

Gorge Gazette - July 2023

News about Trelissick Park, the Ngaio Gorge and streams



Abbreviations:

WCC Wellington City Council
DoC Department of Conservation
TPG Trelissick Park Group

BotSoc Wellington Botanical Society
GG Gorge Gazette
CVNZ Conservation Volunteers New Zealand

The reincarnation

New drainage from the Johnsonville railway line gained the upper hand, washed out previous fixes and cut the Northern Walkway/Te Araroa Trail below Hanover Street. WCC's *Tim Harkness* and contractor *Podge* quickly devised a new route to the valley floor, bridging the stream on more amenable terrain. Jubilation: re-opening in time for Matariki weekend.



Impossible!



New bridge at the valley floor

A sylvan setting for a seat



Here is the ideal place to look for gliding eels in the quiet waters below, birds in the trees above, to sit and think or to rest. A TPG supporter *Jenny Lewis*, has donated a seat at the end of Bridge 7. WCC recently installed it.

The plaque expands on the amazing *Oser Galler* story (see the 'Gorge Gazette' page of our website). The original plaque, found submerged in wandering willie, was affixed to the old seat on the Northern Walkway, down from Hanover Street.

And downstream...

Finn Illsley-Kemp's spot down from Bridge 7 is now enhanced with 74 *Carex secta*, *Carex virgata*, *Cyperus ustulatus*, cabbage tree, flax and toetoe. Protection from the raging waters...

Restoration week webinars

There is much to learn by watching/listening to all of these. The one about Trelissick Park is in Webinar #5. Nigel Charman of OMB Free Wellington is in #4. He is collaborating with TPG (See Facebook photos 20 April).

The webinars are at [restoration-week-2023](https://www.trelissickparkgroup.co.nz/restoration-week-2023).



At *Finn's spot*

It's ended

After three years the Ngaio Gorge Road slip stabilisation work has finished. What a marvellous job they did! Now we can access the magazine area and lower park. A weedy prospect indeed. A hive of activity ensued – see photos.

WCC and F&B nurseries to the rescue at the Ngaio Gorge Road layby: around 400 Carex flagellifera, Carex testacea and Poa cita planted by TPG and WCC Ranger Adam Groenewagen.



CentrePort staff recruited by Cat Ayres of Zealandia's Sanctuary to Sea project, planting west of the magazine building. A hard gravel pan lies below – it was the site of the old plastic factory. The mulch pile, incarcerated for three years, is still useable – sort of... WCC Ranger Adam supplied 48 plants, suggesting that they would grow well in the old mulch.

Below: The unclothed historic wall below the park entrance from lower Ngaio Gorge Road, at a TPG working bee. More walls are to follow.



Nocturnal magnificence



Go for a nocturnal walk in the park and you might hear one: [Morepork/ruru song \(MP3, 1,620K\)](#).

They have acute hearing and are sensitive to light. They can turn their head through 270 degrees.

Morepork are nocturnal, hunting for large invertebrates including beetles, wētā, moths and spiders. They will also take small birds, rats and mice.

They fly silently as they have soft fringes on the edge of the wing feathers. They catch prey using large sharp talons or beak.

By day they roost in the cavities of trees or in thick vegetation.

The wētā hotel is empty!

DoC says that many wētā species are now endangered, so we need to look after them. A wētā motel will help protect them from rats, stoats, cats and hedgehogs. Female wētā lay 100-300 eggs so if you build a home they like, their numbers will grow.

TPG installed a hotel supplied by WCC early in 2015, on a large tōtara tree about 100 m down and off to the east of the track from the entrance Trelissick Crescent opposite #41. Now it's empty and in a sorry state. It is being rejuvenated. Builders' filler: the best thing since sliced bread.

Wanted: names for park tracks

We have the 'Northern Walkway', 'Te Araroa Trail' and the 'Frances Lee Track'. An earlier park brochure showed 'Forest Remnant Track' and 'Ngaio Gorge Track'. The 'Barry's Track to Oban Street' sign was (strangely) removed.

Any ideas?

As the female is a hole-nester she is vulnerable to predators such as stoats and possums during the breeding season and eggs and chicks will also be at risk from rats.

Morepork are possibly threatened from the use of toxins used to reduce the numbers of predators. As morepork are at the top of the food chain they could be affected by an accumulative poison by eating live prey that ingested poison.

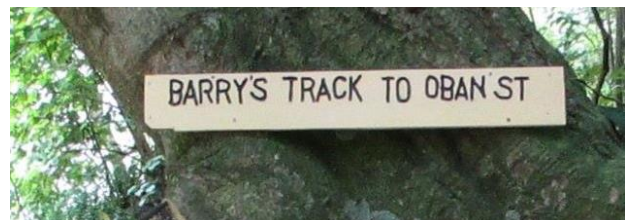
From [Morepork/ruru: New Zealand native land birds \(doc.govt.nz\)](#)

Photos: Left - Tony Stoddard. Right: Stuff NZ Ltd.



Wellington tree wētā harem of five females and one male.

Photo: Steven Trewick



A strategy?

Jonathan Anderson says that we are lucky to have a concentration of about 50 wild kōwhai/*Sophora microphylla* in the lower part of Park.

The only sizable population of natural trees on the Wellington Peninsula lies mostly on the slopes below/surrounding the lower end of Oban Street. Anita Benbrook from WCC's nursery has identified a few other wild trees in Tyers Stream and Ngauranga Gorge. There may also be the one or two surviving trees on farmland in Takarua Gorge.

The genus *Sophora* was revised by taxonomists a few years ago and there are now eight different New Zealand species of kōwhai. Most trees planted in gardens are horticultural selections, of either a species or hybrids between species (most species hybridise with one or more of the other species).

Jonathan suggests a strategy for kōwhai in the park:



Photo: Wayne Bennett

1. Restrict planting as much as possible to only *Sophora microphylla*, and plant only trees grown from wild seed collected in Wellington. He has collected 5,000 seeds from the wild trees in the park in the last two years. They are now being propagated and grown on by the WCC nursery in Berhampore, and there should be plenty of new trees for planting in years to come.
2. Accept that kōwhai have been planted in modest numbers throughout the park in the past. There are a number of adult trees that are 20-30 years, or more, old. Some are *Sophora microphylla* (common kōwhai) of unknown origin, but many are *Sophora chathamica* (coastal kōwhai), or hybrids. Examples of coastal kōwhai / hybrids can be seen in Wightwick's Field.
3. We can be more relaxed about the pedigree or origin of new trees in the upper half of the park i.e. above the lower gorge.
4. Follow a strict eco-sourced *Sophora microphylla* policy for planting from the lower gorge down. The line on the aerial below (corresponds with the lower sewer tunnel). It includes the hill slopes below Oban Street, where most of the wild kōwhai are found.
5. Where practical we transplant small kōwhai that have been planted in the lower part of the park. We can find suitable sites for them in places like Wightwick's Field or the upper stream flats.



A sortie in the valley

The recalcitrant arum lily under bridge 5 and upstream blackberry trying to envelop flax were punished at our 11 July working bee. MP *Nicola Willis* and three TPG stalwarts to the fray...

More from the coalface

Trelissick Crescent verge – *Marilyn Hester* added 225 plants. It's finished and looks amazing! For more see GG, April 2022.

Rain inducing? – CVNZ's May visit had to be cancelled. Rain was also reluctant to depart for their June visit, hosted by *Angus Napier*, to clear and plant a slope above bridge 7. But they persevered.

Enhancing the NW slope below Oban Street – 20 plants for *Andrew Cutler*, including tōtara, kahikatea, tītoki and lancewood.

The BotSoc May field trip

See on our website the resulting [Vascular Native Plant List \(May 2023\)](#), [Trelissick Park Restoration Notes \(May 2023\)](#), and [Weed Listing May 2023](#).

Te Hononga/Catchments Collective

Eugene Doyle recently rounded up 21 participants covering many catchments in the Wellington Region for a Zoom meeting – see the Appendix in the Minutes of the TPG meeting of 4 July on our website for more. A summary of TPG's Kaiwharawhara catchment problems:

The use of the streams to receive all stormwater from the catchment (about 20 km²), with volumes increasing considerably as more houses are built. This arises from removal of bush cover and faster runoff from hard surfaces. After heavy rain the swift and violent volume of water in the stream leads to bank erosion and build-up of silt/gravel, affecting stream bed invertebrate life. This is aggravated by more extreme weather events from climate change.

Pollution, e.g. from residential sewer/stormwater cross-connections, sewer leakage, oil/asbestos from roads, washing cars, leachate from old landfills...

Barriers for fish passage (GWRC has funding to investigate - ongoing).

For more...

Scroll down our Facebook page, or read a wealth of information on our website, updated by *Bill Hester*.

Contacts

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[Trelissick Park Group](#) website

[Trelissick Park Group | Facebook](#)

Thanks to all our volunteers, supporters, WCC staff and weed control contractor Kaitiaki o Ngahere.

Membership drawn from Highland Park Progressive Association Inc., Ngaio Crofton Downs Residents' Association Inc., Onslow Historical Society Inc., Private Landowners' Group, Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society Inc. (Wellington Branch), Wellington Botanical Society Inc., Wadestown Residents' Association.



Between Bridges 4 and 5 – much improved.

Podocarp planting – By *Jonathan Anderson* throughout the park – continuing...

Rubbish blown/gravitating in from urban surrounds.

Exotic plant seeds blown in or carried in by birds from urban surrounds.

Erosion of stream banks from off-leash dogs wanting to play in the water. (Trelissick Park is 'off-leash').

Slips (e.g. from Wilton Park exposing toxic landfill).

Sharing the catchment/gully with major, powerful reticulation services (Transpower, KiwiRail, Wellington Water) that need access, and from time to time need to do major works that impact the catchment.

Lack of daylighting. Large sections of the streams have, over the years, been lost underground through culverts, weakening their claims as streams and making them more like drains.

The catchment as a whole has **no cohesive legal status**; various agencies (GWRC, WCC, KiwiRail, Transpower, private landowners etc) have interests, often competing.