

The starry white flowers of *Clematis paniculata*



The starry white flowers of *Clematis paniculata* festooning the bush are familiar to most people and are a sure sign that spring has arrived. At Rotokare it flowers from August to October followed by the silky feather-like seed heads. While the majority of our native flowers are small and inconspicuous this is one that can't be missed.

It is not generally realised however that there are several other species of *Clematis* in New Zealand and one of these is currently flowering in the Rotokare bush. If you look up as you pass through the overhanging trees at the start of the lake track from the car park you will see the smaller flowers and leaves of *Clematis foetida* draped across the bush. There is also a good display of this species on the edge of the clearing behind the public toilets.

Also flowering now is the spring orchid *Earina mucronata*. This is an epiphyte growing on tree trunks and is common along the barrier-free track. It looks very like a bunch of grass hanging down but some will be displaying the small creamy coloured flowers of typical orchid shape. On a still day you may notice the scent before you see the flowers. Barry Hartley (Trustee).



ROTOKARE BUSH TELEGRAPH

November 2010

** Newsflash ** Kiwi returning to Rotokare this month!

The big day, that will see the first species returned to Rotokare, is nearly here. For the next two years Rotokare will act as a crèche for young Taranaki kiwi before they are returned to the wild. In the wild, at unmanaged sites, kiwi chicks only have a 5% chance of survival due to predation by stoats and other predators. Sanctuaries like Rotokare provide the ideal opportunity to rear kiwi in a safe natural environment, until they reach a 'safe' target weight of about 1200g. The project is being run in conjunction with Taranaki Kiwi Trust and the Department of Conservation, who are already partners in the Egmont National Park Kiwi Conservation Programme that aims to restore the local kiwi population.



Friends Update

Recent generosity towards our project – thanks to.....

- ☺ A huge thank you to all those who helped with the conservation week open day held in September.
- ☺ Cam and Sarah Collier – quad bike donation.
- ☺ Eltham Fire Tanker Trust – tank water delivery.
- ☺ Eltham Lions – materials and labour lining the workshop walls and ceilings.
- ☺ Maree and Alan Liddington aquarium and accessories for the education centre.
- ☺ Angela and Erwin Kiser - squab seating for the education centre, and kitchen for buildings.
- ☺ Maree Ballantyne – making the squab covers and blind folds for the education centre.
- ☺ Peter Jacobson Welding Services - materials and creation of berlese funnels for the education programme.

Photo: Steve Trawick, Auck tree weta and many Wign tree weta happily living in a man-made roost.



Rotokare Resident

Love em or hate em – the amazing tree weta!

Māori referred to weta as 'devils of the night' and 'gods of ugly things', and unfortunately this mirrors most people's perception of them, when in fact they are harmless and important components of many New Zealand ecosystems.

Weta belong to the order Orthoptera, which also incorporates crickets, grasshoppers and katydids. Tree weta are one of the 5 different genera of weta in New Zealand (cave weta, tusked weta, ground weta, and giant weta), all of which are endemic, flightless, nocturnal, large by insect standards, relatively long lived and ancient in origin. Tree weta grow to approximately 50mm, and are largely herbivorous, but are known to feed on other invertebrates opportunistically. During the day they take refuge in tree holes, known as galleries or roosts, which are created by beetle larvae. Male tree weta are highly territorial and will defend a superior roost and possible harem of females from other males.

Tree weta are key components of forest ecosystems, as one of the most important bottom members of the food chain, they are important prey for many other native animals including kiwi and tuatara. Due to their behaviour and general abundance, they are excellent animals to monitor and use as an indicator species for the health of an ecosystem.

In conjunction with the Eltham Technology Centre, progress towards the "Rotokare Weta Project" is underway with each student constructing an artificial weta roost for monitoring purposes out at Rotokare. After an initial introduction into conservation and weta last month, students seemed excited at the opportunity to be involved first hand with an important monitoring and research project. Melissa Jacobson, Environmental Educator.

A change to the helm!

As most of you well know, Joe Menzies has been the driving force behind the creation of Rotokare. This month Joe stands down from the Chair position, to allow another Trustee the opportunity to take the reins. With relief, I am pleased to quickly add that Joe is by no means stepping out – he will remain as a key trustee and mentor.

On behalf of the Trust I would like to take this opportunity to thank Joe for what can only be described as an outstanding contribution and commitment to Rotokare. His passion, determination, and practical "kick-arse" attitude towards restoration at a community level has set the foundations of an awesome project. On a personal level, Joe has influenced and motivated me to not take an un-warranted 'no' as an answer – a whole lot can be achieved with a positive attitude and a trailer full of determination. After all, this is what has made a dream become reality. No newsletter article can adequately express the acknowledgement deserved other than, Joe, thank you for adding a strong flavour to the Rotokare recipe of success.

Without further ado, I would like to introduce Mike Weren as the new Chairman. Mike has been on the board since its inception in 2004, and in recent years has really taken on a pivotal role. Mike also acts as the Trust's treasurer, and has got a strong handle on the governance and operational detail. We all look forward to working with Mike, and wish him all of the best. You have big shoes to fill Mike, but we have every confidence in your ability to be running in no time. Kara Prankerd (Project Manager).



Conservation Week Success

On the 15th of September an open day was held at Rotokare, to celebrate Conservation Week. A series of stations were set up along the lake walkway, and groups of school students and adult groups walked the track, stopping to learn about conservation at Rotokare. The stations consisted of an up close look at some amazing lizards with the Herpetological Society, a glimpse into wetland water quality monitoring techniques with Elise Smith, and learning all about Rotokare's bird residents with Barry who represented the Ornithological Society. Further along the track, Shay Dean from Taranaki Regional Council - helped groups identify some of the amazing native plants around them, Kris and Kara - represented Taranaki Kiwi Trust - and gave visitors the opportunity to use radio tracking equipment used to locate kiwi. Finally DoC staff Barry and Lori, talked about pests and predators and the traps used to eradicate them. Conservation week is about raising awareness, and I think this was well and truly achieved. A successful day, to be offered again in the future. Melissa Jacobson (Environmental Educator).



Learning about how and why water quality monitoring is an important conservation tool, with Elise Smith.

Significant grants ensure the continuation of the Rotokare Sanctuary Project

TSB Community Trust 



Taranaki Electricity Trust has come on board once again in support of the Environmental Education Programme, kindly donating money to help fund the 2010/11 programme.

TSB Community Trust has awarded the trust with a \$50,000 grant over the next two years, to help towards the sanctuary project.

Thanks to these organisations, we can all do what we do best, and continue this important project into 2011.

Life at the Lake

It's been a long time coming, but we're finally based at the 'lake house'. The move went well thanks to so many helpers. We're still getting used to having breakfast without being distracted by the view!

As usual there has been plenty going on both around the buildings and out in the reserve. We've recently finished installing water collection drums around the inside of the fence, which allow for much more efficient maintenance around the fence like weed control and fence cleaning (moss and lichen growth on the fence). These drums were very generously donated by Eco-lab.

In late September, Mike and I attended the annual Sanctuaries of New Zealand workshop, held on Great Barrier Island. This was a great reminder of how well the Rotokare operation is going on a national level. We both learnt a lot over the three days, and were lucky to have visited two wonderful sanctuaries on the island.

Over the last couple of months we've been making a few improvements around the place, one of which is the addition of a kiwi-proof culvert screen ready for the release of chicks.

The recent weather storm of a few weeks ago put our fence to the test. The only damage done was a small amount of hood lift at the top of O'Connor's gully, and a few rivets popped in predictable locations. These pest proof fences should be expected to need maintenance from time to time, and with weather like that I feel we came through in very good shape. We have a well constructed fence, and clearly had a dedicated and thoughtful team involved in the planning and construction.

Over the last wee while, we've had some new faces join us for the working bees on Sundays, and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them for joining us and adding to the team. The volunteer efforts at Rotokare are amazing, and it is indeed humbling to witness such commitment. Simon Collins (Site Manager).



a. Jenny and Litchie off to install water collection drums.
b. Damage to the fence hood.

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BIOSECURITY ALERT



STOP
(At the gates)

CHECK
(Your car, boat and bags)

KEEP EM OUT!

(pests and predators like mice, rats, and your pets)



Buildings Update

Since our last newsletter in July, building progress has been steady but rewarding. The best news is that the house is finished inside. The end result is terrific, a credit to all those who spent tireless hours on the job. Simon, Tricia and Tai have been living in on site for a month now – what a place to live!

The education centre has progressed well. The classroom is almost done. Walls and ceiling painted, a mural started, blinds hung and the old carpet as clean as we can get it for now. We still need to paint the window sashes and sort out the bench area. The office block has had most of the wall linings fitted with gib-stopping still in progress. This building, as well as the workshop and house will need a second coat of paint outside.

We have had a generous offer from Eltham Lions to buy and fit wall and ceiling linings to the workshop and garage. This work by Lions recently at the Sunday working bees has seen nearly all the walls lined with chipboard and melteca boards. Again, we would like to say a huge thank you to all those who come out to help with this part of the project. Without you, we would still be way off completion and a lot worse off financially.

Another generous donation of rent-free accommodation for Simon and his family while the house was being completed cannot go unmentioned. So a huge thanks to the Hawkes Family, for this amazing donation.

Please do come out, check out the amazing progress on these buildings, we would love to see you, especially on Sunday morning working bees. Mike Weren (Chairman).