



Dolbel Reserve in Taradale is named after Philip and Richard Dolbel, brothers who emigrated to New Zealand from Jersey (Channel Islands) in 1855. They ran a general store in Clive and had interests in a dairy company, lime works and brick works. They bought Springfield Station in 1865 and later Redclyffe Station and farmed both in partnership. The Dolbel family sold Redclyffe Station in 1971 and it was subdivided into several smaller parcels of land, one of which later became Dolbel Reserve.



In 1992, a partnership between the Napier City Council and the Rotary Club of Taradale saw commencement of tree planting. In 2005, the Rotary Club of Greenmeadows joined the partnership and developed the Colenso Block and Bell Block on the southern slopes.

Members of the public were invited to donate a native tree in memory of a loved one to establish a memorial planting and this proved to be a very popular fundraising initiative. Over the years, the reserve has been very well planted through various community efforts and there are now around 13,000 trees, primarily natives. Last year alone the Rotary Club of Taradale planted 1,500 trees, most of which were propagated and raised by its volunteers. There are plantings of exotic and native trees and shrubs on the lower slopes while the upper grass slopes are periodically grazed by sheep. Weekly working bees keep volunteers active.

In July 2003, the entrance to the 18 hectare reserve was greatly enhanced with the official opening of the Dolbel Memorial Gates. The \$51,455 cost was funded by community donations, with gifts of \$20,000 from the Rotary Club of Taradale and \$10,000 from the Dolbel family being the two largest contributions. Plaques on the gates acknowledge the support.



During the past twenty-odd years, a network of over 10 kilometers of walking tracks has been created and the reserve has become a favourite place to exercise for locals and visitors alike. Donated memorial seats and seats and tables constructed by the club are strategically located along the track system, so it is a lovely place to visit and pause for a coffee or a picnic.

The 360° panoramic views from the top of the reserve, overlooking Taradale and stretching as far as Mahia and Cape Kidnappers, Te Mata Peak and back to the ranges are absolutely spectacular and well worth the effort needed to get there. I know this because I took the photo!

Parking is available close to both the Dolbel Street and Trigg Crescent entrances. For information on other family-friendly reserves, check out the local councils' websites.

Thanks to Robert McCaw from the Rotary Club of Taradale for his lovely photos.



CONSERVATION CHAMPION

Roger Alexander, QSM, owner of Bridgewater, the lovely property with the attractive 4 hectare wildlife lake you pass as you enter Puketapu village from Taradale, is a great grandson of pioneer, Richard Dolbel. He is a retired farmer, farm forester and conservationist.

Roger was awarded the Queen's Service Medal last year for services to conservation and community. The citation records that 'he purchased the swamp area on the edge of the village of Puketapu in 1978 and undertook 30 years of dedicated work to solve the drainage and flooding issues of the swamp to create Lake Puketapu'. And what a triumph it is. Roger thought that Puketapu deserved better – and delivered.



When you have a vision and are lucky enough to have the ability (which Roger has in spades) together with the finances to bring your vision to fruition, anything is possible. The 250 hectare property now boasts a wildlife lake which must surely rate as one of the most picturesque private lakes and efficient wetlands in the province. Like many worthwhile projects, it wasn't easy and it took time.



The swamp circa 1960

Starting in 1983, contractors using grunty D8 caterpillar earth-moving machines equipped with winches, pulled out hundreds of 'basket' willows from the swamp and removed thousands of raupo and rushes along with countless tons of mud. Five man-made islands were created and planted in aquatic vegetation such as flaxes and pampas, along with taxodium and nyssa sylvatica trees, whose roots act as giant sponges, soaking up undesirable nutrients. Birdlife soon started to thrive and breed on the predator-free islands.

While Roger may be modest about his achievements, it is clear that the spectacular end result came about because of his extensive knowledge of trees and the fact that he put great thought into the planting programme, choosing the right specimen for the right conditions. Each tree and plant has a purpose and was specifically chosen to handle different growing conditions, be it moisture, wet feet or clay. What had been a 'smelly eyesore' and a 'dead swamp' for decades now discharges clean water into the Tutaekuri river.



Not content with creating one beautiful lake, Roger's next project was to use Claude Monet's impressionist paintings as inspiration to transform a second swampy area closer to the house into the Monet Lake, complete with bridge, lilies and resident, hand-reared swan Mr Mistoffelees. It is simply stunning. Funds are raised for Cranford Hospice when garden clubs and overseas visitors pay a nominal entry fee to see the Alexander's landscaping masterpiece for themselves.

Every autumn, Roger and Diane share their beautiful property with the community to raise funds for good causes. The hugely popular Puketapu Fair has raised tens of thousands of dollars for the Rotary Club of Taradale, the local church and Puketapu School. Principal, Chris Fox, said that Roger is a wonderful friend of the school and is at the heart of the great community. He gives his advice feely, shares his knowledge and wisdom unreservedly, seeks opportunities to improve the lives of others frequently and shows integrity in all that he does - a real role model.



PICTURE PERFECT

Amateur photographer, Kirsteen Redwood from Napier sent me this lovely shot of a South Island saddleback taking a dip at Motuara Island, a scenic, predator-free wildlife sanctuary in Queen Charlotte Sound.

About the size of a blackbird, the birds are conspicuous and easily observed in regenerating scrub, forests and coastal woodlands. Originally plentiful and widespread when Europeans first discovered New Zealand, its conservation status is now 'recovering'.



100 years ago, as a result of introduced predatory mammals, such as ship-rats and stoats, the birds declined in numbers to a single population on Taranga (Hen Island), off Northland's east coast.

However, a series of successful translocations was initiated by the New Zealand Wildlife Service in the 1960's and there are now fifteen island populations and five at predator-fenced mainland sites, including Cape Sanctuary, here in Hawke's Bay. Estimates suggest that around 500 saddlebacks live on Hen Island and that there are at least 7,000 nationwide... another conservation success story.

BIRDS ON COINS



The reverse side of the \$2 coin features the rare white heron (kōtuku). With a conservation rating of 'Nationally Critical', the bird is well-loved by New Zealanders but is rarely seen except by those who specifically seek it out. Its sole New Zealand breeding site is near Okarito Lagoon in Westland, where about thirty pairs nest. This site is well-known and also well-protected, but elsewhere it is 'He kotuku rerenga tahi' or the bird of single flight, implying something seen perhaps once in a lifetime. Nationwide, there are 150 - 200 birds.



Photo courtesy of Chris Helliwell



Kōtuku had mythical status for Māori because of their rarity and beauty.



In June, the SPCA launched a brand-new series of Learn-to-Read Storybooks to help Kiwi children learn vital lessons about wildlife and animal welfare. Over the past four years, 156,000 copies of these storybooks have been enjoyed in over 2,000 primary schools nationwide. After the success of the first two collections, SPCA's new series focuses on the care and wellbeing of wildlife.



CEO Andrea Midgen says, "When children care about animals, they are more likely to want to protect them and the planet we all share". What a great initiative.

78,000 copies of these books were sent to every primary school in New Zealand – free of charge. Each school received 36 copies of the new series; six sets each, which are funded by donations and community grants. Check out: <https://kids.spcaeducation.org.nz/animal-care/wildlife/>



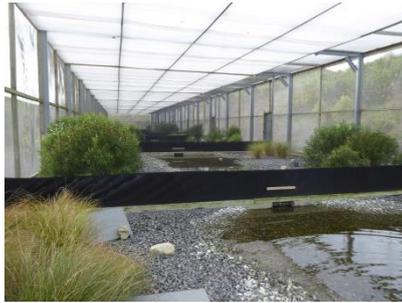
Plant and they will come. August and September are great months to plant trees and shrubs and putting in well-chosen plants will attract birds. Gardening expert, Gillian Thrum from Green Door Garden Centre and Decor told me that, during a recent lunchtime at home, she saw a tui, bellbird and wood pigeon in the low-growing, native kowhai, Sophora Dragons Gold. Gillian's other top tips are:- Banksia Integrifolia (Coastal Banksia), Grevillea Robin Hood, Prunus Campanula Superba (Taiwan Cherry), Phormium Green Dwarf (Flax), Callistemon (Bottle Brush), Coprosma, Titoki and Pohutakawa.



I was privileged to be given a private viewing of the Kotahi Aviary which is part of Cape Sanctuary but located on private farmland nearby. Funding for the costly programme comes mainly from the Lowe family with generous support from major sponsor Kotahi Global Freight Solutions, hence the name, and also from DOC.



Manager, Rachel Ward, told me that the very impressive 80 m x 10 m aviary was purpose-built two years ago, with huge volunteer input, to become one of only three sites in New Zealand where conservationists, dedicated to building up the population of the rare native shore plover, are breeding them in captivity. The other two are the Isaac Conservation and Wildlife Trust in Christchurch and Pūkaha National Wildlife Centre at Mount Bruce. Currently, there are eight of the birds which have a DOC rating of 'nationally critical' in residence.



The interior of the aviary is amazing. It is divided into eight separate areas, with free-flowing water from the adjacent Maraetotara River pumped through the centre, has nesting boxes and appropriate plants.

With only 250 shore plovers in the country and a limited genetic pool, the Shore Plover Recovery Group, made up of technical experts, DOC and vets from Massey University, ensures that the captive birds are highly managed to spread the limited genes around.

Nothing is left to chance, with the birds fed a special, carefully weighed and freshly made up formula daily (twice daily during summer to keep the food fresh). The Massey-recommended diet consists of mashed-up veterinary grade cat biscuits, Wombaroo insectivore, ox heart and shore plover mineral mix including selenium, softened to a slurry with water. As a treat and enrichment, they also each get five high fat/high protein meal worms daily. Exactly 40 grams of food is offered with leftovers measured the next day to provide an accurate record of the previous day's intake.



Rachel weighs the food carefully



The food is placed in a shallow bowl filled with salt water, as walking through this keeps the seabirds' feet healthy. Using binoculars, staff, (or volunteers) carry out a daily visual health-check of each bird, starting at the top... eyes, nares (bird nostrils), beak, feathers, chest, feet and vent (rear end) as well as observing normal movement.



Fun Fact: Releases around mainland New Zealand have shown that shore plovers are strong fliers. One released on Mana Island was seen at Plimmerton, taking the scenic route home via Lake Ellesmere and the Manawatu Estuary, flying 850 km in two months. Some birds have flown up to 385 kms to return to the aviaries where they were reared.



*If you would like to volunteer at Cape Sanctuary, e-mail:- volunteer@capesanctuary.co.nz
Hear Rachel's interview with Kim Hill on RNZ on www.facebook.com/capesanctuary*

If you know of something interesting that's going on in Hawke's Bay that's relevant, please let me know and I'll be happy to follow it up:- jessicamaxwell2017@gmail.com

If you think a dog can't count, let it see you putting three dog biscuits in your pocket and then try giving it only two...

