



Friends of Oakley Creek

Te Auaunga

SPRING 2023

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

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- Cleanup starts p6
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Editorial

Spring is in the air.

As the weather warms, we look back with satisfaction on a successful planting season, with young plants well mulched and the water table replenished by the wettest winter we've had in years. We are seeing a lot of nesting activity on the awa. This glossy pair of kereru got a bit ruffled in the process. Thanks to the sterling efforts of our trapping teams, they have a better chance of raising the next generation.

You will be pleased to see that Auckland Council's contractors have started work on clearing the larger trees that were lost to the January storms. But the walkway is still officially closed and there is still no word on when the bridge rebuilding might start.

In this edition you will find a fascinating article on the pukeko, a surprisingly progressive parent. Look out for a charming piece on growing up on the creek in the 1950s, penned by the father of one of our regular volunteers. You will also find a report on Protests and Place Makers at Water-view, a talk which was part of the recent Heritage Festival.

So, if you're feeling a burst of spring energy and you'd like to do something satisfying - we are still looking for a secretary and we have a vacancy on our pest patrol team. There's something for everyone.

Enjoy!

Gina Hefferan, Editor



Photo (above): Kereru pair before



Photo (above): Kereru pair after

"That was a lovely li'l shot of community joy Thanks for your hard work, warm welcome and good vibes."
 Nick, working bee volunteer

Planting season 'done and dusted'

By Wendy John

While there are still a few plants left to go in the ground, it's great to have another successful planting season ticked off. This year approximately 5000 plants were planted, with support and funding from our local boards – Albert Eden, Puketāpapa and Whau.

The main plantings, done on our regular, monthly Sunday working bees, were in Harbutt Reserve – at the south-west end of the reserve, where we have extended the planting out into the grassed area, and in two sites nearby where tree privet and bamboo have been controlled. We also did another planting in one of our 'rock forest' areas below the shared path, opposite Pak'nSave. And our regular Tuesday and Friday Working Bee volunteers, along with a number of corporate groups (see below), helped with the planting in various sites along the awa.



Photo (above): Danielle & Linda



Photo (above): Glenn in action



Photo (above): Mulching team



Photo (above): Monthly Working Bee Team

Our local and partner groups – the Oakley Loop Group, Pt Chevalier Girl Guides, Collectively Kids, Powell Street Sustainable Neighbourhood, Cradock Street Sustainable Neighbourhood and A Rocha also contributed again, to restoring our precious awa with more planting.

Our monthly working bees these past three months have mainly involved tree planting. But the volunteers have made a good start on mulching the young trees in the new planting areas. And, when the mulching is completed, with summer around the corner there'll be no shortage of weeds to control.

Friday Working Bees

By Wendy John

"It's lovely to be part of such a committed bunch of people!"
Linley,
FoOC proofreader

Our volunteers have been busy as per usual across the creek. Activities over the past three months have included plant releasing, clearance of weeds including moth plant, madeira vine, woolly nightshade and wattle, and rubbish removal. The volunteers also cleared more privet in an area on the west side of Phyllis Reserve, which made space for them to put in some more plants. Thanks to two of our regular volunteers – Tristan Mulgrew and Martin Brown, for doing a great job of filling in for me in this area while I was away for two weeks.

We planted a small 'slump' area in Water-view Glades, and completed planting up a riparian area in Harbutt Reserve - with sedges that will help to prevent further erosion. And, as per usual, we have been busy continuing with general weed control, including clearing woolly nightshade, privet and moth plant. On a couple of occasions, we were joined by corporate groups. (see Corporates and Beyond and Sandra's report).



Photo (above): Look at that stack of weeds! Well done, Friday team! (Martin Brown)



Photo (above): Martin, Nasra, Chris, Tom & Natalie



Photo (above): Rena, Tom, Helena & Raewyn



Photo (above): Friday Team having a well-earned break

Te Auaunga ‘Community Group’ Activities

By Wendy John

Pt Chevalier Girl Guides – The Girl Guides, along with their team leaders Sarah and Rosemary, siblings, parents and friends, did a wonderful job of putting another 100 plants in the ground at their site in Waterview Glades. They also did some plant releasing, weeding and rubbish removal. What a great group of local ‘eco-warriors’!



Photo (above): Guides transform Waterview Glades

Oakley Loop Group (Methuen Road)

The rain only just held off for the OLG team to get the plants in the ground for this year’s planting at the ‘loop’. It’s always a pleasure working with this lovely multi-generational group on their challenging site - opposite Alan Wood Reserve - and wrapping up with afternoon tea and some stimulating conversation.



Photo (above): OLG in action

Corporates and Beyond Volunteers

By Wendy John

The corporate groups continue to roll in – again, some approach us directly, and some come through Volunteering Auckland. And some come

back to help out on a regular basis, either annually or more regularly. Their contributions are very much appreciated.



Photo (above): Westpac tackle the bamboo



Photo (above): Sandra & the Nielsen Team

Outreach Report

By Sandra Maclean

Lots of great stuff happening at the Waterview Heritage Area in our Tuesday morning sessions. We've had regular support from young overseas visitors through the Sustainable Coastlines programme, as well as local students and families through the holidays. KPMG also sent us three corporate teams on successive weeks. All this extra capacity has meant we've been able to get into parts of the site we don't

usually reach with weed control and planting. Plus, we've got lots of mulch out around our young plants ready for the forecasted hot summer. We are also hoping that the large number of locals who turned out for the guided walk as part of the Auckland Heritage Festival will bring us some new volunteers.

At Odyssey House we have been working hard on the areas of impenetrable vines – thanks to everyone who took that on – it wasn't a task that everyone would relish. Now the site is more approachable we are back to working with the residents on a fortnightly basis, tackling the ginger and getting the rubbish out.

Corporate teams from Nielsen and ANZ came out to work on the area affected by January's storms below BP, as well as a school group over from the States to watch the Women's Soccer World Cup.

Funding from Whau Wildlink allowed us to engage ecological contractors to prepare an area within the Esplanade Reserve below 27 Powell St. We were then able to get back in with the residents from that development to plant up part of the area cleared of invasives. Similarly, at Waterview Apartments we filled some lightwells created by



Photo (above): WHA volunteers

our earlier privet control and planted them up with natives.

Weed control with our roving weed team of Jean, Keith and Alister has focussed on Alan Wood Reserve and more recently in the Waterview Downs area. More sessions at Waterview Downs - which if you've seen it, you will know is a smorgasbord of weeds - will be lined up soon. Get in touch if you would like to partake in this banquet.



Photo (above): Volunteers at WHA

Water Monitoring on the Awa

By Wendy John

Volunteers recently undertook the spring water monitoring on the creek. It was very encouraging to see the increase in the

number of macroinvertebrates - compared with the very low numbers from the previous two monitoring sessions - post

the storms. The water samples were alive with all sorts of lovely critters including damselfly larvae, oxythira caddisflies,

woody-cased caddisflies, isopods and amphipods, rounded and flat snails, midges and more.



Photo (above): Rutu & Sarah check the health of the awa



Photo (above): Helen water testing

Oakley Creek Trappers - a record catch!!

By David Bowden

The trapping team has made great progress this year, despite starting late because of the January and February extreme storm events preventing access to traps. Collectively, the team has trapped 220 predators from a network of 163 traps this year (as of 13th September) (see figure one). Some key predators caught included 134 rats, 41 possums and 41 mice. This is a record catch for this time of year when compared with the past 5 years (see figure 2).



Photo (above): Map showing Te Auaunga trap network

The largest numbers are typically caught during winter months when natural food sources are scarce. 2023 followed this trend. In fact, 71% of all catches so far, have occurred since the beginning of

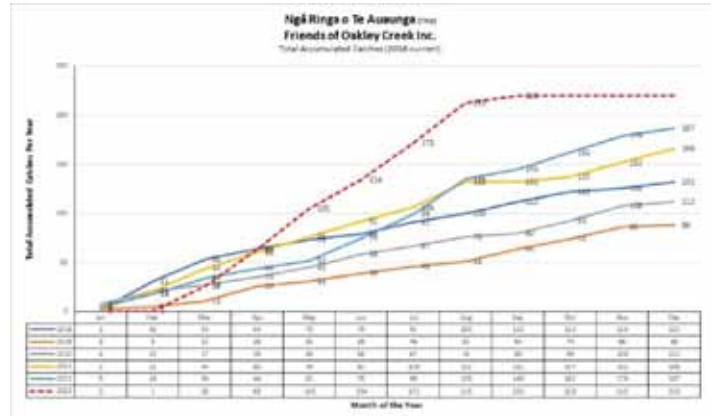


Photo (above): Graph showing accumulated catches over past five years

April. Total catches are expected to decline through to mid-December as predators switch over to natural food sources. Despite this decline, the trapping team could trap more than 250 predators by the end of the year, which would be a wonderful achievement.

The Society is very grateful for the ongoing help of trappers and others associated with the programme. Regular trappers include Carole French, Chris Brown, Chris Judd, Craig Martin, Crispin Balfour, David Blackwell, Gavin Thompson, Tony McNeil (trap network maintenance lead), Rosemary Phillips, Sandra Maclean and Wayne Forsyth. Let's not forget the baiting and monitoring team who provide a



Photo (above): Gavin checking traps

second layer of defence against predators, namely Helen Mell-sop, John Stevenson, Marianne van der Haas and Wendy John. Thank you all!!

Post Storm Clean Up Commences

By Wendy John

Finally, the first stages of the storm clean up are underway, with the NZ Tree Tops team doing a great, and challenging job of dealing with the largest of the trees that came down in February. These include a pine tree (by the Waterview Downs Bridge) and three poplars near the waterfall. But there is still plenty to be done, and the remedial work on the slips and rebuild of bridges could take months – or longer. So, because of health and safety concerns the walkway is still, officially, closed.

As we did, some of you may have submitted on the Council's two recent consultation documents regarding 'post storm recovery and resilience'. A proposed key component of this includes 'making space for water' in our urban environment. However, from a bigger picture perspective, looking into what we, as a country, need to be doing into the future to mitigate flood risks and protect and support our communities, natural environment and wildlife, you might like to check



Photo (above): Auckland Council contractors at work

out this excellent report that has been produced by Forest & Bird - https://www.forestandbird.org.nz/sites/default/files/2022-11/F%26B_Room-For-Rivers_Report_online_0.pdf

The Pukeko - A Very Successful Immigrant

By **Marin Adams**

Murder and mayhem each night - that is what it sounded like. As a child, I used to lie uneasily in the top bunk and listen to the repetitive screams of pukeko down in the swamp. No other bird made such a noise, especially after dark. Maybe I was hearing alarm calls when predatory rats or stoats were spotted looking for a meal of pukeko eggs or hatchlings. One thing is certain, the pukeko family work well together to drive off intruders.



Photo (above): Nest building



Photo (above): Pukeko nest

The pukeko is not endangered and, in fact, has thrived with the changes in our landscape. They now thrive in farmlands and suburbs that are near streams. Cooperative parenting, plenty of food, adaptability and acute predator awareness have all played a part in their breeding success.

Pukeko are much less successful in terms of popularity with humans. Their liking for kumara is an age-old problem in Aotearoa, according to Margaret Orbell.

"Hie, hie! Haere ki to huhu, haere ki to repo, Haere ki a Hine-wairua-kokako! Hie, hie!" ("Go away! off to the swamp, off to the bog, Off to Hine-wairua-kokako [*the spiritual ancestor of wading birds*]! Go away!")¹

Living by Te Auaunga, I confess to aggressive intentions at times. First there was 'my water-melons' that gradually ripened in the summer heat. I was completely unaware of avian eyes, or was it noses, monitoring their readiness for harvest. I decided the melons were ripe enough to eat, but before I could translate decision into action, the melons were gone! The pukeko carried out a dawn raid. Each of the seven melons had been opened up and the pink flesh neatly scooped out. Pukeko 7 Marin 0. And then there were the tomatoes ...

I noticed the pukeko and our mother hen had a hostile relationship, probably because the hen realised her seven chickens were a potential meal. One day I witnessed a full-on fight. The hen jumped up onto the pukeko's back. The pukeko submitted. From then on there was no conflict and hen, chickens and pukeko would amicably graze together in the garden on fallen fruit.

I remember seeing small pukeko (known as "swamp hens") in Australia and finding out, for the first time, that pukeko were not native to New Zealand. They self-introduced around a thousand years ago. Pukeko are closely related to the takahe, a bird that does exist in our fossil record. Their species name, porphyrio, is Greek for purple. (Near enough?)

Pukeko have a remarkable family life. Females will mate with two or more partners including close relatives. In some districts pukeko share a communal nest, with males predominantly, but not always, sitting on a large cache of eggs. Non-breeding aunts and cousins help rear the chicks. As Jamieson said "the pukeko may



Photo (above): Feeding chicks



Photo (above): Pukeko chick

have one of the most interesting and complex social systems of any bird species in the world."

References

Jamieson, Ian: Pukeko-the indomitable swamp phen

Website: <https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/pukeko-the-indomitable-swamp-phen/#:~:text=The%20swamp-phen%20which%20colonised%20New,Australia%20and%20the%20South%20Pacific>

Orbell, Margaret: The Natural World of the Maori

Website: NZ Birds Online-Pukeko <https://nzbirdsonline.org.nz/?q=node/329>

Vacancy - Secretary

A good secretary is worth their weight in gold! We seek the help of a methodical and organised person to help us prepare agendas and take accurate notes at our monthly committee meetings. The role requires an eye for detail and an ability to attend (online or in person) committee meetings once a month to take notes and circulate them to committee members. A good knowledge or experience of committee procedures would be helpful but not essential. We have an enthusiastic committee who will support you in every way possible. If this voluntary position interests you, please contact David Bowden (Chairperson) on 027 249 1873 or info@oakleycreek.org.nz for further information.

Childhood Memories of Oakley Creek in the 1950s

By Russell Ward

I am trying to orientate myself from a satellite view of the Mt Albert/Avondale area as it is now.

It was all clumps of gorse and very few houses in the '50s when we lived there. Our place was built on an open field, and we used to play down the back of our house in what is now called Waitati Reserve. There were isolated large clumps of gorse that were great to play in, for hide and seek and cowboys and injuns. There was a big old pine tree that was hollow that we could hide in but not many trees really. It was all farm area around us and behind. I seem to recall the name McDonald - there were chook houses beside our house but long abandoned. The Smiths lived on the other side of Bollard Ave. The son was Sidney and he was a locksmith. Theirs was a lovely old house, but piled high with things and it was said that only one room was liveable. They had a collapsed garage with an old veteran Renault car on Methuen Road on the other side of Bollard Ave.

Bollard Ave crossed the Oakley Creek down the bottom of the hill. Late in the '50s a young couple built a house right next to the creek there. It was on high foundations in case of flooding. There were lots of tall gum trees.

This was about the time that the movie *The African Queen* was showing, and we were all keen on boats and waterways. I figured that the creek wended its way northwest towards Waterview and so must have been somewhere out behind our house to the north. There were a lot of trees down toward New North Road so I thought the creek might be nearby.

I recall fighting my way through the long grass and gorse bush-

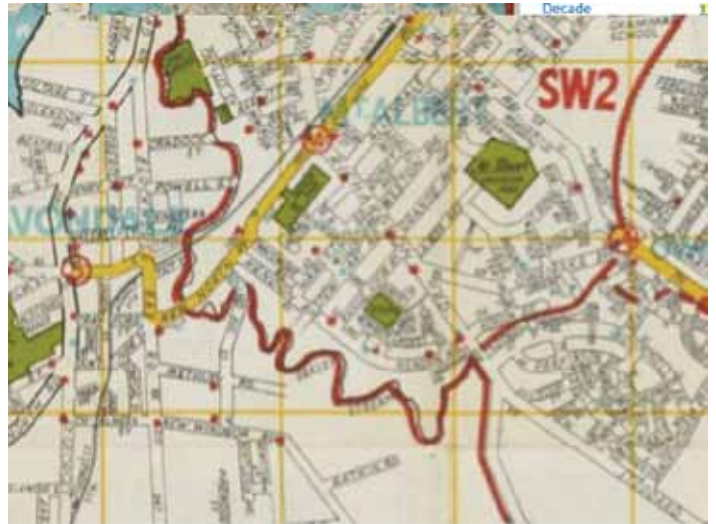


Photo (above): Map showing Oakley Creek in 1950s (cropped from Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections Map 7140)

es towards a clump of trees which turned out to be on the banks of the creek. And there it was - the Oakley Creek. The water was greyish but not particularly smelly or dirty. It was probably three or four metres wide, but I never sounded it to see how deep. The water usually flowed quite steadily. A little upriver from me was a concrete bridge structure that carried a

water pipe - not sure if it was sewage or fresh. It had a narrow flat area atop the pipe that you could walk on to get across the stream. I remember after a heavy rainstorm the water once came up almost to the top of the pipe.

At one stage someone had left a corrugated iron ("tinny") canoe up on the banks or it had floated down. I tried it out in the creek, but it was quite leaky, and I didn't particularly want to swim in the water. I was keener on swimming in saltwater - Pt Chevalier was the usual place to go for that.

So apart from carving out model boats and floating them, that was about the extent of my adventures on the Oakley Creek. We moved to Mt Albert in the late '50s. Later I came to know the upper reaches of the creek when I went to Wesley Intermediate. But up there it was full of household junk and clutter - car tyres, old kitchen stuff and, later, supermarket trolleys.

But then father had a boat built in Bayswater and we went to sea!



Photo (above): Flooding in O'Donnell St in 1953 (Photo reprinted from *Not Just Passing Through - The Making of Mount Roskill* by Jade Reidy)

Saving Our Heritage - A Tale of Protests and Place Makers

By Gina Hefferan

On a grey day, despite the forecast rain, almost 30 of us met by the historic boiler in the Waterview Heritage Area. We were there to listen to Robyn Mason and Peter McCurdy, local historians, as they shared their knowledge of the history of this fascinating area. It is a story that is full of intrigue, scandal, failure and heroic, dogged determination.



Photo (above): The crowd gathers in the Waterview Heritage Area



Photo (above): Note the Cornish boiler in the foreground

Robyn summarized it most eloquently:

"Site R11/2191 (Oakley's Works, Thomas' Star Flour Mills & Garrett Brothers' Tannery) is the record of changing land use and development – from a site where an entrepreneurial squatter once erected a flax works and bequeathed his name to a Creek, to a rural hamlet where local farmers brought their grain for milling, to a rural-urban hinterland whose light industry supported the commerce of the city, and finally to city suburb.

And always the Creek – the natural environment – as the backdrop. Oakley Creek Te Auaunga: at first providing kaimoana for Māori, then as a source for power generation for a pioneering miller and later for tanners, and finally as a place where urban dwellers can connect and reconnect to their natural environment—a sliver of green space in a now highly urbanised and populated City."

Peter indicated the stonework that was the site of the old Star Mill and explained the mill's operation. He told the story of when he first recognised the significance of this stonework that formed part of his garden at the time. He was sitting in a dinghy on Oakley Creek, looking back at his home when the penny dropped and the match with historic photographs of the mill became obvious.



Photo (above): Robyn and Peter



Photo (above): The stonework visible in the background is the site of the Star Mill

That story was interesting in itself. But what was more moving for me was the history of activism by which local residents stood up and fought for their local environment. The local community rallied to object when an abattoir was mooted for Waterview. They rallied again when the local Heron Park was designated as a Night Soil Depot. They rallied in support of the locked-out water-siders in 1951.

So, it was in keeping with this tradition that Robyn and Peter, themselves, became part of a group that stood up for the preservation of the Waterview Heritage Area when it was proposed as the site of an overland motorway connection, to link the existing State Highway 20 with the Northwestern Motorway. Without the dedication and sheer hard work of that group, including Friends of Oakley Creek, this precious area would all have been obliterated and the site buried under the asphalt. The fact that a section of the Waterview Connection is underground, preserving at least part of the historic site for us to enjoy today, is due largely to the heroic efforts of a small group of local residents. It was humbling to hear their story. And to realise the debt that we all owe to these people for preserving this fascinating area.

Dioecious Plants

By Wendy John

Spring is the time when you can see both the male and female flowers / inflorescence group on the various *dioecious* plants growing along the creek.

So, what is a *dioecious* plant? It is one that has male inflorescence on one plant and the female ones on another. Whereas *monoecious* plants have the two sexes on the same plant.



Photo (above): Kawakawa male flower



Photo (above): Kawakawa female flower



Photo (above): Karamu male flower



Photo (above): Karamu female flower

The general pattern is that the male flowers that produce pollen form first, so that it is in the air ready to pollinate the female flowers when they form.

Aotearoa is known for its high percentage of dioecious plants e.g. approx 12-13% vs 3-5% in the UK. A few well known and common plants include kahikatea, kawakawa, kohekohe and members of the coprosma family.

Gift a Tree

By Wendy John

We know it's a little early to be talking about Christmas. But we thought we'd 'sow the seed' – or you can 'gift a tree' any time of the year.

Need an inspiring gift idea?

Give a tree to plant on Te Auaunga - Oakley Creek ...

Just \$20 gives:

- a native tree - to be planted at Te Auaunga - Oakley Creek on your behalf (or by your recipient or you)
- an attractive commemorative card - with the details of your gift
- membership of Friends of Oakley Creek - for one year



Photo (above): A tree is a gift that keeps on giving

Seasonal gallery

The kowhai (*Sophora*) is always such a wonderful harbinger of spring, and we have several on the creek, so we highlight them in this edition. Tui have been celebrating them since the first blooms appeared.

Other sightings on the creek include: the always showy rewarewa blooms (*Knightia excelsa*); delicate minigimingi flowers (*Leucopogon fasciculatus*); luscious karo blossom (*Pittosporum crassifolium*) and the slender *Fuchsia excortica* flowers.



Photo (above): Kowhai flowers



From left to right: Rewarewa flowers; mingimingi flowers (*Leucopogon fasciculatus*); karo flowers (*Pittosporum crassifolium*) and *Fuchsia excortica* flowers

Weed season

By Wendy John

Yes, the weedy season is looming. So, do keep an eye out for, and deal with some of the key environmental weeds that are a threat to our native bush. These include:

Moth plant

Woolly nightshade

Climbing asparagus

Japanese honeysuckle

For more information on how to deal with these go to - <https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/environment/plants-animals/pests-weeds/Documents/weedcontrolmethods.pdf>



Wanted - Volunteers to help with Predator Control

We are looking for volunteers to join our predator control teams. There are two openings. One is to help with trapping which means being on a roster with two other team members and involves checking a trap line once every three weeks (1.5-2 hrs). The other is joining our rodent baiting team, helping with baiting four times a year, on five consecutive Saturday mornings each time (1-1.5 hrs). Plus helping with predator monitoring twice a year - optional. Training and resources are provided.

If you are interested in helping, contact Wendy – info@oakleycreek.org.nz

Notices

Monthly Community Working Bees: As per normal, our monthly working bees are held on the first Sunday of each month - 10.00am-12.00noon.

Tuesday Working Bees: Tuesday mornings 9.30am to 12.00pm. This exciting project is looking for some more regular volunteers. For more information contact Sandra - 021 166 7647.

Friday Working Bees: Friday mornings 9.00am to 12.00pm. We work in various 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 or contact Wendy – 027 232 6454.

Friends of Oakley Creek Te Auaunga

Chairperson:

David Bowden

Treasurer:

Matthew Hill

Secretary:

TBC

Committee:

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

Newsletter Editor: Gina Hefferan



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>

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

