



# Ngā Ringa o Te Auaunga Friends of Oakley Creek

SUMMER 2025

## Editorial

### HIGHLIGHTS:

Harbutt Reserve remediation	6
Raumati	7
Weedbusters	8
Mural	10
Pokeweed	11

### INSIDE:

News	1 – 6
Features	7 – 11
Gallery	12
Notices	13

This summer has been hard on our new plantings, many of which have been looking a little dried out in the relentless winds. Why is it that weeds seem to flourish even in these conditions?

This summer edition has a weed theme. Our volunteers have been valiantly tackling those weeds to give the new plants a fighting chance. We invite you to do your bit. Even on a summer evening stroll it is possible to take out a few strands of bindweed, rip up some blue morning glory or uproot a moth plant.

In our feature articles you will meet Jean and Keith, legendary weed busters who have tackled some of the harder weeding projects along the creek over the last fourteen years. We



*Photo (above): Harbutt Reserve erosion site - after remediation*

also introduce a new weed recently found on the creek, American pokeweed. Some summer reflections will conjure the tastes and sounds of summer.

We report on improvements on the awa. Highlighted on this page is the transformation of an erosion hotspot in Harbutt Reserve, check inside for details. You may have noticed that phase two of our mural project is almost complete. Take a look on your next creek visit.

You may have noticed that we have revamped our logo and branding. Thanks, Rosetta Brown, for your help with that.

**Gina Hefferan, Editor**



*Photo (above): Harbutt Reserve erosion hotspot - before*

*"What a great morning and what an awesome purpose! We thoroughly enjoyed helping out and we are completely in awe of what you guys have achieved with the work you do around the creek."*

*– Dan Wilkinson,  
MTF Finance Group*

## Monthly and Friday Working Bees

**By Wendy John**

As per usual, at this time of the year, our volunteers have been busy mulching, where appropriate, and doing their best to keep the weeds at bay – both at our monthly and weekly working bees. This is no mean feat with the plethora of weeds that would love to take over. They include the incredibly rampant bindweed and blue morning glory, woolly nightshade, black nightshade, *Tradescantia*, Madeira vine, climbing dock, German ivy, Japanese honeysuckle, privet – Chinese and



*Photo (above): Monthly Working Bee volunteers enjoying well-earned home baking*



*Photo (above): Friday Working Bee volunteers taking a break*



*Photo (above): Friday volunteers Tom, Tejo and Wally-Tom, clearing Madeira vine*



*Photo (above): Friday Working Bee volunteers, incl CVNZ*

Tree, wattle – brush, black and golden, palm grass and more. You name it – we have it, even after all these years!

If you happen to be strolling along the creek over the summer, feel free to pull a few weeds. We need all the help we can get. And, do take a rubbish bag to take out any rubbish you might see along the way.

And, if you have any of these nasties in your garden, here's a link to show the best way to deal with some of them – <https://oakleycreek.org.nz/resources/weeds/>



# Te Auaunga Partner Community Group Activities

*By Wendy John*

Our local partner groups continue to chip away at their patches along the creek.

The **Oakley Loop Group** volunteers got stuck in, in November, and did a great job of 'plant releasing' / clearing the weeds around the young plants

that were planted over the past couple of years. Then we had contractors, NZ Enviro, come in and do some spraying of the bindweed across the wider site to help get on top of some of the weeds. Then just prior to the Christmas break we had our Friday Working Bee volunteers in, to give a helping hand with some extra weed control.



*Photo (above): Oakley Loop Group*

## Corporates and Beyond Volunteers

*By Wendy John*

In the period since our last newsletter, we have had assistance from a number of corporate groups. These included Deloitte, WSP, MTF, McKinsey, AIA, Milwaukee Tools and Xero.

The **Deloitte** team did an amazing job of spreading two piles of mulch around the young plants in Waterview Glades.

**Conservation Volunteers** continue to support our project with both their CPP (Connecting People with Parks) and MCP (Migrant Conservation Programme). Their volunteers make a very valuable contribution to the restoration of the creek, and it's always lovely having people from different cultures and parts of the world joining us.



*Photo (above): Deloitte volunteers*



*Photo (above): MCP Team Leader Teresa Ma briefing volunteers*



*Photo (above): CVNZ & Fletcher Building volunteers*

# Outreach Report

**By Sandra Maclean**

Spring saw a very welcome upturn in support from corporate groups for our activities. We welcomed two WSP teams who mulched in Waterview Glades and weeded and controlled privet farther downstream. MTF Finance also mulched in Waterview Glades and teams from AIA and Milwaukee Tools cleared bindweed at the Waterview Heritage Area. Xero helped out in Howlett Reserve and McKinsey & Co. did some plant releasing in Harbutt Reserve.



*Photo (above): Sandra in action*

We enjoyed more support from CVNZ and Sustainable Coastlines at the Waterview Heritage Area at our regular Tuesday sessions. And CVNZ came out with a fantastic team to our Stoddard Road site to look after our recently planted natives. Fred from the neighbouring Mt. Roskill Police Station also gave us a hand that day.

One of our newest groups is a team from the Mason Clinic who have been working with us. Clients and staff have enjoyed learning more about the awa they live and work next to, and they've



*Photo (above): WSP volunteers at Waterview Glades*

done a great job of tidying up dead trees and clearing nasturtium.

Our roving weed team of Jean, Keith and Alister were employed at a piece of esplanade reserve below 26 Blockhouse Bay Road, controlling privet and moth plant. Odyssey House residents have stayed on track with restoration of their grounds and have a fabulous display of flowering toetoe to be proud of, as well as all the other young natives that are thriving on site.

All in all, it's been a great season. Thanks to all the teams who have worked so hard, as well as our regular volunteers who give us so much support.



*Photo (above): Jean Alister and Sandra in weedbusting mode*



# Water Monitoring on the Awa

**By Wendy John**

It's exciting and encouraging to see some up-and-coming young scientists helping out with water monitoring on the creek – both at the St Judes Scouts Den site and the Kukuwai Park sites.



Photo (above): Water Monitoring at St Judes Scouts Den – Quirke whanau



Photo (above): Water Monitoring at Kukuwai Park – Lynda & Emmie (Sarah Bishop)

# Predator Control

**By Wendy John**

Unfortunately, in our urban environments, control of predators is a never-ending task. Trapping continued over the summer, with a short break for the holidays. And our rodent baiting teams completed the summer pulse prior to Christmas.



Photo (above): Predator Control volunteers – John, David & Bernie



Photo (above): Wayne & Chris on a productive trapping round

# Nursery Update

**By name of author**

Most of the build for our new nursery is now completed. The latest work was the finishing touches to our new shadehouse, with the weedmat going down, and a gate and pavers at the entrance. Thanks, heaps, to Chris and John for their amazing efforts.



Photo (above): Chris & John finishing the floor of the shadehouse



Photo (above): Nursery shadehouse pavers installed

# Contractors

*By Wendy John*

**Buffer Zone Weed Control** – With funding from the Albert Eden and Puketāpapa Local Boards and the Council’s NETR (Natural Environment Targeted Rate), we were able to have contractors, NZ Biosecurity Services, back again to carry out more critical weed control on private properties located close to the creek. This work sits under Auckland Council’s RPMP (Regional Pest Management Plan) which will, in time, require certain pest plants to be controlled on all land within 500 metres of any ‘ecologically significant park land’ – which includes the parks along Te Auaunga – Oakley Creek. It aims to prevent pest plants from invading the parks.

**Howlett Reserve Restoration** – Work continues on the restoration of Howlett Reserve, on the south side of the tidal reach of Te Auaunga – thanks to support from Auckland Council. This is a challenging site, with most of the work being undertaken by contractors, Te Ngahere. They were back recently to deal with some of the weeds that were starting to smother the young plants.



*Photo (above): Te Ngahere team – Hayley, Sam and Jono at Howlett Reserve*

**New Wayfinders / Distance Markers along the Creek** – At last, the remainder of the wayfinder pou have been installed in the mid-lower creek. These are now placed at intervals along the entire length of the creek. At each site they show where you are, how far it is to the headwaters of the creek, and how far to the mouth of the

creek. These beautiful pieces of artwork were designed by DallowBoss Design. Thanks to the Puketāpapa and Albert Eden Local Boards for sponsoring these. Check them out next time you are out walking.



*Photo (above): Te Auaunga wayfinder pou (Spencer Myer)*

**Harbutt Reserve Erosion Remediation** – Council contractors, Glasgow, have done a great job of remediating a long-standing erosion hotspot in Harbutt Reserve, immediately downstream from the Cradock Street Bridge site. These works were also extended further downstream and on the opposite side of the creek, to build greater resilience into the site to prevent further erosion in the future. This included planting of natives to help stabilise the stream bank.



*Photo (above): Harbutt Reserve Erosion team*



# Raumati Reflections

By Marin Adams

*Ngā mihi o te wā* Seasons greetings.

My childhood memories of summer are endless hot days and fish, fish and more fish. The Manukau Harbour had an abundance of kai moana in those days: the most highly prized was tāmure (snapper). There was also kumukumu (gurnard) and kahawai. The fishing line suddenly screaming out meant a whai (stingray) was on the line and there would be a battle to bring it safely inside the boat. No good to eat but it would be buried in the orchard to fertilize the fruit trees. After fishing, the smell of manuka smoke would permeate the garden while we waited for the smoked fish to be ready to eat. At night we would walk along the shoreline, spears in hand, with a kerosene lamp to illuminate flounder resting in the shallows. They made a good breakfast.

For us as children, catching fish was fun. But in precolonial times, feeding the whanau in summer was a more serious business. Although the warmer months often brought



Photo (above): Inanga (whitebait) (National Kiwi Centre)

an abundance of kai moana, the height of summer often meant other food was scarce. The kumara were yet to be harvested and not many berries and seeds were ripe.

Summer was a noisy time. There is a saying, 'Te tātarakihi, te pihareinga; ko ngā manu ēnā o Rēhua' (the locust and the cricket are Rehua's songbirds) because these creatures sing when the heat of summer has arrived. Similarly, the flying kēkerewai or green manuka beetle was known as 'Rehua's bird'. Plentiful in summer, the beetle was harvested for food when it became trapped in mud beside the stream.

As you walk along Te Auaunga, do you pause to think what food the bush, the stream and the harbour provided in pre-European times?



Photo (above): Huhu grubs (Phil Bendle, Landcare research)



Photo (above): Pikopiko – the tips of a fern. (NZ Food heroes blog)



Photo (above): The moon rises and Rehua is visible in the sky (instagram – maramataka\_in\_action)

As well as the fish and shellfish in the Waitemata at the mouth of the stream, there was pikopiko (fern shoots) and the stem and root of the cabbage tree. There were abundant tuna (eels), and whitebait swam up the awa in spring. Huhu grubs could be found in rotting wood. Karaka berries lay on the ground and could be eaten once carefully prepared. Tawa, taraire and hinau berries were also edible and able to be preserved. Kaka, tui and kereru were snared in summer.

Enjoy the rest of the warm weather.

*He waru ki runga.*

*He rare ki raro.*

In the heat of the summer, people relax.

*Kia haumaru te noho, e hoa mā*  
Stay safe, my friends.

## References:

<https://www.nrait.co.nz/our-owners/te-whanake/nga-tau-the-significance-of-our-seasons/>

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/maori-foods-kai-maori>

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/seafood>

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/tawhirimatea-the-weather/page-2>

# Legendary Weedbusters – Keith and Jean

**By Gina Hefferan**

Jean Barton and Keith Ayton have been ridding Auckland of weeds for decades now. They are the crack troops that Wendy and Sandra call on whenever there is a particularly gnarly infestation of weeds. Keith says they wouldn't do this if they were paid – you couldn't pay them enough! They stress that they don't often do regular weeding now; they prefer special projects, often teaming up with others.

So how did it start? They say that they have always been conscious of weeds, in particular moth plant. Everywhere they went, if they saw weeds they pulled them out. They regularly worked with Friends of Maungawhau over a period of 10 years, every Tuesday tackling various projects and documenting progress. They also have an enduring

connection with Kawau Island, weedbusting in South Cove.

One of their early projects was an infestation of stinking iris under a Moreton Bay fig in Mansion House Bay. They noticed this on their way back to Auckland and realised that herbicides could not be used because of the risk to the tree. These would need to be manually weeded. So, they contacted DOC and offered to do the weeding on their return to the island, if DOC could cut off the flower heads to control the spread in the meantime. On their return to Kawau they cleared the patch. This is the kind of defined project that they are particularly fond of.

They are not into micro-weeding, the easy jobs; they find those boring. They're more into the challenging weeding projects. They have got all the tools now to take on these projects. Although



*Photo (above): Weedbusting with tools*



*Photo (above): Jean and Keith with a dead woolly nightshade in 2010*





Photo (above): Hitting the woolly nightshade in 2016

they prefer to tackle weeds before berries, seeds and pods form, they now have the gear for tackling moth plant pods even high in the trees. They have pole saws that are 6 metres long. One of the good things about weeding, even as you get older you can still do weeding, just more slowly. Jean claims she can still move faster than the average gorse bush.

Jean is the main driver; she says she volunteers Keith for projects. They needed to get sign off from DOC, an organisation that was initially risk averse, they suspect because of their ages. But this is less of a problem now because DOC staff that they have worked with previously can vouch for them. Their most recent project has been on Motutapu Island, working on weed-infested gullies through the winter.

You might be surprised to find that there is a network of dedicated weeders in Auckland, quietly taking care of the natural environment. Jean and Keith know many of them and they share knowledge and techniques. They tell the tale of their first time cycling on the northwestern cycle path. They noticed a woolly nightshade suddenly topple over among the mangroves. It had been felled. That was their first introduction to David Smith, now a good friend.

Another of their earlier weeding projects was initiated by Mary Stewart of Auckland Council



Photo (above): Jean, Keith and Wendy

Biosecurity. As they worked together, she commented that you wouldn't want to be dealing with these challenging sites in five years. That was nearly 20 years ago.

They can't remember exactly how long they have been volunteering with Friends of Oakley Creek. Wendy says it's at least 14 years, probably longer. The earliest photos she has of them are back in 2010, when they started helping to clear large infestations of woolly nightshade and moth plant on the creek.

Jean remembers first looking down on the Phyllis Reserve, a nightmare vision of large woolly nightshade trees. Wendy explained that they were not allowed to use chainsaws. Jean volunteered Keith to take them on. It was very satisfying to clear them all.

Their most recent Oakley Creek project on the creek has been Kukuwai Park, dense with moth plant, woollies and gorse. They have helped with the initial clearing and are now revisiting it to deal with any regrowth or leftovers from last year.

I ask them whether they find this work satisfying. Jean's reply is a typically enthusiastic, "Hell yes!" So, we salute our legendary 'weedbusters'. They have made a huge contribution towards clearing the nastiest of the weeds on our creek – and across the wider region, and continue to do so.

# Stunning new piece of artwork on Te Auaunga

**By Wendy John**

Our committee member ... volunteer ... 'publicist' ... art director – Chris Brown, doesn't miss an opportunity! After the completion of our beautiful 60m long mural – instigated by Chris, there was another piece of blank wooden fence just crying out for a 'make over'. And so, the lovely artist, Lucia Laubscher

(Art by Lucia – My Art) has done an amazing job of creating a stunning piece of artwork, to complement our original mural. (The mural, with the 'add ons', was inspired by a beautiful mural that artist, Derek March, has done at Matuku Link – <https://matukulink.org.nz/open-studio/>) And, thanks to the Albert-Eden Local Board for their support.



Photo (above): Chris, contemplating the next mural



Photo (above): Lucia & Chris and a 'blank canvas'



Photo (above): The new mural



# A new weed on the creek

By Wendy John

Recently, a new plant turned up on the creek in a couple of locations – American pokeweed / *Phytolacca americana*.

It is native to eastern North America, the Midwest, and the South, and has also naturalised in parts of Europe and Asia. It is in the same family as inkweed / *Phytolacca octandra*, <https://inaturalist.nz/taxa/155483>, which can be found right across New Zealand, and is listed in Auckland Council's RPMP (Regional Pest Management Plan).

American pokeweed is an herbaceous perennial plant, which grows 1-3 metres tall. It has simple leaves on green to red or purplish stems and a large white taproot. The flowers can be white through to pink. Its berries, which ripen through red to purple to almost black, are similar to that of the more common inkweed.

All parts of the plant can be toxic to human and mammalian health. Toxins are found in highest concentration in the rootstock, then leaves and



Photo (above): American pokeweed



Photo (above): American pokeweed flowers

stems, then the ripe fruit. The plant generally gets more toxic with maturity, with the exception of the berries, which are dangerous even while green.

It is easily found growing in pastures, recently cleared areas, and woodland openings, edge habitats such as along fencerows, and in wastelands. In America, it is considered a pest species by farmers, because it poses a risk to stock.

The first word in its scientific name, *Phytolacca americana*, comes from the Greek words *phyton* (plant) and *lacca* – the scarlet dye secreted by the *Kerria lacca* scale insect. The second denotes this plant as native to America. The common name 'poke' is derived from puccoon, pocan, or poughkone (from an Algonquin name for the plant). Its berries were once used to make ink, hence its other sometimes-used common name, inkberry.

According to *iNaturalist*, it has only been sighted in four locations across the Auckland region. So, while it may not, yet, be seen as an environmental weed, it is obviously self-seeding, so is something to keep an eye out for.

Source – [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phytolacca\\_americana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phytolacca_americana)

## Seasonal gallery

The harakeke (*Phormium tenax*) on the awa put on a spectacular display this season. The flowers can range in hue from dull red through orange to yellow. Their nectar is a tui favourite. Although popularly known as common flax, this is not in fact a flax plant, but a member of the lily family.

Other sightings on the creek include cabbage trees or tī kōuka (*Cordyline australis*) and kanuka (*Kunzea ericoides*) in bloom, a male ring-necked pheasant, a green damselfly larva, seen at the Cradock St site by our water monitors, and this smooth stick insect (*Clitarchus hookeri*)



Photo (above): Harakeke flowers



Photo (above): left to right: Tī kōuka in bloom; kanuka flowers; male ring-necked pheasant; green damselfly larva and smooth stick insect.



# Xmas Party

*By Wendy John*

After a serious morning's work on the creek at our monthly working bee in December, we gathered, or should I say 'huddled' together, under a gazebo and umbrellas to share some Christmas joy, and to celebrate another year of restoring our precious awa.



*Photo (above): Xmas Party after very wet morning of weeding*

## Notices

### Volunteer Positions

**Secretary** - we are still needing a secretary. 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 interests you, please contact David Bowden (Chairperson) on 027 249 1873, Wendy John - 027 232 6454 or email [info@oakleycreek.org.nz](mailto:info@oakleycreek.org.nz) for further information.

**Predator Control** - if you are interested in joining our predator control team, we are needing a volunteer to join one of our trapping teams. This would involve doing a 'trap run' once every three weeks. The run takes approximately 1.5 hours. Training and resources are provided - contact Wendy - [info@oakleycreek.org.nz](mailto:info@oakleycreek.org.nz)

**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 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, or contact Wendy - 027 232 6454.

# Ngā Ringa o Te Auaunga Friends of Oakley Creek

## Chairperson:

David Bowden

## Treasurer:

Matthew Hill

## Secretary:

TBC

## Committee:

Wendy John, Adrienne Stanton, John Stevenson,  
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](mailto: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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