



Friends of Oakley Creek Te Auaunga

SPRING 2021

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Editorial

Winter is behind us and it's lovely to see the creek spring to life again. The awa is bursting into flower and birdsong, and I certainly appreciate longer, finer days for my walks along the creek. This edition we tell you about the work we're doing with our fantastic volunteers and contractors to restore the creek through planting, weeding, pest and tree works.

We also look back to see what a difference it can make over time, for example at Harbutt Reserve. We share some fascinating eDNA testing results that show the awa has more native fish species than we realised, and we learn about forest bathing and how one volunteer realised how much she got from her work on the creek.

Another volunteer tells us about how he's enjoying giving back with his new found trapping skills. We look back at our railway heritage and take an in-



Photo (above): A mother duck and her ducklings, a sure sign of spring.

depth look at pūriri, a common tree along the creek. There's the usual seasonal gallery, plus info about opportunities to volunteer on our working bees, or as a trapper in the notices section. We're also back on facebook,

you can find out more about what's happening on the creek @facebook.com/OakleyCreek.

Enjoy!

Cate Ryan, Editor

The work of Friends of Oakley Creek Te Auaunga is proudly supported by





Photo (above): A young volunteer, Archie, on a recent community planting day

"... I walked Oakley Creek yesterday after about a twenty-year absence and was suitably wowed by the work put in by Friends ... and there was good bird life at the far end."
Shirley Jones

"Until you dig a hole, plant a tree, water it, and make it survive, you haven't done a thing. You are just talking."
Wangari Maathai, Green Belt Movement'

Community planting days

By Wendy John

We were in full swing with the planting season, having put 3,312 native plants in the ground, when COVID stopped play. A number of new areas have now been planted up and monthly community plantings include; a site alongside the Waterview Shared Path, with 1,100 plants; a site tucked in the bushes on the west side of the creek, below the Waterview Connection vent stack on Great North Road, this area had been cleared of Chinese privet, and we filled it up with 400 plants; and finally, the area below the Kokopu Bridge, between Phyllis and Harbutt Reserves has been planted up with 240 plants.

In addition to these, other sites were planted with the help of



Photo (above): Community Tree Planting

some of our key partners - the wonderful Collectively Kids (Early Childhood Education Centre) children, the Oakley Loop Group, the St Judes / Mt Albert Scouts, Mt Roskill Intermediate, Pt Chevalier Girl Guides and A Rocha -

with the Cityside Baptist Church (mentioned in our winter newsletter).

But don't put your spades away yet! As soon as we are out of lockdown, we still have some more plants to go in the ground.

Protecting our young plants

By Wendy John

While people enjoy planting, this is only the first step in restoring our precious taiao / environment. When people ask us "how many trees have been planted?", the real question should be "how many plants have survived?", as this is the real sign of success. It is only because of the efforts of the community, who help with plant releasing, weeding and mulching that our trees stand the best chance of surviving and reaching maturity. Research and our experience show that survival rates of young native plants are increased by clearing grasses and other weeds, thus reducing competition for water, light and other resources (Anton et al., 2015; Davis & Meurk, 2001)¹. Plus, it's a very satisfying and



Photo (above): St Peter's College mulching at Oakley Loop

rewarding activity, some people even say they enjoy weeding more than planting. We estimate that around 85-90% of our planting reach maturity, although it's less for sedges planted on the stream banks.

Thanks especially to our regular Friday and monthly volun-

teers, and to groups such as St Peter's College (who also helped with some of the planting), and St Kentigern College who have turned up in numbers to help spread mulch on some of our planting sites. This additional support makes such a difference.

¹Anton, V.H., et al (2015). Survival and growth of planted seedlings of three native tree species in urban forest restoration in Wellington, New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Ecology*, 39(2), 170-178.

Davis, M., Meurk, C (2001). *Protecting and Restoring our Natural Heritage: A Practical Guide*. Wellington: Department of Conservation.

Two men and a chainsaw

Two Treescape staff members recently did an additional day of work on the creek for us, and they will be back later in the year. The task we set for them was to clear some of the tree privet on the edge of the bush line along the shared path opposite Pak'n Save, particularly around one of our remnant māhoe rock-forest areas. They felled around 20 tree privet, all of which were looking sad and nearing the end of their lives. It's great to have this extra support for our project, and we now have some wonderful new insect and lizard habitat stacks, and more room to plant more natives. Over time we intend to have all 'privet forest' areas along the creek replaced with natives such as pūriri, kohekohe, karaka, titoki, porokaiwhiri (pigeonwood) and māhoe. Thanks to Auckland Council for funding this work.



Photo (above): Treescape arborists, Ryan & Ryan, post tree privet removal

Harbutt Reserve changes over time

By Wendy John

When we look back at sites before we started removing weeds and planting natives the difference is astounding. You can see the different stages of restoration on the creek at different locations. In some areas we were able to work from a blank canvas, with minimal weed control required before we could do the planting. However, in others the approach needs to be quite different and is much less straightforward. There are areas where the starting point has been a canopy cover of weed trees such as privet and wattle, with the understory completely covered with climbing asparagus, such as behind and to the south of Harbutt Reserve.



Photo (above): Climbing Asparagus before control

In 2013 contractors started to deal with the climbing asparagus at this site, which was no mean feat, as well as thinning out the understory of younger privet and wattle. From the start, it has been important to take a slowly-slowly approach, and not to remove too much of the canopy, as this would let the light in

and create a different type of weed problem. In some areas, we have done some understory planting to give nature a helping hand (and we will do more). But in others, we have allowed natural regeneration to take the lead.



Photo (above): Climbing asparagus area, natural regeneration after control.

Of course there is still a long way to go, as the seeds of all these environmental weeds are relatively long lived, and we will only remove some of the weed tree canopy when there are enough natives mature enough to provide a replacement canopy.

Controlling rabbits across the awa

By Wendy John

As you probably know, rabbit browse can have a serious effect on ecology, including the survival rate of planted and naturally regenerating seedlings and saplings. While rabbits have long been a problem on the creek, recently their numbers have reached plague proportions. In the past, rabbit control has been sporadic, with little lasting impact but Auckland Council has now set up a programme to control these pests on a regular basis on the creek, as well as other nearby 'rabbit habitat' such as Chamberlain Park and Western Springs, with the intent of getting rid of as many rabbits as possible across the region. Unitec and the Waitemata District Health Board - Mason Clinic, also have a programme to deal with rabbits across the Wairaka Precinct.

Sarah Gibbs from the Auckland Council reported on the numbers of rabbits during the most recent control event:

"Rabbit control in the Oakley / Phyllis / Harbutt Park cluster took place on 13th September. No rabbits were controlled. Given this site was of increasing concern last summer / autumn, this is an excellent result. We are still expecting there will be residual rabbits in adjoining areas, but the low numbers in Oakley mean we are stopping them spreading, as well as protecting plantings in the Oakley complex."

Thanks heaps to Sarah and the contractors!

eDNA sampling reveals more native fish species

By Cate Ryan

Recently we took part in 'Wai Tūwhera o te Taiao' – Open Water Aotearoa, the EPA's eDNA community science programme. When creatures move through the environment, they leave traces of DNA which can be collected and sequenced to reveal all the living things present in the local ecosystem. Testing was done in June at six sites along the creek, with fascinating results. There seemed to be more native fish species at downstream sites than upstream above the waterfall, and shortfin eels

were present at all sites. There were signs of banded kōkopu above the waterfall which we haven't seen before, and estuarine triplefin, or cockabully was found at the Oakley Creek Waterview Inlet, where the creek is tidal. Exotic fish were recorded at all sites, including the usual suspects - goldfish and gamba. A range of native and exotic plants, fungi, invertebrates, mammals and birds were also found, notably two types of rats, a brush-tail possum, and nine species of canine (pets, presumably!).



Photo (above): Banded kōkopu (NIWA).

To find out more, visit <https://www.epa.govt.nz/community-involvement/open-waters-aotearoa/>

Unitec students use the creek as a learning tool

By Wendy John

As part of their first-year studies, we lead Unitec Landscape Architecture students on a walk along the creek. We cover things such as general restoration practices like planting, staging, maintenance etc., and help to reinforce the classroom learning of concepts such as succession, adaptation / niches, and terminology around plant community composition and structure.

We also discuss reasons for successes and failures, strategies for sourcing plants, habitat creation (e.g., for skinks and copper butterfly), planting techniques / timing and non-toxic weed control / suppression, through the lens of underlying ecological concepts and principles, and native plant adaptations and interactions.



Photo (above): Unitec Landscape Architecture students

Pathway renewals

By Wendy John

As was reported some years back, in 2015 Friends of Oakley Creek Te Auaunga was consulted by the Albert Eden Local Board as they produced a 10-Year Action Plan for the lower section of the creek. The plan included a range of proposed works such as path upgrades, interpretation and wayfinding

signage, slip repairs and more. The work is being done in stages, and some of the works have already been completed e.g. the interpretative and wayfinding signage. Recently completed works along the walkway include an upgrade of the steps to the intersection by Heron Park and up to the student accommo-

modation north-west of the waterfall, and new steps completing the connection between Waterview Downs, the creek and Phyllis Reserve. Friends of Oakley Creek has done the replacement planting around these work areas. The next stage will be an upgrade of the actual walkway – watch this space.

"The walk highlights that there is so much more to restoration than just planting trees, weeding and trapping pests!"
Wendy John



Photo (above): Path Renewals, new steps

Forest bathing in Avondale

By Linley Rivers, as told to Marin Adams

It's lockdown. I sit down amongst the trees at the bottom of my section and feel the sun on my skin. It is quiet, sheltered and I have a deep sense of contentment. Some people call this experience "forest bathing". It is a traditional Japanese practice, and its proponents recommend exposure to nature for about 20 minutes per day. I always linger longer. They claim the practice can reduce stress hormone production, improve feelings of happiness and free up creativity, as well as lower heart rate and blood pressure, boost the immune system and accelerate recovery from illness.

So how did I, a sensible older woman, become a forest bather in my own back yard? It started with a whine of chainsaws as the developer next door took down the very old pine tree on my boundary. The tree harboured birds that I enjoyed watching whilst sitting on my deck. Six months later there were weeds and rubbish where the tree had once stood. It was not a good look. What was I going to do now?



Photo (above): Linley and Marin at the start of planting

I got to know Wendy John through a neighbourhood group and in conversation, mentioned my new wasteland. Wendy immediately had suggestions and a clear path to transformation. I would not have known where to start. In May 2017 the programme began, and it took three visits from a contractor to rid the site of weed species. With the promise of a generous lunch, neighbours were then recruited to help with a working bee. Broken glass, an old wirewove, discarded building materials were removed and there remained bare earth.

Wendy put together a plant list and I purchased 200 native trees at an affordable price from a community-based nursery. Other friends donated seedlings, increasing the number of plants to about 300. Another working bee in mid-September 2018, and the plants were all in the ground. This was three years ago and now the trees have grown much taller than I. They have required some nurturing such as water in summer and weeding from time to time. Always the neighbours have been happy to help, and they say the work is a pleasure.



Photo (above): The site in September 2018 – weeds have started colonising the space

So, what have I learned? I needed skills, resources, and a plan to make the project work. I also needed encouragement because I wouldn't normally ask neighbours to help me out. When I did get them involved, I enjoyed the sense of community we created. Thank you to Wendy and my neighbours for all the benefits that the project has given to me, including mental health benefits from forest bathing, working as a team, and creating something beautiful. It's wonderful being able to contribute to the biodiversity of the wider Oakley Creek catchment and be part of the Oakley Creek community.



Photo (above): The site in September 2021 – with healthy native shrubs and saplings dominating

There's more to trapping than dead possums

By Gary Chambers, as told to Marin Adams

I only started trapping three weeks ago. It all happened because of lock down. My job as a travel agent stopped when Covid hit and I was released from going to the office each day. I live in Pt Chevalier and started going for walks. One day I noticed a little signpost pointing to Oakley Creek – Te Auaunga. Walking down and along the path I was astonished to find such beauty in the middle of an urban environment. It occurred to me that I now had time to give back to the community in a way that gave me both exercise, pleasure and satisfaction.

I became a Friends of Oakley Creek volunteer and agreed to look after two traplines; one along the side of the 'Rainbow Path', at the north end of Unitec and one in Howlett Reserve². Having spent my career indoors, I had no idea how to trap possums and at the first training sessions had to summon courage to put my fingers anywhere near the mechanism. It was a lot more complicated than I expected. Each of the ten traps I look after has its own GPS location so that I can find the trap amongst the trees and record the location of each possum caught.

My first week was very rewarding. I caught possum after possum up in the old oak and pohutukawa



Photo (above): Possum eating a kereru egg (DoC website)

trees. I started checking the traps every two days instead of once a week, and the more traps I set, the more possums I caught. They were all large and healthy specimens. The second trapline in Howlett Reserve was different. Two possums then nothing at all. A good sign and if they turn up again, my traps will be ready for them.

I have always loved nature and when I watched the TVNZ documentary 'Fight for the Wild', I suddenly realised it was going to take a huge effort to keep our New Zealand birds from extinction. Possums not only eat foliage, but also love birds' eggs and they are big enough to drive the nesting parent from their nest. The job is far too big for DOC and local councils. If everyone helped, we could make New Zealand predator free. So, when I see a dead possum in the trap, I know more birds and trees will survive and thrive.

I have also joined Pest Free Pt Chevalier to deal to the rats that live hidden in our back yards. I used to think all was quiet when I went to bed at night. Now I know that the bush comes alive with other species and there are life and death duels between victims and predators, whilst I am peacefully sleeping.

So, if you want to give a hand on the traplines, I could do with some help. But if rats are your bête noir, and you want to trap in your back yard, there is always a local Pest Free group you can contact.

*"My first week was very rewarding. I caught possum after possum up in the old oak and pohutukawa trees."
Gary Chambers*



Photo (above): Gary Chambers beside Oakley Creek

²Howlett Reserve sits alongside of the tidal reach of Te Auaunga – Oakley Creek.

The Rainbow Path sits immediately to the north of Te Auaunga – Oakley Creek and trapping here is part of our aim to reduce predator numbers in the buffer zone around the creek.

Visible reminders of our past

By Chris Brown

There are many fine and long-lasting examples of drystone work along Te Auaunga / Oakley Creek. The fragments date from European settlement over 100 years ago. Some walls might have marked a land boundary, while others formed significant structures. Luckily for us one of the best, and most visible, is the large stone embankment high above the creek at the Avondale end of the shared pathway, which is the remains of the original railway alignment and bridge.



Photo (above): Stone Wall Embankment (Chris Brown)



Photo (above): The internal structure of the Embankment (Chris Brown)

There are good views of the wall and the waterway below, from the Soljak Bridge / Te Arawhiti o te wai o Rakataura. I had passed the site many times and decided to get up close and remove some of the weeds growing through it. The northern end of the wall has fallen away to reveal the placement of the large scoria boulders.

This bridge - Bridge Number 9, on the western line from Newmarket to Glen Eden, was opened in 1880, and remained in use

until the 1940s. The gap across the creek is a substantial distance, and it is hard to imagine the bridge now. Unfortunately, I couldn't find any photos of it. However, I did find a delicate drawing of a long section of the bridge, from a 1943 plan, which gives us an idea how huge it was.



Photo (above): View of the valley where the bridge crossed the creek (Chris Brown)



Photo (above): Looking west across Avondale Racecourse, on racing day (courtesy Auckland Library, Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections 7-A12490)

Keep an eye out for the drystone features as you walk along the creek. They are things of beauty in their solid handcrafted way and they tell stories, too. Whenever I walk past this embankment, I imagine Bridge No. 9 high above the creek, with a steam train crossing, and hundreds of passengers on their way to a day out at the Avondale Racecourse.

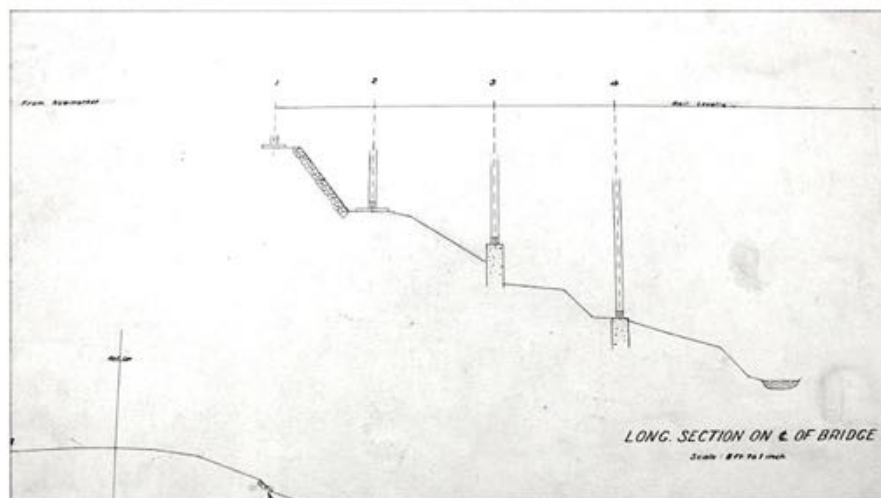


Figure 2.12. Close up of long section of Bridge No. 9 (BABJ A681 14406 Box 266 / 22404, Archives NZ)

Photo (above): Sketch of the long section of Bridge No.9 from a 1943 plan (Clough and Assoc, 2017)

Source: Clough and Assoc – Waterview Shared Path: Final Archaeological Report - Aug 2017

Pūriri

By Ngaio Balfour

The pūriri tree is endemic to Aotearoa and plays an important part in our natural and cultural history. Pūriri first came to have meaning for me through my father's warmth and respect for it. He would say that he always parked his ancient racing green Volkswagen Variant underneath a pūriri because "this will surely stop the car breaking down yet again". More recently, as I studied ecology and read books such as Robert Vennell's "The Meaning of Trees", I have come to understand pūriri in another light, here are some of the things I have learnt:

Pūriri and human use

Strength for construction

Māori extensively used the tough wood of the pūriri as timber for weapons, tools and defense. The timber was particularly valuable for fishing tools, being one of the few woods that sinks. The timber also became invaluable in the Northern Wars, being used to construct pā because it could withstand musket fire. Early colonists also used pūriri to create structures such as bridges, ships and railways. However, the colonists' relationship with pūriri was exploitative, and few trees from that era remain alive today.



Photo (above): A majestic old pūriri tree (New Zealand Geographic)

Ceremonial

Pūriri is sacred to many iwi / tribes, associated with mourning and burial. Pūriri leaves were used to adorn the tūpāpaku (the corpse) and form an infu-



Photo (above): The pūriri moth lives in, and eats pūriri trees

sion to wash it. After the tūpāpaku decomposed, the bones would be buried in a hollow of the pūriri tree. The 2000-year-old sacred burial tree, Taketakerau, remains standing in Opotiki today.

Pūriri and native flora and fauna

Food and shelter

Pūriri's sturdy bows, bright berries and nectar-filled flowers provide food and housing for many beings within the forest. Perhaps you too grin at the sight of a plump kererū flexing a young, fruit laden pūriri branch, reaching for a juicy meal. To find out more, read Marin's splendid article on the kererū in the Winter 2021 newsletter.

The sturdy branches also provide a home and nursery for plants and insects. If you are attentive, you will spot many smaller plants nestling in their bows. Harder to see are the homes of the pūriri moth, visible only through a small opening in the tough bark. For further information, read Eleanor Cooper's and Xin Cheng's beautiful kōrero on the moth in the Winter 2021 newsletter.

Many thanks to pūriri!

And to you, the reader, I hope you can take a moment to greet the pūriri trees on your next wander through the creek. And do take care, whenever possible, to always park underneath a pūriri tree.

"Amongst the glossy green,
Berries beckon,
Moth larvae nibble ironwood,
Birds bend bows,
Reaching for the rich quercine"
By Ngaio Balfour

Seasonal gallery



Photo (above): Flower of poroporo (*Solanum lacinatedum*)

Te Auaunga is bursting with flowers this time of year. You'll probably have seen the bright yellow flowers of kowhai and kūmarahou making an appearance. The stunning rewarewa with its nectar rich flowers is a lure for birds and insects, and the flowers of rangiora are also abundant, along with those of many more native trees and shrubs.

Clockwise, from top left: Kowhai (*Sophora microphylla*), kūmarahou (*Pomaderris kumeraho*), rangiora (*Brachyglottis repanda*), rewarewa (*Knightsia excelsa*), and mānuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*).



Plant of the season

The nearby Whau River was named after whau, a large shrub, with massive leaves that make it look better suited to tropical climes. The whau plant likes areas with lots of sunlight and is often an early coloniser after disturbance, and often occurs alongside rivers and streams. Whau plants produce prolific numbers of seeds and flowers.

Photo (below): The small white flowers of whau (*Entelea arborescens*)

Photo (below): The impressively large leaves of whau, with someone's hand for scale (iNaturalist UK)



Notices

Monthly Community Working Bees: Once lockdown is behind us, we can hopefully get back to our regular monthly working bees. As per normal, they are held on the first Sunday of each month – 10.00am-12.00 noon. We will also be organising a couple of extra Sunday working bees to catch up on some of the work – details to come.

Friday Working Bees – Every Friday morning, post lockdown, 9.00am to 12.00pm. 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.

Volunteer trappers needed – Howlett Reserve - we are in the process of further restoring Howlett Reserve, Waterview, along the tidal reach of the creek.

We are needing some more volunteers to help with maintaining our trap line through the reserve. The aim is to have a team of three, with people being on a three-weekly roster. If you are keen to help, please contact us. We provide training and resources.

Oakley Creek Walkway – Northern Circuit – we are looking for a volunteer to help with the trapping of this area, to make up the team of three.

Facebook page

After some down time, our facebook page is once again up and running. **Please look us up @ <https://www.facebook.com/OakleyCreek>, and join the conversations there.**

Crossing the boundaries

By Wendy John

As some of you may know, Te Auaunga – Oakley Creek flows through three local board areas – Puketāpapa, Whau and Albert Eden. Recently Whau Local Board member, Catherine Farmer 'crossed over' into the Albert Eden Ward to plant a pohutukawa tree in Phyllis Reserve. She had been growing it at her place for some years and wanted to gift to the creek.

Email from Catherine – "Thank you [Wendy / Friends of Oakley Creek] for your willingness to replant the tree. Several times I have visited it and am encouraged by its new green growth. The rain that week looks like it helped. Also, it is a symbol of resilience and collaboration by we three!"



Photo (above): Catherine Farmer planting pohutukawa

Friends of Oakley Creek Te Auaunga

Chairperson:

David Bowden

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Marin Adams

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Newsletter Editor: Cate Ryan



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

Newsletter contributions and comments are welcome – email info@oakleycreek.org.nz

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>

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