

FERNGLEN NATIVE PLANT GARDENS NEWSLETTER

Summer 2018



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Curator's Report

Ventia, the council contracting firm, was very helpful just before Christmas by undertaking restoration and modification of the irrigation system in the main garden. Irrigation in the fern garden also had a touch-up with an extra sprinkler inserted on the approach to the fern house.

Since Christmas, however, watering has hardly been necessary, thanks to regular sprinkling from the heavens. But the rain and heat has activated the weeds and unwanted growth so it was great to have half a dozen volunteers help combat this problem on a wet Saturday 10 February, our second working bee of the year. Monthly working bees (taking place on the 2nd Saturday of each month) have had a big impact on the well-being of Fernglen.

The Committee has been engaged in another contribution to environmental care with the establishment of a rat baiting and possum trapping programme. Steve established the procedure and Jill did a magnificent job encouraging Fernglen's neighbours to take up rat baiting/trapping on their own properties. This will benefit Fernglen and the surrounds and contributes to the "halo" programme, part of the Pest-Free Kaipatiki project. It is intended to invite the local participants of this programme to a get-together at Fernglen at the end of the month.

Council has been very helpful supporting a couple of projects. One project was mulch-spreading at Ben's Ridge, and a large truckload of high quality mulch was provided. The Ben's Ridge planting is in great shape thanks to Nev's enthusiastic maintenance, the new mulch and regular grass cutting. The second project is to reline the fern house with some new ponga trunks and 50 trunks have now arrived.

The early summer heat stressed ferns such as *Doodia australis* (pukupuku) and *Blechnum penna-marina* (little hard fern) where they are growing in positions exposed to sunlight. But now with little sun and lots of rain they have recovered. The *Doodia* look particularly impressive with a burst of new fronds.

Towards the end of January the perching Easter orchid, *Earina autumnalis*, started flowering, amazingly early. Maybe it had heard that Easter eggs are already for sale in the shops, so it had better get on with it. The display didn't last long though, soon ruined by further bursts of heavy rain.

Elingamita johnsonii below the Alpine House continues to sport a great array of berries. Just above it the Chatham Island nikau looks majestic with its stout trunk and sturdy fronds. The base of these fronds is twice the size of the local ones. One frond recently dropped off, making way for a huge floral display which attracted lots of bees. Kereru will come later.

A recent craze with young children, taking them away from screens and into nature, is the decorating of small stones with paint and messages, then placing/searching for them in suitable public places. This activity has brought lots of children and their parents to Fernglen and the garden has been enhanced with coloured stones here and there.

A Reminder of the Laws Concerning Pruning and or Removal of Trees in Urban Areas

In 2009 Parliament amended the Resource Management Act of 1991 to remove general tree rules in urban areas from 1 January 2012. Fortunately, there are still a number of general tree rules that continued to be enforced.

Before removing a tree, it is necessary to check for the following:

- It is listed as a scheduled tree in the District Plan.
- It is protected by a covenant or consent notice on the title.
- It is protected as a condition of a resource consent that has been implemented.
- It is located on a lot that does not meet the definition of an urban environment under the Resource Management Act 1991.

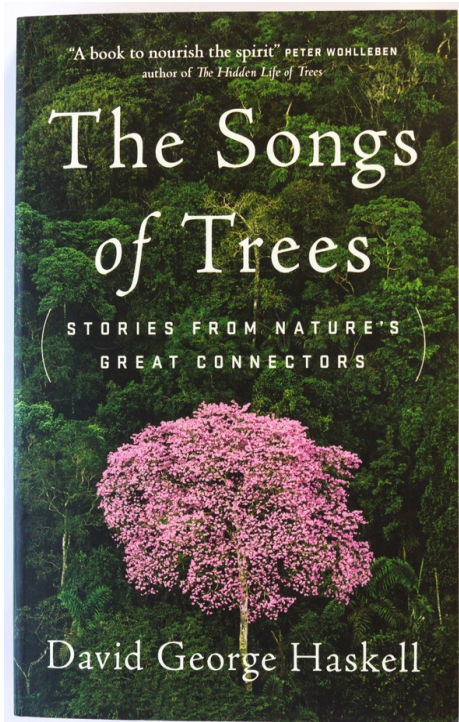
You can prune or trim trees on your property without applying for resource consent as long as:

- You live in an urban environment.
- The tree is not scheduled.
- No more than 20% of live growth is removed in one year.
- The natural form and branch habit of the species is maintained.

Forbidden work near scheduled or protected trees includes:

- Excavation
- Depositing material
- Construction
- Erecting buildings including decks and retaining structures
- Putting in services
- Storing material around the drip line or root zone of the tree, which is the area beneath its branches and around its roots

Book Review: The Song of Trees (Stories from Nature's Great Connectors) by David George Haskell



While not a publication on New Zealand native plants, sadly there was been nothing new published in the last few months, this book a Christmas present, I found intriguing and superbly crafted. Haskell's thesis is that

"when we listen to trees, nature's great connectors, we learn how to inhabit the relationship that gives life its source, substance and beauty".

Haskell looks at a number of diverse trees in considerable detail: Balsam fir, sabal palm, green ash, hazel, redwood, ponderosa pine, cottonwood, callery pear, olive, and Japanese pine, exploring their connections with webs of fungi, bacterial communities, cooperative and destructive animals, and other plants.

The author injects an enormous amount of information into the 292 pages of this publication,

some absolute gems for those of us who love unusual facts and figures! He even refers to the experience of privet in North America,

"hedge-forming Asian privets were planted throughout American gardens of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries guided by the approving words of government botanists and private nurseries. These imported privets now cover millions of acres of American forests."

Hundreds of other species are in the same category, they were once lauded and imported, now they are condemned, a very similar tale to that found in New Zealand.

Haskell has a fascinating chapter on the trees of New York, over 5 million trees that yearly remove an estimated 2000 tons of pollutants in addition to more than 40,000 tons of carbon dioxide.

With a bibliography over 20 pages long, it is fair to state that this publication has been meticulously researched. This combined with Haskell's wonderful writing style makes the book eminently readable.

The Future of the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park

While Auckland Council vacillates over the closure of tracks in the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park Kauri trees continue to die at an ever increasing rate, a modern example of Nero playing the violin while Rome burns! A Rahui has been placed on the park, a voluntary plea for the public not to tramp in the park. However, Auckland Council continues to release statements outlining the difficulties of closing the park or passing the too hard to handle basket to central government. With the very wet humid January and early February, these are perfect conditions for the proliferation of Phytophthora throughout the Waitakeres. As there is no cure for the disease, the only answer at present to prevent the spread of Phytophthora (on visitors' footwear) is to close access to the park. If it is necessary to employ additional staff to monitor the movement of people in the Waitakeres, so be it! If a major publicity campaign in various languages is required, let it begin immediately! At the same time, a careful monitoring of other parks in the Auckland region that contain Kauris is required to ensure the disease does not spread. Access points in these parks must have adequate equipment for cleaning footwear and information leaflets explaining the nature of Phytophthora and how it is spread.

The planting of young kauri trees in areas free from infection should be encouraged to ensure there is a new generation of kauris. There are unfortunately some myths surrounding the cultivation of kauris, the main one being that they are very slow growing. Observe the numerous kauris growing at Ben's Ridge, Fernglen. They have outgrown almost all other trees planted at the same time. Note the first few years after planting are critical for the survival of young kauri trees. They have a very small root system when young which if it dries out the tree will invariably die quite quickly. Correctly planted with generous amounts of compost added to the existing soil, mulched to prevent the soil drying out, deep regular watering during the first few summers, then young kauris will thrive requiring little further long term care.



KEEP KAURI STANDING

STOP KAURI DIEBACK DISEASE SPREADING

KIA TOITU HE KAURI

Care of Native Street Trees

Sadly, at this time, the only 'care' our street trees receive from the appropriate authorities is the appalling cutting of holes or unbalanced removal of large branches where the trees come in contact with power poles. Ironically this 'work' only needs to be undertaken as a result of poor species selection for the area where the interaction with power lines is inevitable. Poorly considered plantings continue to the present time as I often observe new street trees being planted underneath power lines where the species chosen has the potential to grow six to seven metres, well into the lines – unbelievable!

With existing street trees, it now falls to residents to care for their local trees and here I take our native titoki, *Alectryon excelsus*, as an excellent example. For quite a few years now, titoki has been the tree of choice for councils planting street trees. While an outstanding native tree, if you look carefully as you drive around Auckland you will observe titokis performing in a very mixed manner, with many really struggling. Some of the first planting of titokis as street trees were in Epsom where they thrived in the volcanic soils growing into very large trees. However, in most suburbs with Auckland's predominant clay soils titokis are struggling with typical dead branches and stunted growth. This poor performance is often compounded by having large quantities of grass clippings piled up around the trunk of the tree. If you have titokis planted in the berm outside your home, their performance can be improved by adding a layer of compost over the root zone, by mulching the soil around the trunk with crushed bark, and by providing some deep watering over the long dry summer months. If this remedial work fails and the tree continues to struggle, contact the council and suggest that the species is inappropriate for your soil type.

A history of our street trees show a pattern of popularity possibly with the person responsible for selecting the trees, hence we have neighbourhoods with the following trees *Agonis flexuosa* (1960s), bottlebrush (1970s), melias (1970s/80s), Taiwan cherry (1970s), claret ash (1980s), and most recently titokis (1980s-present). There is no guarantee that the tree chosen are the most appropriate for your suburb. However, as they have an important role in softening an urban habitat, it is worth making the effort to care for your local trees.

A Wander through Lake Ba Be National Park in Northern Vietnam

On a recent motor bike tour of Northern Vietnam, I was fortunate to spend a few days at the Lake Ba Be National Park in the Bac Can Province. This National Park is part of an extensive system of Parks and Reserves in Vietnam, one of 87 sites covering 1.3 million hectares, roughly 4% of the country's land area. The primary attraction is Ba Be Lake, the largest natural lake in Vietnam, 8 kilometres long and 800 metres wide. The lake is surrounded by four very large limestone peaks reaching up to 1100 metres while dense evergreen jungle-like forest flourishes down to the shoreline. In appearance, in its absolute tranquillity, the lake reminded me so much of Lake Waikaremoana.



Approaching our homestay, we followed a very narrow and difficult track through the existing jungle (a test even for our trail bikes) with occasional views of the lake. Access around the park was mainly by typical long narrow boats that would deliver you to various points of interest where you could follow a track hewn out of the limestone. As you would expect 'jungle-like conditions', giant buttressed trees dominated a forest teeming with climbers, Lianas, ferns, orchids, and other epiphytes. All the plants appeared in pristine condition. Possibly a result of the very high rainfall in this area.

An added bonus were the butterflies. 332 different species have been recorded in the park. Two endemic species can be found in the park, Owston's civet and Francois' leaf monkey. Sadly, we didn't locate either of them. Our stay at a typical Vietnamese homestay overlooking the lake was very peaceful, incredibly friendly hosts and large quantities of stunning Vietnamese food. The sound of millions of insects and frogs at dusk was almost deafening but somehow set the scene for a most enjoyable stay.