggled. Strangely a close relative, *Melicytus macrophyllus* has thrived with seedlings now appearing throughout the property.

Matipo, *Myrsine australis* – While they have survived, they have been far less successful than I expected. They really struggle in the long, hot, dry summers.

Pittosporum fairchildii – This rare pittosporum from the Three Kings Islands is one of my favourite pittosporums and I had hoped to establish a considerable population at Mangawhai. Sadly, results have been patchy, but this is a very handsome plant.

Nikau, *Rhopalostylis sapida* – Perhaps my greatest disappointment. Initially, I planted clusters of nikau from different parts of New Zealand, however, the summers have been too dry and the winds too strong to allow the plants to become established. There are about fifteen survivors from the original plantings, the Chatham Island nikau surviving the best. In retrospect, I should have waited 5-10 years after planting shelter trees, before attempting to cultivate nikau on a windy ridge.

Hangehanges, *Geniostoma ligustrifolium* – Mixed results with hangehanges. I had hoped they would be a major part of my understorey. They certainly self-seed in my “forest” but struggle to survive the long dry summers.

Milk tree, *Streblus banksia* – One of my favourite native trees, I had hoped this species would become one of the feature trees in my planted “forest”. Alas, all but one specimen have struggled. The one successful plant was planted a few years later and in a more sheltered position. It is now around five metres high and is a superb specimen.

Tawapou, *Planchonella costata* – Another major disappointment. I love this native tree with its glossy green leaves and attractive large fruit. While they have not died, after twenty-plus years in the ground, they have not grown significantly.

Tanekaha, *Phyllocladus trichomanoides* – Initially, the plants grew quite well, but as the summers became hotter and drier, they really struggled. The few remaining specimens really struggled to survive during the past summer.

What I have learned from my not-so-successful plantings at Mangawhai Heads:

- Establish dense shelter as soon as possible
- Only plant trees/shrubs that can tolerate long, dry summers
- Delay plantings of less hardy plants for 5-10 years
- Observe your plantings carefully, to guide future plantings
- Mulch young, and not-so-young plants to help water retention in summer
- Only plant during the winter period, May to September

Why Are Our Native Flowers Smaller and Less Dramatic than Some Other Countries

by Neville Arbury

New Zealand native flowers are generally not showy, they are often small, simple and not bright coloured. The reason for this is very straightforward, they do not need to be large and brightly coloured to attract insects. Over a quarter of our native plants are wind pollinated, where the pollen is transferred from male anthers to receptive female stigmas, often on other plants.

The remainder of our flowering plants, with a few exceptions, are pollinated by insects. Flowers continue to evolve in response to the insect pollinators, while the insects also continue to evolve to "fit" the flowers. The general belief is that native flowers are visited by a wide range of generalist pollinating insects, as opposed to a small number of specialist pollinators. It is only with our native orchids that you find specialist insect pollinators. However, sixty per cent of New Zealand's orchid species can self-pollinate. A worthwhile backup system if insect pollinators are unavailable.

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

Room hire

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

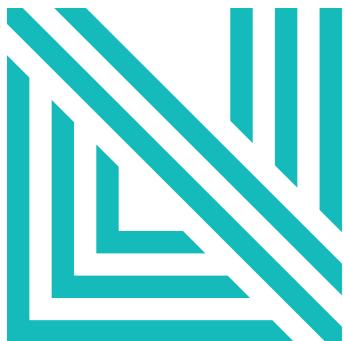
on email: fernnglen.nz@gmail.com

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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