

A network of volunteers prepared to help maintain
the historic and indigenous natural features of the reserve and adjoining slopes
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Hayward Scenic Reserve



Newsletter No 10

Social Activities: The contributory Xmas BBQ held last December at the home of Leon Ramakers and Alison Sinclair was another highly successful get-together. It provided a good opportunity for long-standing and new members of our group to get better acquainted while enjoying some good food and wine. We are indeed grateful to Leon & Alison for once again being such excellent hosts.

What Our Volunteers Do: The range of tasks undertaken by members of our group varies greatly. Much continues to be achieved by individuals, operating either on their own or in partnership, pursuing the “adopt a track” approach to routine track maintenance, a system which we introduced from the outset of our group’s formation. Tasks beyond the capabilities of these individuals to tackle are dealt with by arranging working bees drawn from the wider membership. In addition, we have individuals who regularly undertake recreational activities in the reserve and who contribute by always looking out for and reporting the precise whereabouts of any problems such as storm damage, slips, nasty weed infestations, etc, which warrant action on the part of either our group or HCC. Other individuals are happy to undertake animal pest control by monitoring and rebaiting where necessary a range of traps and poison bait stations. Then there are those who, when walking in the reserve, choose to carry a plastic bag and a suitable small hand-tool, pausing from time to time to carefully prise out and remove any snakefeather and other pest plant seedlings within easy reach of the track they are traversing – every little does count in the long term! Others are happy to collect suitable local native plant seedlings, pot these at home and nurture them to a size suitable for eventual planting out in the reserve, thus augmenting and diversifying the natural bush regeneration gradually taking place up there. Last but not least, in this electronic age, there is the vital contribution by our webmaster, James Cross. So there are certainly plenty of ways in which people can contribute in helping our group to preserve and enhance the natural and recreational features of the Hayward Scenic Reserve and adjoining slopes.

Working Bees: Experience to date has shown that a great deal can be accomplished in a few hours by a small group working together as a team. On track maintenance projects, having 6-8 dedicated participants has proved to be most effective. On a recent young pest plant removal working bee, a team of 10-12 proved an optimum number to deploy. A similar number on today’s (13 June) tree planting working bee exceeded our best expectations by carrying uphill and successfully planting out 70 young natives in just over one hour. The good sized high quality young trees, comprising six species very well suited for the site, were supplied by HCC.

Track maintenance working bees have been scheduled for the following dates for the balance of this year:

Sunday	11 July	1.00-4.00pm
Saturday	14 August	1.00-4.00pm
Sunday	19 September	1.00-4.00pm
Sunday	17 October	10.00am-12 noon
Saturday	20 November	1.00-4.00pm

If you have not already done so, please note these dates on your calendar or in your diary. Given the need for some flexibility since the schedule was originally compiled early in the year, full details of the tasks and the meeting places will be circulated later. In addition, circumstances may well arise which require us to call additional working bees at fairly short notice.

Track News: *Rewarewa Track* – This track has really been underappreciated by reserve visitors for many years. An off-putting factor was the difficulty some users experienced in negotiating the often slippery cut-clay steps near the junction with the Te Whiti firebreak. Last year this problem was overcome by HCC totally reconstructing the steps, using wooden facings and lots of gravel. HCC has recently assumed full responsibility for the maintenance of the full length of the Rewarewa Track. Our thanks to Barbara de St Croix, Pam Mayston, and more recently Bill Trompeter, for looking after this track so well prior to the HCC takeover. The other tracks in the reserve which HCC maintains are the main route between Whites Line East and the hilltop (Lomaria, Ngapunga and Konini Saddle Tracks), and the Hayward Track linking Whites Line East with Mawson Street.

Hayward Track – The part of this track between the Tyndall Creek crossing and Mawson Ridge has had a steep, narrow, pine-needle strewn zigzag section the condition of which is well below the standard which HCC has now set for its main walking tracks in bush reserves. During last December/January a contractor did an excellent job in re-routing the bottom half of this zigzag section. We now have a wider, gently climbing track traversing mainly through native bush. This re-routing has also largely overcome privacy concerns expressed by the current owner of the historic Hayward family homestead. Decisions have yet to be made about when and how best to deal with the deficiencies of the top half of this zigzag section.

Old Farm Track – This relatively newly found track, with its greatly improved access to Griffins Ridge, is proving invaluable to the various workers engaged in pest plant control in the Mawson catchment area. It is also being increasingly appreciated by recreational walkers. The awesome vista that suddenly bursts into view not far from the beginning makes venturing along this track well worth the effort. A recent working bee made significant improvements, but there is still scope for further “fine tuning” such as a few timber-faced steps and surface grading to facilitate stormwater run-off.

Northern Rata: This showy species put on a great display last December, enabling the location of the mature trees to be readily seen. Hopefully there will have been a natural dispersal of seeds that, in the continued absence of possum browsing, will result in more of this desirable species emerging along the eastern hills in the future. Last spring, our group planted out 14 good sized young rata trees provided by HCC. Thanks to ample rainfall during the early summer, these are all now thriving.

Snakefeather: Our group has long maintained that the dense, above head-height infestation up along and to the north of Griffins Ridge is the major source of snakefeather berries eaten by birds, giving rise to on-going widespread dispersal of the seeds of this nasty pest plant. In past years, inability to get an adequate water supply up to that level, coupled with access difficulties, has virtually ruled out getting professional contractors to spray herbicide in this area. Consequently, the limited funding available for snakefeather control was fully utilised, generally with good effect, on more easily accessed infestations at lower level. However, late last year, to overcome the high level water supply problem, a farm type tank was installed on the old Mawson firebreak just above the top of Griffins Ridge, enabling hose lines to gravity feed water needed for effective herbicide spraying. Sadly, despite this new water supply facility, HCC was unsuccessful in negotiating a fixed price contract to spray the dense, high level snakefeather infestation during this late summer/ early autumn season. Nevertheless, during the recent autumn months a great deal of preparatory work has been done up there by a well led group of young men employed by GWRC under a Government subsidised scheme called CommunityMax. Using the Griffins Ridge and Mawson Catchment Tracks as access, they have cut many channels into the heavily infested areas, cutting off the snakefeather vines at about chest or face height, then unwinding and placing the lower foliage on the ground ready for spraying. This labour intensive method ensures that, when strong growth resumes next spring, there will be ample foliage near ground level to absorb a “killer” dose of herbicide, while avoiding or at least minimising damage to any spray sensitive host plants. Springtime spraying before the berries form should also reduce future seed dispersal by birds. We look forward to witnessing the effectiveness of this control method later this year.

For a number of years several of our members have made a point of prising out snakefeather seedlings, being careful to ensure the crown is removed intact. Some members have also engaged in manually removing the crowns of more mature plants, a time consuming task that can be effectively carried out where the ground is crumbly. A decade or more ago, having been told by GWRC that snakefeather was considered second only to Old Man's Beard as a pest plant threat in the Wellington region, some of us with garden type pump sprayers used herbicides supplied to me by GWRC ("Banvine") and HCC ("Roundup" and "Pulse" penetrant) to spray clumps that were taking hold on reserve land above the Mawson St properties. So late last year, during discussions within our group, it seemed appropriate to decide that we should now undertake some snakefeather spraying elsewhere in the reserve to augment HCC's intended full commitment of its limited financial resources to high level spraying above Mawson St. We were aware of a large and steadily expanding infestation off part of the Rewarewa Track and chose this as the best area to work on, especially as some members were already attempting control here by painstaking manual removal. We knew that spraying with a "Roundup/Pulse" mixture effectively killed snakefeather, but because these name brands are expensive and costs of this undertaking were to be borne by members personally, we decided to trial the effectiveness of cheaper equivalent active chemicals. While the trial spraying which we did on 31 January successfully achieved all our objectives, it got us very much offside with the authorities. We were quite surprised to learn that our actions were illegal. Unbeknown to us, the rules applying to the use of herbicides on public land have been quite drastically tightened since the days when the authorities were happy to freely provide volunteers like me with spray materials. I'm pleased to say a subsequent meeting with key HCC officers duly cleared the air and a means devised whereby some members of our group can quite legally assist with snakefeather spraying in the future.

Other Pest Plants: The chain sawing contractors have been back recently, felling wattles and other unwanted exotic trees they missed last year. A sizeable flowering Old Man's Beard infestation which we reported growing among the felled wattle debris near the start of the Mawson Ridge Track has been promptly dealt with by a professional. Several large banana passionfruit infestations have been reported for attention by HCC's contractor. Also, group members are constantly pulling out young banana passionfruit vines which are emerging all over the place as seeds long dormant in the ground finally germinate once suitable conditions arise. Japanese honeysuckle is rampant along the Old Farm Track. Boneseed is a problem by the bottom of the zigzag section of the Hayward Track above the historic Hayward family homestead. A working bee has successfully dealt with the Montpellier broom along part of the Dry Creek Zigzag Track. We want as many of our members as possible to be able to recognise all these pest plants, both in their mature form and in their seedling and juvenile stages.

Animal Pests: In the absence of reports of possums being back in the reserve, it does seem that reinfestation has yet to occur following past intensive control measures. Rats currently pose the biggest animal pest menace to native birdlife, followed closely by stoats and feral cats. I would like to hear from anyone prepared to join the fight against these pests.

Personal: One of the keenest participants in several of our working bees, Jennifer Vinton, has had the misfortune to become the victim of a very nasty freak road accident recently. While waiting on the side of SH2 to be picked up by a friend, a hook on a passing gravel truck & trailer unit caught on the backpack she was wearing, dragging her along the road for a bit, causing her left arm to be run over by a wheel of the trailer. She is recovering well in Hutt Hospital after 2 operations involving hours of surgery. Her recovery will take some months and, sadly, she may not regain full use of her left arm. While we will greatly miss her enthusiasm during forthcoming working bees, we know she will continue to be a strong supporter of what our group strives to achieve and we look forward to seeing her out and about again in due course.