

Forest and Bird (Dunedin Branch) Newsletter – June 2003

Annual General Meeting

Please be sure to attend the AGM of Forest and Bird (Dunedin Branch) at the Otago Museum at 7.45 pm on Tuesday 17 June. The meeting will be followed by a talk from John Nunn on beetle diversity in Dunedin.

Chairperson's report

The Branch has had an active and rewarding year. New conservation initiatives have been undertaken and others are being considered. The Branch participated in two meetings of regional branches during the year, the latest one coinciding with the official opening of Otago's first tussock grasslands conservation park, Te Papanui.

Orokonui Sanctuary Project

The Otago Natural History Trust's proposal for a 'mainland island' sanctuary at Orokonui continues to be supported by the Branch. A number of meetings have been held with local residents and interested parties, and working parties have been set up to examine the feasibility of the

project. Much discussion has

centred on the issue of access to the reserve. A projected increase in the volume of traffic along Orokonui Road, the logical entry point, has been of concern to local residents. The Trust is currently having discussions with the developer of a subdivision on the western side of the reserve, where there is potential for an alternative access point that would have fewer adverse effects on existing residents. If a feasibility study for the project has a positive outcome, a major fundraising effort will then be needed to get the project underway.

Kereru project

A financial contribution from the Dr Marjorie Barclay Trust allowed the Branch to support the renovation of a facility at the Dunedin Botanic Gardens to a standard in which injured kereru (New Zealand pigeon) could be kept. The Branch's donation allowed the former propagation facility to be partially roofed, provided with roosts, and planted out in species that kereru feed upon. The facility was needed to allow injured kereru being cared

for by Nik Egerton, a local vet nurse, to regain flight condition and thus enable a 'soft release'. The Deputy Mayor, Dame Elizabeth Hanan, officially opened the facility in March. Kereru seem to like it – the first three released birds flew away together, but were observed sitting on the roof the following day! This project has been the successful outcome of collaboration between Forest and Bird, Dunedin City Council and the Department of Conservation, all working together to provide Nik with a facility in which to further her work. We also hope that researchers from the Zoology Department at the University of Otago will be able to study the fate of released birds and increase our knowledge of the ecology of urban kereru.

Wilding trees

The wilding tree team has had a relatively quiet year, clearly missing the organisational skills and enthusiasm of our co-ordinator, Dave MacFarlane, who was committed to other work for much of the year. We still managed to cut down 3,000 wilding trees, most of these during the annual Environment Southland/DOC Southland wilding tree weekend on Cattle Flat Station near Mid Dome. This was an extremely successful weekend, with four Dunedin Branch

volunteers joining 45 others in cutting down 16,000 trees spread across 145 hectares. This contrasted with a total of only 4,000 trees cut down on 200 ha during the 2001 and 2002 weekends. Dave is now available again to lead the team and we look forward to further progress on wilding tree work in the following year.

Restoration areas around Dunedin

At Caversham Bush, a sizable area needs to be planted with native trees now that the areas of plantation forest have been removed. Dunedin Branch members along with volunteers from the Otago Tree Society have been active in tree planting and weed control exercises here. At the Every Reserve on the Otago Peninsula, work continues on replanting *Coprosma* shrubs and removing large macrocarpa and ngaio. The Every Reserve consultative group (which includes Dunedin Branch) meets frequently to discuss management of this reserve. Ken Mason continues to do sterling work with KCC and Students for Environmental Action to enhance the condition of native vegetation at several sites, including the society-owned Moores Bush in Kaikorai Valley, beech forest remnants in Flagstaff Creek, and coastal plant

communities on Quarantine Island in Otago Harbour.

Otanomomo

In an interesting development, the Department of Conservation has offered Dunedin Branch an initial one year contract to try to eradicate invasive weeds from Otanomomo Scientific Reserve, near Telford Polytechnic on the road between Balclutha and Owaka. The contract also requires protection and enhancement of the small population of a threatened tree, *Olearia hectorii*, which exists at Otanomomo. The forest at Otanomomo is notable for its spectacular canopy of emergent podocarps, but the understorey has suffered considerable invasion of weeds. The Department gained internal funding for a site-led weed project, but local conservation staff are fully committed to other work and have no surplus time. Management committee members recently inspected the reserve, finding a severe infestation of Chilean Flame Creeper, as well as a considerable amount of blackberry and a range of other woody weeds. The Chilean Flame Creeper presents a particular challenge as no practical control method is known for large infestations of this species occurring in native forest. Never the less, the Branch is minded to take up the contract,

as no other contractor appears to be available to do the work, meaning that the funding would lapse and the reserve continue to suffer from the weed effects, as well as provide a seed source for weed invasion of other areas. If taken up, this project will require a significant and sustained effort from volunteers, and we trust that Dunedin and South Otago Branch members will prove willing to assist with restoration of this important lowland forest.

Submissions

The Branch continues to be active in writing submissions and letters regarding conservation issues. We opposed plans to construct a second hide at Sandfly Bay, for exclusive yellow-eyed penguin viewing use by commercial clients, but the Department of Conservation has not yet communicated its decision to us. We have joined Federated Mountain Clubs and Public Access New Zealand in opposing proposals to close public roads near the mouth of the Shag River and will be represented at a hearing on this matter at the end of June. The Branch contributed a detailed submission on the draft management plan for Fiordland's fisheries and marine environment. Submissions have been analysed but a final draft of the plan has not been released. Dunedin Branch

wrote and presented a submission on the DCC's draft TCCP/Annual Plan, in which we argued for protection of conservation values at Mt Watkin, near Waikouaiti, and for Caversham Bush Reserve to be allocated a small amount of funding to allow restoration to proceed.

I would again like to thank all Branch members, as well as members of the management committee, for their support this year. Most of our work simply could not occur without the support of volunteers. Branch members have many opportunities to be involved in local and regional conservation initiatives and we are always keen to hear from members who are willing to contribute to the Branch's projects, or help guide the Branch's direction as members of the management committee. Please don't hesitate to contact either myself or other committee members if you feel you have something to offer.

Kelvin Lloyd, Chairperson.

Kaj Westerskov

An ardent conservationist and renowned ornithologist, Dr Kaj Westerskov, who died in Dunedin in late April, was also a past Chairman of the Otago Branch of Forest and Bird. As Associate

Professor in the Zoology Department at Otago University, Kaj was also a colleague for 21 years, best known for his initiation of the University's Post-graduate Diploma in Wildlife Management. This course persists today and has maintained its popularity as one of the most successful post-graduate diploma courses offered by the University.

Kaj was a keen outdoors man, both hunter and fisher. One of Kaj's early students, Bryce Johnson, now Director of Fish and Game New Zealand, recalled for Kaj's obituary in the *Otago Daily Times* of May 3, that Kaj's work room was decorated with "a rack of deer antlers on the wall, a mounted pheasant, a pair of feathered grouse feet and even a field jacket, hunting hat and shotgun hanging on a hook behind the door."

While his speciality was partridges, Kaj wrote a user-friendly field guide, *Know Your New Zealand Birds*, published by Whitcombe and Tombs in 1967 with copious photographs from his own camera plus 16 superb colour plates from Buller's *Birds of New Zealand*.

Kaj chaired the local Forest and Bird branch for several years in the mid 80's, before I became a

member, but I clearly recall our exchanges when the newly appointed Conservation Director David Collingwood (fresh from leading the campaign for the first of the two failed aluminium smelters, proposed for Aramoana) came to Dunedin to address the Branch. I contacted Kaj during the afternoon of Collingwood's evening talk to the Branch, to indicate my intention to further quiz him on the smelter issue at the talk, only to be told firmly by Kaj that a directive from Forest and Bird Head Office was that the smelter was off the agenda. I indicated that, as a non-member, I could not be constrained by this best endeavour, but Kaj, true to form, tried to quell the issue by having David ring me late afternoon. Despite a vigorous 'phone conversation, I recall raising several aspects of the smelter proposal during discussion time following David's talk. Typically, though Kaj was obviously concerned, I don't recall him exercising a lasting grudge.

It was pleasing to see, and have some time to talk to Kaj and his wife Kirsten at our "Save the Albatross" launch at Taiaroa Heads last December. Kaj's interest and concern for albatross was well known and, in his many visits to the colony he often shared his knowledge, enthusiasm and

concern with tourists and locals alike. Alan Mark.

Lenz Reserve tree-planting

On Saturday 17 May, 35 people representing Dunedin, South Otago and Southland branches of Forest and Bird gathered in brilliant sunshine at the Society's lodge at the Lenz reserve in the Catlins. A special tree-planting ceremony took place, to remember four members of the Lenz Reserve Management Committee who have died over the past year. Trees were planted for Tui Slade and Ronald Ericson of Southland branch, and for Nancy Strang and Helen Barclay of South Otago branch, all of whom made valuable contributions to the management and smooth operation of the Reserve over a number of years. Accompanied by at least half a dozen very active and vocal fantails, guests planted superb specimens of kowhai, rata, rimu and totara, in holes prepared by participants in the Southland branch working bee. To round off the ceremony, visitors enjoyed a relaxed and convivial time over a delicious pot luck afternoon tea in the Lodge. Janet York.

Trip to Kurinui restoration project

On Saturday 24 March, eleven of us visited Scott and Dinah Dunavan's property, Kurinui, 7 km inland from Hampden and just south of the Waianakarua Scenic Reserve. At our first stop we looked across a panoramic scene of gullies and steep bluffs. Scott distributed maps and described some of the history of the area. Until six months ago, the area was grazed by sheep. Possum numbers were very high before a recent Animal Health Board 1080 poisoning operation and the area has pigs and deer - this is traditional North Otago shooting country.

After parking the cars we followed a track from the tussocks and shrubs on the ridge down into a gully of tall kanuka, scattered old broadleaf and marble leaf. Since the exclusion of sheep, natural regeneration is taking place and there is a variety of small seedlings (mahoe, broadleaf, kohuhu, *Myrsine* and kaikomako) in moist hollows along the track. On rocky bluffs, out of sheep reach, *Celmisia hookeri* and *Gingidia montana* are flourishing. The track ends at a ledge, with a spectacular view over the valley where falcons are regularly seen. Janet Ledingham was lucky enough to see a falcon perched just 10m away.

After lunch in the shade, with a view of the hilly north Otago landscape, we set off through a mixture of gorse and kanuka vegetation that is widespread on this 750ha property. In places patches of taller kanuka are beginning to suppress the gorse. Tom tits, fantails and bell birds were seen, but no keruru on this particular day.

The Dunavans are in the process of registering a QEII covenant on the property and the scale of this restoration project is quite inspiring. There is a lot to be done: improving the boundary fences, possum control, and monitoring of *Hieracium lepidulum* and Himalayan honeysuckle. There is the problem of pigs that can't be fenced out, and the worry that banana passion fruit vine, present in Hampden and Moeraki, will be brought in.

But despite the problems, it was fascinating to see Kurinui at this early stage and know that such a large tract of private land in North Otago is now being managed for its conservation values. Thank you to Scott and Dinah for showing us a small part of their splendid project. For more information about Kurinui, see <http://www.kurinui.org.nz>

Moira
Parker.

Branch website

This twice-yearly newsletter is circulated to about 600 branch members. It is edited by Paul Star, Forest and Bird (Dunedin Branch), Box 5793, Dunedin.

Our branch hopes also to create and run its own website soon, for which we need the help of a volunteer with appropriate skills. If you are interested, please contact us.