

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

Coordinator: Russ McStay, 37 Mawson Street, Waiwhetu
Phone: 569-2915
E-mail: r.mcstay@hyper.net.nz

Newsletter No 3



**Hayward
Scenic
Reserve**



Snakefeather Spraying: Those of you who haven't walked the Hayward Track between Whites Line East and Mawson Street recently have missed a heart warming sight – the brilliant autumn yellow of dying snakefeather on the heavily infested slopes between Mawson Ridge and the Tyndall Creek crossing. The yellow is now turning to the traditional dull brown of dead vegetation. Thanks to limited funding made available from HCC's volunteer budget, Target Pest was contracted to spray this area just prior to Xmas, to effect a kill before the annual crop of berries became attractive to the birds who traditionally feed on them and spread this plant pest further afield. Target Pest intend to do a "catch up" spray for missed plants over the same area. There may even be a little funding left to treat some infestations elsewhere this season.

The really good news is that this is the start of an on-going program to target this nasty pest plant in the Hayward Reserve and adjoining slopes. Greater Wellington Regional Council Environment Division has decided to bring the reserve into the Waiwhetu Stream Working Group effort, and will be allocating \$5,000 a year from 1 July 2006 for HCC and our Friends group to spend on "catchment restoration and maintenance" i.e. pest control contracts, plants, or anything that helps protect the stream catchments on the steep hillsides in our area. In the future, HCC also hopes that some funding from its pest control budget can be made available for controlling snakefeather on the eastern hills. These initiatives are most welcome and timely if the gradual northwards spread of this pest plant is to be halted. I regret to report that it has already reached the Mission Street catchment - Vera Johnstone, a supporter of the Friends group who lives at the head of Chanel Grove, tells me she has been regularly been pulling out seedlings on her property which adjoins the bushland there.

Weed Mapping: HCC has engaged Robert Ashe as a "paid volunteer" to co-ordinate, assisted by volunteers from the Friends group, the mapping of weed infestations in the reserve area. The objective is to determine where contactors should be directed to work if the best possible outcome is to be achieved from spending the limited funding available for pest plant control. Initially, the focus will be on only 5 pest plant species – snakefeather, banana passionfruit, Japanese honeysuckle, prickly Moses wattle, and wilding pines. Would those of you willing to help with this rewarding task in the coming weeks please contact me.

Website: Thanks to the endeavours and generosity of James Cross from Hayward Terrace (who together with his wife Sarah have joined the Friends group), we now have our own website. The address is <http://www.waiwhetu.org>. James would like to receive photos, particularly of points of interest along the tracks. The site contains the track map and track description data. James plans to make it so that visitors to the website can click on the map to view details of each track.

Steps at Tyndall Creek Crossing: Ever since this part of the Hayward Track got washed away in the February 2004 storm, getting down from the south side to cross the now rubble strewn creek bed has been an awkward scramble for many track users, particularly family groups. Some months ago, HCC agreed to have a set of steps installed at this point. I am pleased to now report that Excell plans to install the new steps by the end of January.

Xmas BBQ: On the evening of 15 December I was pleased to be able to host at my home the first ever get-together of members of the Friends group. With HCC's Rosie Doole and Robert Ashe also there, this was a most enjoyable and successful gathering, enabling a range of people with a common interest in the well-being of the reserve to exchange views and get to know one another better. Our thanks to Rosie for providing most of the food and to Robert for his cooking skills on the BBQ. Calm mild weather and nice wine contributed to the enjoyment of the night.

Snail Survey: Recently a retired taxonomist, David Roscoe, has been sampling in our reserve as part of an on-going project to provide a manual with colour photos of each of the snail species present. He expected his sampling would produce about 8-10 different species, in line with the results from sampling in other small reserves elsewhere in the Hutt Valley and Wellington. The extractions from the 14 samples taken to date from our reserve have so far produced an unexpectedly stunning array of snail species. The number of species per sample ranged from 9-30, averaging just over 20 species per lot. The total number of different species counted so far is 58, several being encountered in nearly every sample, but most occurring only in patches here and there. Oddly, only one introduced species (the common garden snail) has been found, and that was encountered only by the Mawson Street entrance close to houses. The complete absence of slugs is another unusual feature of the survey. Clearly our reserve is of scientific interest, being specially rich in land snails and probably also in respect of beetles, worms and other invertebrates.

Possum numbers down: I have been trapping possums in the Mawson catchment area now for over a decade. Over recent months I have been catching only about one a month from 8 traps. This very low catch rate may well be proof of the effectiveness of the bait station lines now being maintained all through Parkway and up to the ridge.

Adopt a track: Don Millward from Mission Street has volunteered to monitor and undertake routine maintenance on the Whites Gully and Tyndall Ridge tracks. I am prepared to do the same in respect of the Mawson Ridge Track, the McStay Track, and (as I have done for many years) the Hayward Track between the Mawson Street entrance and the Mawson Ridge crest. I invite other members of the group to adopt one or more of the other tracks in our area of interest. The obligations you would be taking on in doing so are not terribly onerous. First, it entails monitoring track conditions by walking its full length at intervals no greater than 4-6 weeks. Secondly, you should take with you a pair of leather or other protective gardening gloves, a pair of secateurs and also a small pruning saw (folding type is most convenient), enabling you to trim back encroaching vegetation and to deal with any light windfalls lying on or across the track. Finally, you should let me know immediately whenever you encounter a track maintenance problem beyond your capabilities to deal with. Trellisick Park in the Ngaio Gorge is one reserve area where a volunteer group using the "adopt a track" system has helped to ensure that routine track maintenance is regularly undertaken. I look forward to hearing from you.

Birdlife: A native falcon appears to have taken up residence somewhere in our reserve. I have seen it several times over recent months in the Mawson Street area and also just recently above Mission Street. This species is known to be breeding in the East Harbour Regional Park. On a sadder note, I would like to know of any recent sightings of bellbirds in our reserve. According to a Forest & Bird expert this beautiful native species is now considered virtually extinct throughout much of the Wellington region outside the Karori Sanctuary. Virtual extinction is the term used when a species can no longer reproduce because the females have been wiped out due to predation by pests such as stoats, rats and cats, leaving a dwindling number of males destined to never find a partner to mate with.

I welcome any suggestions you may have for improving our reserve.

Russ McStay

18 January 2006