



# Friends of Oakley Creek Te Auaunga

AUTUMN 2022

## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

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## Editorial

Autumn has been wild on the creek this year. The heavy rain and wind in late March brought floods and fallen trees, but not before we saw a bounty of late summer / autumnal fruits and flowers such as those from kahikatea, puriri, karaka, houhere and koromiko. In this edition we introduce our Chair – David Bowden, and how he came to be working with us, as well as the new role of Outreach Co-ordinator, for which we are lucky to have Sandra Maclean on board. It's fantastic that we're able to have Sandra dedicated to this work.

We have articles about the ongoing planting, weeding and water monitoring work from our volunteers – either in their community groups around the creek, or on our regular working bees. We catch up with tree maintenance work by contractors and learn about possum population monitoring and results. We have a lovely feature on

the karamū tree (*Coprosma robusta*), and another feature on some special ferns around the creek from the *Doodia* genus. Residents around the creek will be familiar with their duck family neighbours, and we have a beautiful article about a duck's life in and around Te Auaunga.

There's the usual seasonal gallery, plus info about opportunities to help out, in the notices section. Our AGM is coming up in June, please join us to hear about progress and from our guest speaker. Unfortunately, our brilliant treasurer Sarah Woodfield is leaving us so we're also looking for a new treasurer to join us at the AGM – let us know if you're keen!

Enjoy!

*Cate Ryan, Editor*

## Another successful April working bee

### **By Wendy John**

At our April community working bee we were joined by a great number of eager volunteers – a mix of regulars, not-quite-so regulars, newbies, plus a group of Chinese people from Conservation

Volunteers' Migrant Conservation Programme. We carried out plant releasing and weeding around the young native plants that were planted last winter.



Photo (above): Conservation Volunteers' Migrant group with team leader Xinxin Wang (orange vest) and FoOC's Wendy John (to the left of Xinxin) and the rest of the team.



Photo (above): Albert Eden Local Board member, Julia Maskill, mucking in

## David Bowden - Chair

**By Marin Adams**

Friends of Oakley Creek Te Auaunga has many, many volunteers. Being chairperson is an important role and carries with it considerable responsibility. So, what led David to make such a commitment? The seeds were sown in the United Kingdom when David was just a boy. He remembered his parents telling him about them attending Ban the Bomb marches and his father speaking passionately from the heart at public meetings.

When the family came to live in New Zealand in the 1970s, David became familiar with the landscapes, native trees and birds near his home in Hawkes Bay. His family joined Forest and Bird and enjoyed monthly day trips away. Gradually his curiosity and interest in nature grew, fuelled by long discussions about climate change at home in the 80s, well before most New Zealanders were even aware of the issue. On leaving Hastings Boys High School, he attended Canterbury University. He studied geography (later re named "environmental science") and psychology, completing a Master of Science in 1994. After which he successfully found employment in local government and non-governmental agencies, doing work that both fulfilled his environmental interests and utilized his skills.

Following in the family tradition, David became an agent for change in his spare time. It was not banning the bomb, but as Chair of the For-

est & Bird Central Auckland Branch in the early 1990s, he advocated to stop the environmental destruction of the proposed eastern motorway in East Auckland. Around that time in the early 2000s, Oakley Creek in the west, was also seen as a perfect motorway corridor for commuters hurrying to work. The water, trees, native fish and birds were to be managed, dispersed and their homes in the creek supplanted by new concrete structures. Public opposition in the East stopped one motorway, but the proposed southwestern motorway connection continued to gain momentum. The community, including members of Friends of Oakley Creek, were appalled by the proposed loss of their creek and surrounding green space. A united front of activists was formed under the banner "Tunnel or Nothing". Their efforts saw the government opt to put the motorway underground and invest in significant creek enhancements.

With the Waterview Connection now built, Friends of Oakley Creek has continued to focus on its core function: restoring the creek environs. Since becoming Chairperson in 2020, David has worked with other committee members, to deliver a conservation programme of volunteer activities including fundraising, litter clean ups, tree planting, weeding, predator control and advocacy. Thank you, David, for your work in the past and now your ongoing commitment. Well done!



Photo (above): David Bowden (Chair) and son Archie

# New Outreach Co-ordinator for Oakley Creek

By Cate Ryan

In some exciting news, Friends of Oakley Creek has a new staff member! Sandra Maclean started with us in January, initially as cover for Wendy when she was on holiday, but Sandra is now on board as an Outreach Co-ordinator. Her main focus is stakeholder engagement on restoration projects, and the Waterview Heritage Area is one of her first



Photo (above): Sandra Maclean

projects. Keen-eyed locals may have seen the catchy posters around Waterview inviting them to 'Tuesday Restoration Sessions (see image right). At this stage efforts are concentrated on clearing weeds, since they're overwhelming our native plants. Waterview is a fascinating area with living history. Evidence of early Māori settlement includes shell middens, living platforms and storage pits. Remains of an old flour mill, quarry, and brickworks also survive from early European times. Sandra's keen to hear from anyone that would like to get involved in the Waterview project, cyclists especially - since there are so many on that path! Get in touch on 021 166 7647, or sndrmaclean@yahoo.co.uk if you're keen.

Other projects for Sandra include restoration of the tributary adjacent to the Mt Roskill Police Station (in partnership with NZ Police), and stamping out moth plant in the Whau area – especially around properties adjacent to Oakley Creek.

Photo (above): Tuesday sessions at Waterview – info

# Friday working bees

By Wendy John

As always, there's heaps to do on the creek, and our Friday volunteers have been busy these past couple of months, working their way through areas of recent plantings, along the top western edge of Harbutt Reserve. Clearing away the weeds gives the young plants some breathing space, plus on the rare occasion that we've had rain, it can get to the ground and the roots of the plants more quickly.



Photo (above): Pat gets handy with a scythe



Photo (above): Martin wonders where to start with the weeds

Our 'southern circuit' trapping team recently did a great job of clean-ing and calibrating the DOC200 traps on their trap line so that they are set off at a suitable weight, to ensure maximum efficiency.



Photo (above): Wayne Forsyth & Rosemary Phillips (photo by Chris Brown)

## Three men and three chainsaws!

**By Wendy John**

We were thrilled when the crew turned up recently to carry out the next session of removing some of the privet and wattle in the upper creek (Harbutt Reserve) with not one chainsaw, but three, and three men to use them. The team managed to get through a heap of work – almost all of the trees we had marked for them, plus they tidied up a huge black wattle that had been felled a couple of years ago. This work, while not opening up too much canopy, which would encourage weeds, is part of our programme of transitioning this area from privet into a native rock forest. Nine hundred plants will be going into the ground this coming planting season. Watch this space!



Photo (above): The team made short work of turning these privet trees into lizard and insect habitat

## Pine tree on the move

**By Wendy John**

There's never a dull moment on the creek, especially during storm events. In the past couple of months, we have had a cyclone and a major flood. As a result of the high winds during the cyclone one of our large pine trees decided to 'bite the dust'! It fell from the top of a steep bank across the path (without doing it any damage), and across the creek before smashing into an area of natives on the far side. The contractors initially did a quick tidy up / trimming of branches to make the area safe for the public to pass by. Then a few weeks later they turned up with a massive crane to remove the tree. The crane was stationed at the top edge of the bush behind the new Kainga Ora apartments on Great North Road – some 60 or so metres away. The boom of the crane was probably at least that long (60m) when fully extend-

ed (see image below)! It was amazing to watch the skill and precision of the arborists and crane drivers, working in sync, on such a high-risk job. Thanks to Treesafe for their amazing effort, and now we have a lovely big pile of mulch to spread around.



Photo (above): Fallen pine tree over the track at Te Auaunga



Photo (above): A very tall crane was needed to clear the fallen pine away

# Wax tag monitoring for possums

By John Stevenson

In conjunction with our animal pest control programme, FoOC runs a monitoring programme which uses wax tags with bait to give us an indication of the effectiveness of our controls. The idea is that possums and rats will chew the wax tags, and the fewer bite marks, the fewer pests there are around. We monitor possums in February each year with two lines of forty wax tags put out on each side of the creek for seven nights. The tags are baited with a mixture of flour and icing sugar to attract the animals. The pest animals present can be identified by the bite marks they leave (see images below).



Figure 1: Comparison of wax-tag data on Oakley Creek east and west sides of the creek, for the last 5 years (John Stevenson)

Numbers over the last five years were highest in 2019 and 2020 for both possums and rats (Figure 1). Strikes by rats are much greater than by pos-

sums. The results indicate more possums on the west side of the creek than on the east - except this year when 15% of the tags on the east had possum bites as compared to 10% on the west.

Numbers reduced in 2021 - but had a bit of a rebound this year. It is unclear how the weather might affect the numbers. This summer was very dry which is

likely to result in less food, suppressing breeding and number of pests present. However, less food could necessitate foraging over a wider range and likelihood of more encounters with our tags. It should be noted that some of last year's data was incomplete which will affect the results. However, we can still get a reasonable picture from the percentage figures.



Photo (above): Clean wax tag (John Stevenson)



Photo (above): Wax tag with possum bite marks (John Stevenson)

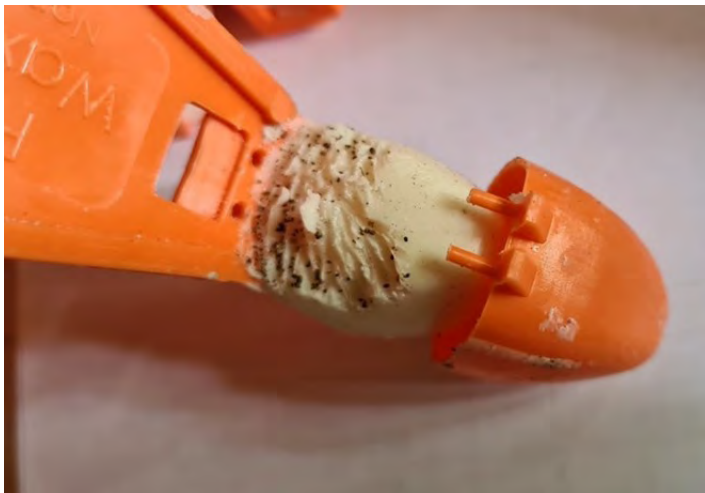


Photo (above): Wax tag with rat bite marks (John Stevenson)



Photo (above): John Stevenson puts out wax tags for possum monitoring

## Water monitoring

**By Wendy John**



Photo (above): Water boatman (*Sigara arguta*)

Each quarter volunteers undertake water quality monitoring at seven sites along the creek. Lynda Burnside and Sarah Bishop monitor the upper portion of the Stoddard Road tributary on May Road. This time around they netted a tray load of **water boatmen (*Sigara arguta*)**, which is the first time so many of these cool wee critters have been seen at any one time (and, of course they were released back into the stream).



Photo (above): Lynda Burnside and Sarah Bishop water sampling

## Flooding and green infrastructure

**By Wendy John**

Te Auaunga had a 'full flush' during the recent intensive flooding, with the river valley looking like the Mississippi, and Kukuwai Park becoming Kukuwai Lake!

However, many other parts of Oakley Creek now have 'green infrastructure' so that areas will 'flood by design', which means they divert water away from buildings, such as peoples homes, and the floods will entirely recede within a few hours. Have a look at this article which show cases some of the **'marvellous powers of secret stormwater infrastructure'** on the creek.



Photo (above): Oakley Creek in flood

## Daylighting of the Wairaka Stream

'Daylighting' is when the streams in underground culverts are brought back to the surface. Work on the daylighting of a section of the Wairaka Stream in Unitec is almost completed. But, during the work two other springs were discovered and the engineers are now trying to decide the best way to incorporate these flows with the main flow.



Photo (above): Work to daylight the Wairaka Stream

# Powell Street ‘Pow Wow’

**By Wendy John**

We are ever so fortunate to have neighbourhood groups along the creek who do an invaluable job of taking care of their local ‘patches’. Our Powell Street Sustainable Neighbourhood Group is another example of this. They have been working on restoring an area of the creek for approximately 10 years.



Photo (above): Powell people enjoy a well-earned evening meal after a working bee on the creek

# Oakley Loop Group – at it again

**By Wendy John**

There is no time to rest when it comes to conservation work and controlling weeds. Our lovely Oakley Loop Group held another successful working bee recently on their ‘patch’ on the creek. As always, we finished up with some delicious treats and a cuppa.



Photo (above): Oakley Loop Group take a break from restoring the creek for a photo

# A solemn promise lightened with fun

**By St Judes Scouts and their leaders as told to Marin Adams**

A scout’s promise includes a commitment “to contribute to my community”. In this particular case, to plant and protect native trees along the bank of Te Auaunga. The land had been covered with rubbish and weeds but on my visit, it was waist high with native plants including; hoheria, whau, manuka, coprosma and mapou. I could see a lot of work had been done including the removal of five truck loads of rubbish.

When I was eleven years old, I did not like having to work. So how was it the St Judes



Photo (above) The site ready for planting (James Flocchini)

scouts stayed the course and restored the land surrounding and adjacent to their den?

Working along the creek did have a downside. There was a sore back, dirty hands, getting too hot, falling in the creek...splash! And weeding can be boring and just when you thought you had finished, another crop of little weeds would emerge and grow and grow. Especially during lockdown when you can’t be there.

But the upside is having fun. Normally you are not allowed to destroy things but with weeds you can whack them, tear them, pull them and it’s all good. You can shovel mulch and heave it to good purpose. You can wade into the creek, see eels and not freak out. You can find rubbish and long gobs of algae and make the stream look cleaner. It’s great exercise and you feel good.

So, what life lessons came with all that hard work? Listen when someone has a good idea. A task is much easier when we all work together. There are resources in the community you can call on. You can make a difference. And being a good citizen is rewarding in itself. Congratulations St Judes. As scouts

you have indeed fulfilled your promise. And a thank you to all those who supported you – Kainga Ora, Whau Local Board and our own, Friends of Oakley Creek.



Photo (above): Some of the unsightly rubbish the scouts cleaned up in preparation for planting the site (James Flocchini)

# Greetings to Karamū: *Coprosma robusta*

By Ngaio Balfour



Photo (above): Karamū – berries

Karamū is a small shrub-like tree found throughout both islands of Aotearoa. The leaves are glossy green and about 7-12cm long, with a clear mid-vein. In summer the gangly branches bear bright orange fruit, small and closely clustered.

### Sacred

Karamū carries particular importance for Māori in communication with the Gods. In some Tohunga (priest) practices, karamū leaves provided the sole ceremonial clothing. Karamū was also used in birthing ceremonies, in which a branch, heavy with berries, would be arranged around a baby boy's head to strengthen his destiny as a great warrior.

### Cuisine and coffee

Karamū forms a versatile part of traditional Māori cuisine. The leaves were used year-round to line hangi, infusing kai with a rich golden colour and distinctive flavour. The process also aided the preservation of kumara, which would be cooked in the hangi and dried to form Kao. Karamū summer fruits also provided a tasty treat, particularly favoured by children.

Early British colonials used the leaves as a substitute for chai tea. An experimental gardener extended this entrepreneurship in 1877, attempting to start a Karamū coffee market. Though apparently pleasing to the taste, the market never flourished.

### Medicinal properties

Aotearoa's native plants hold extensive medicinal properties and are vital in traditional Māori medicine. Karamū is no exception. Inflammations of the bladder and kidney may be relieved by a broth formed from boiling young Karamū leaves and shoots. The steam from the broth may also treat numerous conditions, including cuts, ulcers, and eczema.

### Restoration

Karamū is a vital friend within ecosystem restoration. The small and hardy plants provide a nursery

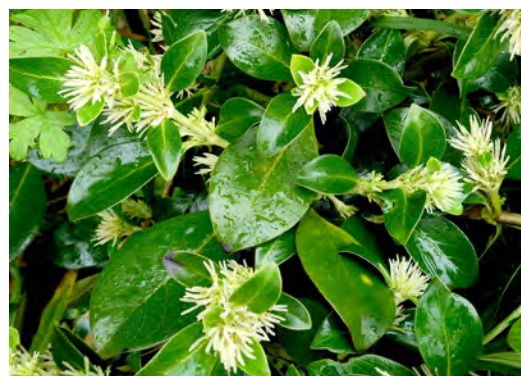


Photo (above): Karamū – female flowers



Photo (above): Karamū – male flower

for more sun-sensitive greenery by creating the first shade in exposed sites. Karamū also welcomes birds, lizards and weta who feed on the bright berries. What of the smaller creatures? If you look closely on the glossy leaves' underside, you will see small 'pits' (domatia), which are the cosy where for tiny mites.

The humble karamū grow throughout Te Auaunga, particularly on bush edges and newly planted areas. They are in fruit mainly from April to May. See if you can recognize them by their leaves and perhaps put a note in your calendar to look out for the fruit next year.

### References:

I highly recommend the second and third source for further reading.

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## Creek fernature - Doodia

By Chris Brown

I have long loved the sound of the words...*Doodia media*...as its rhyme rolls off the tongue conjuring up a Dr Seuss like plant.

There are two types of *Doodia* to be found along Te Auaunga...*australis* and *squarrosa*.

*Doodia media subsp. australis*... commonly known as the rasp fern...feel its fronds and you will see why...is able to be seen in a group at the intersection of the pathways up from Phyllis Bridge. At the moment one of the ferns has the pinkish/red emergent fronds which make this plant so attractive and is the feature that distinguishes it from the other NZ *Doodia* species.

It grows throughout Aotearoa, from the Kermadec Islands to Banks Peninsula and can be found in coastal lowland areas in open or forested sites, happily growing in full sun on poorly drained soils.



Photo (above): *Doodia media subsp. australis* – rose tinted frond (Chris Brown)

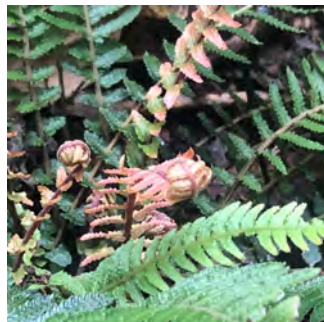


Photo (above): *Doodia media subsp. australis* – close up of pink, emergent fronds (Chris Brown)



Photo (above): *Doodia media subsp. australis* – characteristic sori (reproductive structures, useful for identification purposes), with whole plant in the background (Chris Brown).

*Doodia squarrosa* is a smaller fern, uncommon on the creek and treated as a rare plant during the construction of the Waterview Connection.

Fortunately I bumped into Wendy John on a creek ramble and she lead me to one growing at the base of basalt boulder beside the pathway. Much smaller than *australis*, the species has nearly been eliminated from the Auckland area by building developments, aggressive weeds and excessive plant collecting. It gets its name from its rough texture too and has two types of frond...sterile prostrate and erect fertile.

And where does that wonderful name come from? Samuel



Photo (above): *Doodia squarrosa* – characteristic sori, compared to sori from *Doodia media, subsp. australis* (Chris Brown)

Doody, a 17th century apothecary and curator. These days that would be a chemist and a botanist.

With thanks to Wendy John and NZPCN for information about these plants.

\*Editors note. This genus has had a name change and although not universally accepted, ***Doodia* is also known as *Blechnum***. These two species are also known as *Blechnum parrisiae* (*Doodia media subsp. australis*), and ***Blechnum zelandicum* (*Doodia squarrosa*)**, respectfully. Neither sound as good as *Doodia*.



Photo (above): *Doodia squarrosa* – whole plant, compared to one frond from *Doodia media, subsp. australis* (Chris Brown)

## Seasonal gallery



Photo (above): Rustgill (*Gymnopilus*)

Have you seen the **Common Blue** – (*Zizina otis labradus*) butterfly around the awa this autumn (image right)? This wee critter, while self-introduced, is still a delight to observe. It is described as New Zealand's most common butterfly, but because of its small size, the fact that it flies close to the ground, and that the blue on the tops of its wings is hidden when it lands (butterflies settle with their wings closed, whereas moths

settle with them open), it is often the most overlooked butterfly in the country.

Other sightings on the creek this season include rustgill fungi (genus *Gymnopilus*), houhere / lacebark, at Alan Wood Reserve, and the copious bounty of fruits from kahikatea, karaka and puriri. The lovely flowers of koromiko (*Veronica stricta*, previously *Hebe stricta*), have also made a show around the awa this autumn.



Photo (above): Common Blue – (*Zizina otis labradus*)

From left to right and top to bottom: houhere, kahikatea fruits, karaka fruits, puriri fruits and koromiko flowers.



# A duck's life – visitors from Te Auaunga

By Marin Adams

The swimming pool sparkled in the early morning light. The last three days down on the creek had been a nightmare. First there was the pukeko with its vice like beak stalking them, then an eel managed to grip the leg of one of the ducklings and drag him under the water. Each night, a possum and rats came sniffing to her nest, looking for food. Being a solo mother was an exhausting task. Just after dawn she walked along the stream bank, through the trees, past the old brick house, along the path, under the black railing and into the pool. Her ten ducklings followed her obediently, into what seemed a safe, predator free zone.

The owners of the dwellings surrounding the pool looked on as she and her tiny ducklings swam around. Some felt for the mother and wanted to feed her family. Others wanted her out, in case she fouled the water. She now had a new type of predator to deal with – one that

shouted and waved a stick at her and shooed her from the pool. She fled up the driveway, quacking indignantly. Fortunately, not all the owners were unsympathetic and some brought her food. While mother duck stood on guard, her ducklings greedily consumed rolled oats, peas and some shredded chicken.

The father of the ducklings was absent. Apparently mallard drakes are monogamous only for the breeding season. Once the eggs are all hatched, the drake will leave, seeking the companionship of other drakes and keeping an eye out for any unattached females to impregnate.

The mother and ducklings first arrived at the pool on October 21st. After the terrifying experience, they did not go in again, but they did remember where food would be laid out. As they became less fearful, they would venture to the courtyard twice or sometimes thrice per



Photo (above): Making themselves at home – ducks in the house (Marin Adams)

day. Even mother duck would share the meal. Sadly, at each visit, there would be one or two less ducklings. They had become food for the creek predators. Ten became three.

The three grew quickly, so that by December 11th, they had feathers and were almost indistinguishable from their mother. The young ducks were so confident, they would walk into the house if the bowl of food was not there. If the ranch slider was closed, they would peck on the glass and then walk around to check the back door.

We expect mother duck to visit again with new ducklings in spring time. Her surviving offspring will be mature enough to raise their own brood. Over summer and autumn they will be eating grass, slugs and worms, to put on weight for the long wait on the nest. Family ties will be broken with the new brood and mother duck will peck and chase away her grandchildren, as viciously as that owner of the pristine swimming pool.



Photo (above): Change is as good as a holiday – The ducks enjoy the pool (Linley Rivers)

## Notices

**Monthly Community Working Bees:** First Sunday of each month. The next one is Sunday 1st May and is a Community Tree Planting (first planting of the season), 10.00am-12.00noon. Meet at Oakley Creek Walkway, beside the new boardwalk downstream from the waterfall.

**Tuesday Working Bees:** Every Tuesday morning 9.30am to 12.00pm. We have a great new project underway, which is being co-ordinated by our new Outreach Co-ordinator, Sandra Maclean. We have picked up the challenge of helping to restore the northern section of the Waterview Heritage Area, on the tidal reach of Te Auaunga - Oakley Creek. As Sandra so aptly says - *right now it's a fascinating spot, full of historical interest and native plants sagging under several tons of Madeira vine. Yikes!! So, we're running*

*regular Tuesday morning sessions till we restore this place to its former glory. There may be muffins on offer - if you arrive on a bike you get first dibs. Be great to see you there.*

For more information contact Sandra - 021 166 7647

**Wednesday Nursery Sessions – 9.30am-12.00 noon**

**Friday Working Bees:** Every Friday morning 9.00am to 12.00pm. We work in different locations on Friday mornings, depending on the need at the time. If you're interested let us know and we'll include you in the Friday email list so that you can join us when you are free.

**AGM:** Monday 13th June. Location and speaker TBA. Note, we're also looking for a new treasurer, so please let us know if you're interested (info@oakleycreek.org.nz)

# Friends of Oakley Creek Te Auaunga

**Chairperson:**

David Bowden

**Treasurer:**

Sarah Woodfield

**Secretary:**

Marin Adams

**Committee:**

Wendy John, Adrienne Stanton, John Stevenson, Cate Ryan, Chris Brown

**Newsletter Editor:** Cate Ryan



**Newsletter Photos:** Unless otherwise credited, all photos are by Wendy John

**Newsletter contributions** and comments are welcome – email [cate.ryan@friendsofoakleycreek.onmicrosoft.com](mailto:cate.ryan@friendsofoakleycreek.onmicrosoft.com)

We welcome more members (\$10.00) and/or donations towards the work we are doing to protect and restore our wonderful urban 'taonga' – Oakley Creek Te Auaunga. Donations over \$5.00 are tax deductible.

Contributions can be made directly; our bank account number is 38-9003-0978224-00.

You can also find us at <http://oakleycreek.org.nz/> and <https://www.facebook.com/OakleyCreek>

We gratefully acknowledge the support of Foundation North, The Trusts Community Foundation, Auckland Council, Albert-Eden, Puketāpapa and Whau Local Boards and the Community Organization Grants Scheme (COGS).

