

FERNGLEN NATIVE PLANT GARDENS NEWSLETTER

Winter 2023

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News from Fernglen

text and photos by Kelly Hayward

It seemed there was a period in July when bird song was absent in Fernglen. Perhaps the birds had gone on strike, or were just too wet or sick of the endless wet to sing. Now that pockets of sunshine appear the riorio, grey warbler's trill is regular again and rurus, moreporks are back calling late into the night. Kākā's have returned, in one sighting there was a trio of them. Maybe this year they may nest in one of the purpose built nests, erected on the outskirts of Fernglen and monitored by Pest Free Kaipatiki.

The Fernglen education room office is now available again for hire (see photos below). It is a quiet space suitable for someone to use as an office, art space, storage, consult room. There is a heat pump, whiteboard, desks and bush views. Please be in touch if you're interested to permanently rent the space. The rent of this office assists us to continue maintaining the education room and paying for expenses such as insurance premiums.



Children's books in plastic sleeves have been left at the base of trees by The Reading Granny, who asks them to be taken home, read by families and returned to the gardens to be re-hidden. The books with a flora and fauna theme are particularly apt with the garden's philosophy of education in New Zealand flora and fauna.



The colourful painted rocks continue to surprise and give pleasure to children and adults as they meander around the twisting rock garden paths and along the bush tracks.

The 23rd of July this year marked 11 years since the passing of Muriel Fisher. Having just filed annual return on behalf of the Fernglen Native Plant Gardens Educational Charitable Trust, I reflected Muriel (and Bill) would be proud of the small achievements the dedicated committee, trust members and support crew have made to enrich and enhance visitors' experience of the gardens whilst providing education in native flora and fauna. One of Nev's book reviews in this newsletter is on a newly published book dedicated to Ōtari in Wellington, the same that inspired Muriel and Bill to develop Fernglen. In Muriel's last book, Fernglen, the Muriel Fisher Story, she wrote,

"The first Christmas after Bill and I married we went to Wellington and stayed with my parents. Bill had never been to the capital before. Of course we visited Otari Native Plant Museum, and I need hardly say he was greatly impressed. Subsequently we used to mull over doing something with our property. A vision emerged. We had a backdrop of mature bush, just as Otari has Wiltons Bush. On the margin of the bush was the land below the house which could be turned into rock gardens. What an exciting plan."

In time Muriel and Bill would obtain cuttings of hebes and other rarities from Mr Brockie at Ōtari and subsequently sent him northern species in exchange.

Best wishes

Kelly

Blissful - Quiet Office for Hire in Garden Space

Best suited to ecology minded person(s)

Office space – comfortably fits 3 desks, newly carpeted, whiteboard plus heat pump

Phone Kelly, 021 236 5800 for more info



Book Review: Ōtari – Two Hundred Years of Ōtari-Wilton's Bush by Bee Dawson

by Neville Arbury

Author Bee Dawson, in considerable detail, relates the story of Ōtari from its early days through future possible directions. As early as 1906 the area then known as Wilton's Bush was gazetted as a scenic reserve. In 1926 J. G. McKenzie, director of Wellington's parks and reserves proposed that a collection of native flora should be established at Wilton's Bush. The concept of establishing a living plant museum was picked up by local newspapers and endorsed by eminent botanist Leonard Cockayne. As the author writes,

Cockayne's intensive love of New Zealand Flora, combined with his anxiety that it should be preserved meant that he embraced the project with great enthusiasm.

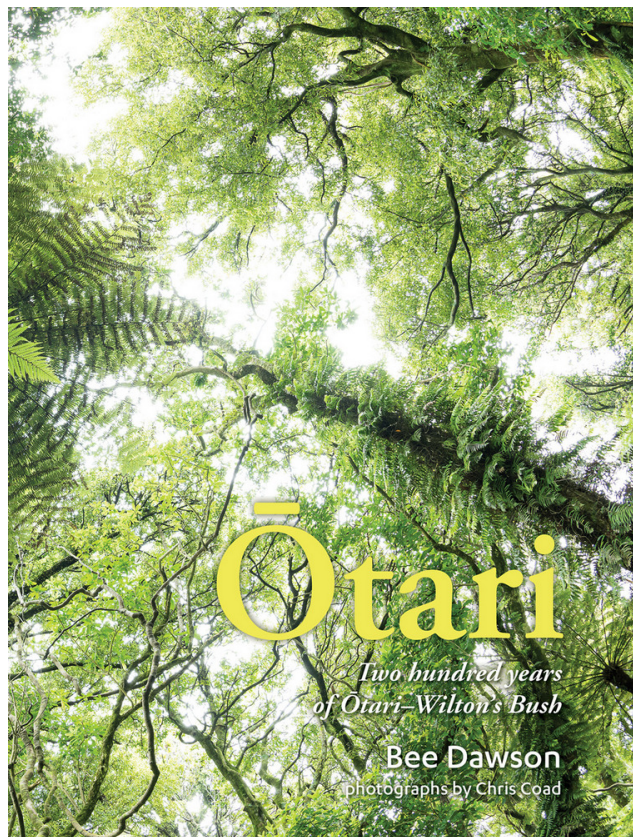
He envisaged that the plant museum would have four major elements. The reserve was to be a collection of all New Zealand plants. Examples were to be made of important features in the primaeval vegetation of New Zealand. The reserve would demonstrate how indigenous plants could be used in domestic gardens, and that the primaeval forest was to be restored to its original form. The native plant museum opened on October 12th, 1926.

The role of Leonard Cockayne cannot be overemphasised in the development of the gardens. In 1930 he donated 150 native plants to Ōtari from his own gardens. The author also devotes considerable space to the first two curators at Ōtari: Walter Brockie and Ray Mole. The dedication and enthusiasm of these two men ensured the garden's development over many years.

Of interest is the importance of careful plant labelling and record keeping from the early days. Each plant label has a number, the species name and the location of where seed/cuttings were obtained.

While recording the past in great detail, author Bee Dawson looks at the future of the reserve. Aims include conserving critically endangered plants, conserving rare native orchids and long-term, to build permanent science and seed-banking facilities.

With stunning photography throughout the book, Bee Dawson has superbly recorded the history of this magical place. Visiting Ōtari is a must for any native plant lovers visiting Wellington. I give the book a very high rating.



Recent Additions to Our Alpine House

by Neville Arbury



Uncinia rubras

Late last year a number of *Uncinia rubras* were planted in the alpine house. They have thrived and are now forming dense clumps with their distinctive deep red colour.



Aciphylla aurea

This winter several different species have been planted including *Aciphylla aurea*, *Aciphylla dieffenbachii*, *Celmisia semicordata* and *Celmisia spectabilis*. While growing alpine and sub-alpine

plants in Auckland remains a challenge, we will continue to introduce new specimens into this purpose-built environment.

Certainly, the parahebes that were planted several years ago have thrived.



Aciphylla dieffenbachii



Celmisia semicordata

Additions to Our Coprosma Collection

by Neville Arbury

At the July working bee, five new coprosmas were planted at Ben's Ridge. The plants were sourced from Matai Nurseries in Waimate, which has provided numerous rare natives for Fernglen over the years.

These coprosmas are all fine-leaved specimens, usually to be found naturally growing on bush margins. The search is always on for additional coprosmas. However, as our collection increases, it is becoming more difficult to locate the remaining lesser-known species. Below are listed our new coprosmas:

- *Coprosma cuneata*
- *Coprosma linariifolia*
- *Coprosma pseudocuneata*
- *Coprosma rigida*
- *Coprosma tayloriae*

Matai Nurseries also supplied the following rare natives:

- *Melicytus lanceolatus*
- *Pittosporum anomalum*
- *Pittosporum rigidum*
- *Raukaua anomalus*

Book Review: *Chasing Plants - Journeys with a Botanist through Rainforest, Swamps and Mountains* by Chris Thorogood

by Neville Arbury

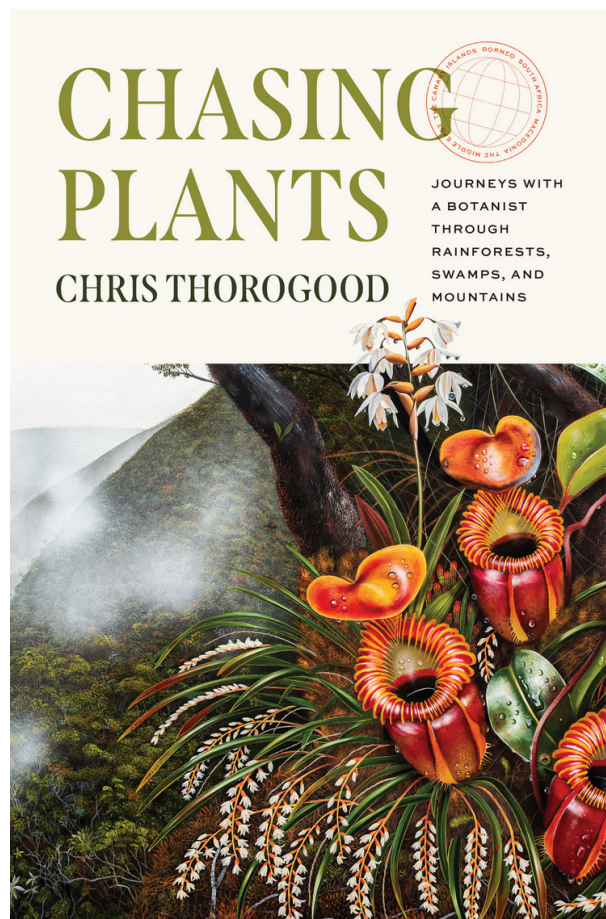
Chris Thorogood, a botanist and lecturer at Oxford University takes the reader on a journey to visit some of the world's most unique botanical treasures. Through personal stories and exquisite illustrations, we learn about many weird and fascinating plants. As Thorogood writes,

I've learned the language of them, how to read the land with them and how to speak to the people through them. Knowing plants lets you see a place differently, read the forest's mind and listen to the mountain.

The author's passion is the evolution of parasitic and carnivorous plants. In pursuit of these intriguing plants, Thorogood takes those reading to various parts of the world including Ireland, the Canary Islands, Macedonia, Crete, Cyprus, the Middle East, South Africa, Japan and Burneo. In each of these countries, the author documents his search for weird and strange species. His sketches are not only botanically accurate but are works of art themselves.

The author explains the concept of biodiversity hot spots in the world. These are places that cover just 2% of the earth's land but have an abundance of quite unique flora. He gives the example of Japan the world's eleventh most populous country that is home to a bewildering rich flora, with an estimated 6,000 different species. Why he ponders?

Take the botanical legacy of Japan's former connection to the mainland, throw in fifteen million years of isolation and a range of altitudes and climatic conditions, the odd monsoon and volcano included and Bam! you have the crucible for the evolution of an exceptionally diverse flora.



Similarly with Crete and the Canary Islands, he explains the conditions that have led to considerable biodiversity. When referring to Crete Thorogood writes,

You can't swing a cat on Crete without hitting an orchid!

His adventures, well documented in this book, will appeal to anyone who is passionate about plants or simply someone who enjoys a fascinating tale of discovery. Highly recommended, I simply could not put this book down.

Attempting to Grow *Cordyline indivisa* – Mountain Cabbage Tree – at Fernglen

by Neville Arbury

For many years we have attempted to cultivate our stunning mountain cabbage tree, *Cordyline indivisa*, tōī. Sadly there has been no long-term success. The usual scenario is that the young plants appear to grow well until they reach around one metre and then they begin to struggle. The importance of watering at this stage appears to be critical. Very simply, if they dry out they die out!

This winter we have planted three new specimens at different sites in the old garden. The hope is that one of these positions may be more favourable for successful cultivation. If the rainfall we have received so far this year continues, I am sure the young plants will thrive! The true test will be this summer and future summers.



Nev. with a young *Cordyline indivisa*, Mt. Ruapehu

While the mountain cabbage tree naturally occurs throughout many parts of the South Island, here in the North Island it is found in isolated pockets south of the Hunuas and in the Coromandel Ranges. It is more widespread south of the volcanic plateau. Superb specimens can be viewed by the road north of the Chateau on the road to the 'top of the Bruce' on Mount Ruapehu.

Myrtle Rust Found in New Zealand's Finest Pōhutukawa

by Neville Arbury

Recently myrtle rust was detected on the giant pōhutukawa at Te Araroa. Named Te Waha o Rerekuhu, the tree stands over twenty metres tall with a canopy measuring over forty metres across. The tree was named after the local Maori chief Rerekohu. A local myrtle rust surveillance group which monitors forests from East Cape to Cape Runaway reports that infections are increasing in this area.

Having climbed this tree as a youngster and later with my own children, this was devastating news. No doubt far worse for the locals of this area. The prognosis for this magnificent tree is not good. The typical pattern of the infection by myrtle rust is that new growth of the tree is first infected. Trees are therefore unable to regenerate and due to repeated infection over a period of time, they can eventually die. Sadly at present, there is no cure for myrtle rust.

This giant of a tree at Te Ararua is a classic example of what can be termed a 'sand-dune pōhutukawa'. This refers to the habit of large pōhutukawas growing in sand dunes. These trees have a spreading habit with large branches often growing in a near horizontal form, that may eventually reach the ground where they develop new trunks.

After first being discovered in the northern parts of the North Island, myrtle rust has spread through other parts of the North Island and eventually reached the South Island. By 2022 myrtle rust has spread to Canterbury, the west coast, and in March this year was first detected on the Chatham Islands.

Native Epiphytes

by Neville Arbury

New Zealand's temperate rainforest contains an abundance of epiphytes. These plants have many intriguing features that allow them to survive in habitats that are far more challenging than places where most plants grow. These features include having leaves that trap and store water, roots that tap into the nutrient source of the host tree, and some that send roots down to the forest floor to access water and nutrients. Native epiphytes can be placed in four main groups:

Ferns

We have forty-six ferns that can be classified as epiphytes. These ferns can be divided into three groups:

- Creeping ferns - *Pyrrhosia eleagnifolia* is a perfect example. These ferns have creeping rhizomes and begin life on the host trunk or branch.
- Tufted ferns – These ferns have an upright form, often with feather-like growth. A number of *hymenophyllums* fall into this category.
- Pendant ferns – These are ferns that hang from an attachment to the host plant, e.g. *Asplenium flaccidum*

A number of these ferns can be seen in the Fern House at Fernglen.

Nests

There are astelias that make up the 'nest' category. *Astelia hastata*, *Astelia microsperma* and *Astelia solandri*. Large nest epiphytes are often located in the canopy of native trees. Here they create important habitats for other flora and fauna species.

Orchids

The total number of native orchids is over 160, of which 10 are epiphytes. All the epiphytic orchids have white fleshy roots that are capable of storing water. They can have a pendant form hanging from the branches of host trees, or a non-pendant form where they have a flattened mat-like appearance.

Shrubs and Trees

New Zealand has five epiphytic shrub species and two epiphytic tree species. The two tree species, *Metrosiderus robusta* and *Metrosiderus bartlettii* are what is termed strangling hemiepiphytes. Young plants germinate in host trees and send roots down to the ground where they thicken and fuse to become an independent trunk. They do not strangle and kill the host plant, they simply outlive them.

The five epiphytic shrub species are *Brachyglottis kirkii* var. *kirkii*, *Griselinia littoralis*, *Griselinia lucida*, *Pittosporum cornifolium* and *Pittosporum kirkii*. Apart from the brachyglottis species, all the others can be found growing in the ground as well as assuming an epiphytic form.

What's Happening at Fernglen?

Working bees

Regardless of the weather, working bees occur at Fernglen **on the second Saturday of every month from 9am onwards, until about 12 noon.**

The working bee is a great way to meet others, learn more about native plants, weeds and pest control. There is always a job to be done in the garden or in the education room.

No gardening experience is necessary and all ages and abilities are welcome. Gloves and gardening tools can be supplied.

Looking forward to seeing you there.

Educational tours

Are you involved with a school or an education group and would like to learn about New Zealand native plants? A unique collection of plants from all over New Zealand grows at Fernglen. To see what is on offer please contact us

on email: fernglen.nz@gmail.com

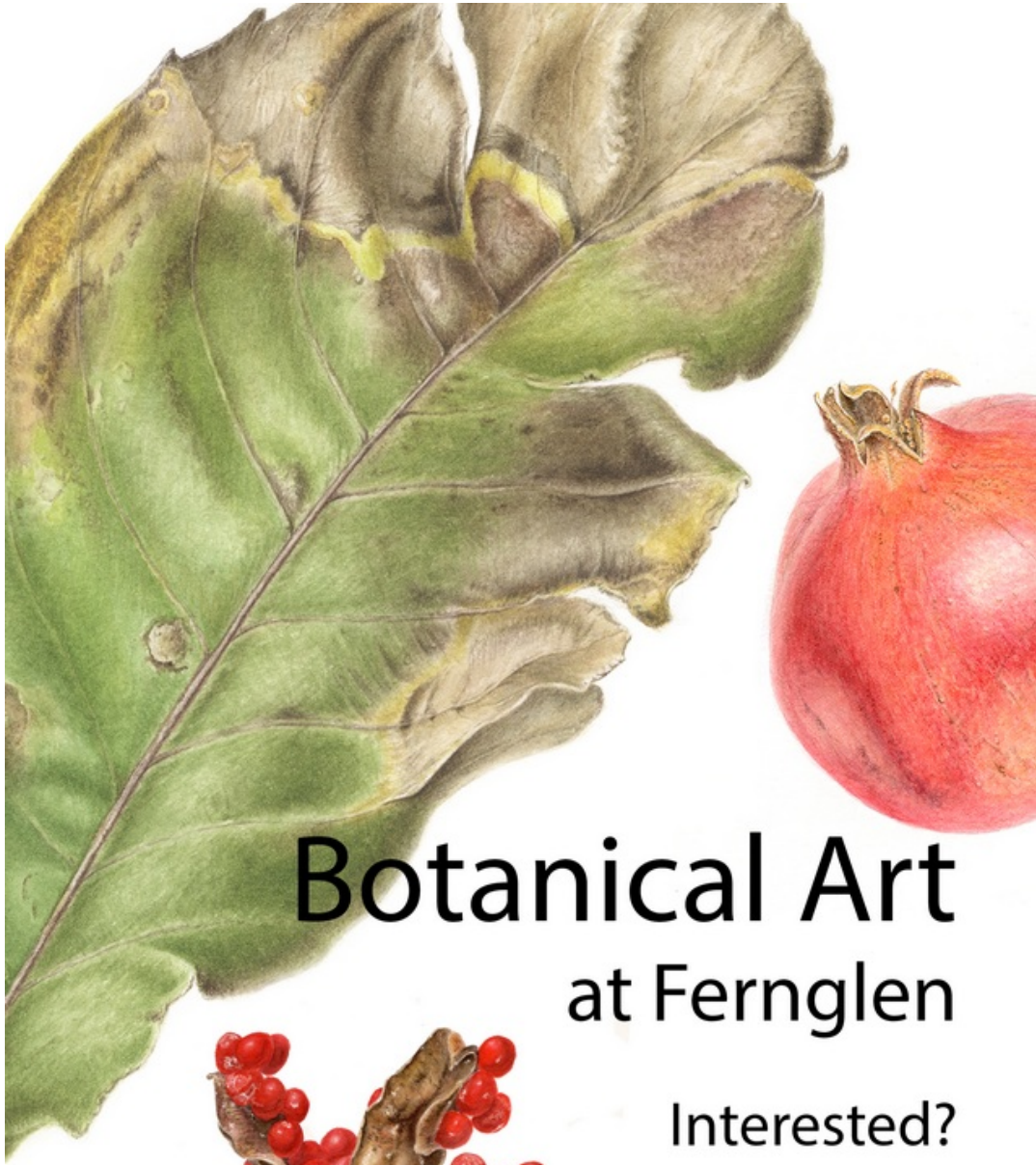
or phone: 021 236 5800

Room hire

The Fernglen Education Room is available for hire at very competitive rates. Please contact us

on email: fernglen.nz@gmail.com

or phone: 021 236 5800



Botanical Art at Fernglen

Interested?

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