

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 7

Apology: I very much regret not producing a newsletter since June last year. As I advised in Newsletter No. 6, major health problems would render my usefulness to the group to virtually nil for quite some time. How true that advice was! A hemi-colectomy followed by 5 months of adjuvant chemotherapy did successfully deal with the cancer. Then lumbar spinal decompression surgery this past June did correct my loss of leg control due to stenosis. Next, after I began a programme of increased walking to recover from spinal surgery, I experienced discomfort from what turned out to be groin hernia. So finally in August I underwent open surgery to repair this. I'm now picking up the threads of normal life again – first, getting the garden in order and, yes, I have so far twice ventured back up into the reserve after an absence of more than 18 months. These visits have been a reality check - when climbing uphill, I discovered just how unfit a 78 year old I have now become!

Thanks Fellow Friends: I wish to record my gratitude to all of you who have continued to work in our reserve to protect and enhance its unique features. Your endeavours coupled with the website maintained by James Cross have resulted in greatly increased awareness and appreciation of the reserve, subsequently leading to visits organised by groups such as the Botanical Society, Forest & Bird, and Tramping Clubs. In particular, I must thank Alison Sinclair and Leon Ramakers for stepping in to provide a leadership role whenever required. Special thanks too to Barbara de ste Croix for her constant dedication, particularly in raising, planting out and subsequent care of young natives. I must also mention Don Millward's unique contribution. He attended an all-day training course on safe herbicide spraying and is now qualified to undertake this work in the reserve. As well, until undergoing knee replacement surgery recently, he was making weekly visits to the reserve (despite increasing knee discomfort) tending to stoat and rat trap tunnels and poison bait stations. He has either telephoned or come to see me after each visit to keep me informed not only of the pest management results, but also of track conditions, storm damage, and activities of others encountered by him while there.

Council Support: I would be remiss in not acknowledging the excellent support our group continues to receive from Rosie Doole. She has been a hands-on participant in working parties. When problems are reported she liaises effectively with Council contractors, and she follows up to check results. I'm sure her representations to management at both HCC and GWRC have been a factor in officialdom giving the reserve over recent years increasingly greater recognition as a community asset. In this regard, when I walked recently from Mawson St to Whites Line East, I was delighted to see how well HCC's contractor, Excell Corporation, has maintained and improved the Hayward Track, making it much more user-friendly for family groups and inexperienced bushwalkers.

Pest Plants ▪ Snakefeather: \$5,000 has been made available from GWRC's Waiwhetu Catchment Fund to follow up last summer's successful snakefeather spraying programme. For at least 2 decades, this pest plant has dominated the slopes alongside the zigzag section of the Hayward Track between Mawson Ridge and the Tyndall Catchment. Its total absence from this area today is a dramatic change which really impressed me on my recent walk. However, there are serious logistical problems to overcome if we are to see similar success achieved in tackling the massive infestations at higher levels, such as Griffins Ridge. Until berries from that source are no longer available to birds,

we volunteers must continue to deal each year with a new crop of seedlings in areas we have previously cleared.

On Friday 27 June, under arrangements made by Volunteers Wellington, 5 staff members from Price Waterhouse Coopers accompanied by Rosie Doole, Alison Sinclair, Leon Ramakers, Don Millward and Robert Ashe's partner Babs, manually cleared a large infestation of snakefeather on a sloping area accessed from the Mawson Catchment Track. Working from 9.00am – 3.00pm, they brought down for safe disposal 15 large bags of root sections, seedlings and small plants. Large piles of green foliage from mature plants were left up in the bush to safely rot away. The corporate volunteers all worked hard, but still enjoyed their day out of the office spent on this unique conservation activity. Hopefully, we will see more corporate volunteer groups opting to undertake similar work in our reserve in the future.

▪ **Prickly Moses:** Some time ago now, GWRC's Pedro Jensen organised the felling the Prickly Moses acacia (wattle) trees, the most noticeable infestations of which were in areas around the Tyndall Catchment to Mawson Ridge section of the Hayward Track. The work was actually carried out by Excell Corporation. Pedro intends to follow up on that work next year by felling the other acacia species (of which I know there are at least two). This work may be extended to adjoining private land if budget allows and neighbours are agreeable. Meantime I would point out that seedlings and small plants of the wattle species are fairly easily pulled out of the ground. We can all help by learning to recognise these and pulling out any we may encounter when walking in the reserve.

▪ **Boneseed:** Following the felling of Prickly Moses coupled with snakefeather clearance, the area around the bottom of the Tyndall – Mawson Ridge zigzag now has ample light for other sun loving species to grow. On my recent walk I noticed several young boneseed plants that had grown from seeds germinated by the more favourable conditions. I pulled out those I could reach from the track, but had to leave about 3 growing in the area above the track just before the left turn upwards at the foot of the zigzag – an attack of wobbly knees sapped my off-track confidence! Please yank these out should you recognise this pest plant growing there.

▪ **Banana Passionfruit (BP) & Japanese Honeysuckle:** In the same area where I pulled out young boneseed plants, I also removed several little BP seedlings. BP seeds remain viable in the ground for many years and germinate promptly when finally exposed to bright enough light. So please be on the lookout for this nasty pest emerging in recently opened up areas. We can arrange for an HCC contractor to deal with any BP vine too large to be totally pulled out by hand. In this regard, HCC's contractor is dealing with a very large infestation of Japanese honeysuckle combined with BP close to the Mawson Catchment Track.

Social Activities: On Saturday 7 June a pot-luck dinner was held at the home of Leon Ramakers and Alison Sinclair. Ample good food and wine were thoroughly enjoyed by all who participated. Given my inability at that time to venture into the reserve, I certainly appreciated the opportunity to chat first hand with active members of our group. Of special interest to those present was material brought by Rosie Doole outlining a proposal to HCC from local mountain biking enthusiasts to create a challenging mountain biking track across the Hutt Valley side of Towai above our reserve, descending to Te Whiti Park via a newly created zigzag trail north of the Te Whiti firebreak. Views expressed by group members at the dinner were generally supportive of the concept.

Native Birdlife: Bellbirds (*Korimako*) have been seen in groups of 3 in the kahikatea stands where the mountain biking facility is being developed by volunteers on the Wainuiomata side of Towai. So I would once again ask you to be on the lookout for the sight and sound of bellbirds in our reserve and record any sightings in the group's website. As I reported earlier by email, a pair of native falcons (*Karearea*) was sighted recently in a tree behind Brian Shearer's home in Mawson St. Tuis and wood pigeons (*Kereru*) seem more plentiful in and adjacent to the reserve this spring, possibly attributable in part to GWRC's very successful most recent crackdown on possums. People residing close to bushy hillsides are reporting that they are once again frequently hearing the call of morepork (*Ruru*) during

the night. Fantails (*Piwakawaka*) continue to appear numerous. During the past winter months, hordes of waxeyes (*Tauhou*) were attracted to my front garden where I had placed in a large deciduous tree a bowl of brown-sugar/water solution and also dripping suspended in a polypropylene mesh bag.

Mawson Firebreak: While felling Prickly Moses trees, the contractor was most surprised at the number of people he observed using this firebreak as a route, both up and down, despite its steepness. That the firebreak is being allowed to grow over is now increasingly obvious. The upper section of the firebreak has been part of the popular route up to and down from the telecoms masts via Griffins Ridge Track. We now need to consider the future of this latter route – should it be maintained and, if so, in what form? I would welcome comment from users. If this route is ultimately lost by overgrowth, the only more-or-less direct way up to or down from that wonderful viewing point will be via Leightons Gully Track.

Maintenance of Benched Tracks: Much of the track network in the reserve sidles across sloping ground and is there of benched formation – i.e. with a bit of a bank cut into the slope on one side. Over time, leaf litter, silt and crumbling ground accumulates sufficient material at the base of the bank to support the growth of vegetation (sometimes even pest plants). As this accumulation increases, track users tend to walk further out from the bank, getting closer to and eventually treading right on the outer edge of the track, wearing this down in the process. Thus, gradually, a new trail is formed at a level a little lower than the original historic bench formation. I see this has happened on a few parts of the Hayward Track. The network in the reserve is historic and we volunteers (and I suggest also HCC's contractors) have a duty to preserve the original benched formation wherever possible. I therefore urge all of you to regularly clear out any material that has accumulated at the base of banks on benched sections of tracks you look after.

Updating Named Track Descriptions: Data on the group's website includes a detailed description of each named track. A copy of this information is being emailed separately to group members. It is unlikely that I will be able to walk all of the named tracks in the foreseeable future to check whether the information posted there is still accurate. Therefore, I would appreciate members reviewing the existing descriptions of tracks they are currently familiar with and suggesting any updating they think should be made.

Beech Forest: In the native forest which originally covered the eastern hills of the Hutt Valley beech was the dominant species which clothed the drier slopes. The Hayward Track passes through a remnant section of this original forest cover behind homes accessed from the south side of Whites Line East. There is another, smaller remnant section on private land above Mawson St. Sadly, when mature beech forest is opened up by either storm damage or property development, a slow but steady decline sets in. One by one, old trees at the newly formed forest edge gradually decline in health and eventually die. In the 25 years I have lived in Mawson St, I have witnessed this decline taking place here. Fortunately, seed from healthy mature trees has germinated and there are sufficient young beech trees coming on to provide reasonable succession. Such succession does not appear to be occurring in the larger remnant section above Whites Line East where mature trees in poor health close to homes have had to be removed for safety reasons. Young beech trees are conspicuous by their absence there. Gathering beech seedlings from elsewhere in the region and raising these to planting out size could be the only way to ensure succession does occur in this bit of historic beech forest.

Supplementary Native Tree Planting: In the months ahead ground in most parts of the reserve will become gradually drier, making any planting out of natives prior to winter next year somewhat risky. But what we can do meantime is identify and prepare sites where supplementary planting would be beneficial. Potential surely exists where snakefeather has been eliminated and Prickly Moses felled. Also, on Mawson Ridge where 2 large pine trees have been felled, there is newly exposed open ground where regeneration warrants some assistance in the form of planting out suitable native species.

Personal: We have lost Greg Young from our active volunteer ranks. He and his family have moved to Hawkes Bay and we wish them well in their new life there. Greg looked after the Mawson Ridge Track.

Kathy Hey (kathyhey@xtra.co.nz) sent me an email recently from her home in Tauranga to say a special thanks to our group for having such an interesting and informative website. Kathy is the daughter of the late Orlando Dryden mentioned in the website's History Section. He was a keen conservationist who spent endless hours working in the reserve. Ron Jarden used to refer to Orlando as "the Squire". The reserve was Kathy's childhood playground.

Russ McStay
21 October 2008