

PIGEON POST

*Newsletter of the
Otatara Landcare Group*

Issue 67 Summer 2024

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The full colour version of this publication is available on www.otataralandcare.org.nz under 'publications'.



A draft master plan for the Sandy Point domain for 10, 25 and 50 years has been made public. The plan is open for submissions, with a deadline of January 31 2024. The story on the draft master plan is on page 4.



Bird Tails by Kathy

Labour Day

We received a tui that had been hanging upside down on a branch for a morning. It was off balance, didn't want to drink, and looked the worse for wear in every way, feathers in disarray, eyes closing, wings not seating properly. Its chances did not look good but it settled really well on a heat pad in its wee cage.

I tried it with Russell's tui mix recipe but it was completely unimpressed. At times it rolled around on the towel, looked at me calmly like this was normal behaviour and settled for a bit.

I figured that it would not be with us in the morning, gave it some pain relief and set it up with nice towel props so it wouldn't just fall about. It would open one eye, look at me and go back into what looked like death throes.

In the morning, Labour Day, it was sitting up as bright as a button and hungry - and there in the nest of towels was a very large egg. "Gosh I know how you've been feeling," I laughed.

Whakatoi

Whakatoi is a kaka who has been around Otatara for weeks making plenty of friends I'm sure. You can imagine how much fun our grandchildren Skye and Moana had choosing and saying his name, which means cheeky and friendly. "It fits," Skye said after the kaka stood on his head.

He also sees fit to give us a bollocking from the willow if we are mowing or hanging out washing, wrecking his peace.

We have three dogs who are better at greeting chooks and birds than human visitors, who generally drive the dogs barking mad.

Our chooks let us know if we've gone past their teatime by delegating Raspberry, the biggest, to come up the back steps, pitter-patter into the kitchen and investigate how far off the pace we are.

The dogs hardly move out of her way as she examines their empty bowls and drinks from their

water bowl. The rules are no pooping. She mostly seems to get it.

When Whakatoi first came by he would sit on the flat roof above the front door, grab on to the outside coach lamp and swing off it by one foot, upside down, trying to see into the living room. The dogs were merely intrigued.

He progressed from that to swinging off the close branches of a wineberry, and then the top handrail of the front steps. One morning he was on the top step standing at the glass front door.

When I opened it he hopped up on to the handrail beside me and then on to my arm and shoulder to check out whether I'd cleaned behind my ears.

The other day Leila had given him a half-hearted yap at the open front door before resuming her morning stretch in the sun on the mat. The other two had briefly lifted their heads but quickly gone back to snoozing.

I looked over and noticed that Whakatoi, who had been sitting on his favourite handrail cleaning

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between his toes while we'd been having breakfast, had gone. A movement caught my eye and I was amazed to discover that far from flying off, Whakatoi had come inside, and made himself comfortable on the arm of the dogs' old sofa. I hadn't even noticed until he began plucking at a worn spot. "Just make yourself at home, why don't you..."

What a wonderful and welcome visitor!

An evening walk in the Otatara scenic reserve

Wednesday 20th December 2023 – evening walk, Otatara (family/pushchair suitable).

We will once again combine with the Southland Tramping Club for this evening's walk.

Please meet at the Otatara Scenic Reserve Car Park opposite 105 Dunns Road Otatara. This car park is 60 metres past the Otatara 4 Square Store on the way to Oreti Beach. Meeting time is 7.30pm. The Otatara Scenic Reserve has a loop track of just over two kilometres.

The area is a mix of sand dune systems with a couple of very small climbs, a lot of flat area and a little boardwalk across the normally swampy areas.

Otatara Pest Busters have been doing pest control work in this area for a number of years and this has led to an increase in bird life.

As this is close to the longest day there will be a lot of evening light and if we get Lloyd Esler to join us (as he often does) we will get a lot of the story of the bird and plant life and the history of the area as well.

No booking required, just turn up at the appointed time!

Organiser contact: Barry.

Email bjsrdms@gmail.com

Mobile: 027 22 88 980 (text please, not phone)



Above, wai tui being held closely and comforted, following suspected poisoning from rhododendron blossom.

A warning about the dangers of rhododendron poisoning for Tuis

Forest, a boy from Taiepa Road, had a tui land at his feet after losing its grip on a branch. He picked it up and it flew to a neighbour's tree but once again slid off the branch and landed on the ground.

Forest took the tui to his mum, Anna, and they brought it to Bush Haven for help. The loss of leg functioning is a typical sign of some sort of toxicity from sprays or plants in the rhododendron family.

There are treatments if given smartly. So especially at this time of year if you observe any birds acting strangely and losing the use of their feet and legs, bring them to us or if we are not available straight away try some charcoal mixed with a little water.

Hold the bird and just tip its head and beak gently down into the mix so that it can suck. Keep it warm and safe from cats and dogs.

Thanks to Forest for realising the tui was in trouble and for his prompt action. Sadly, the tui did not make it, but it is worth trying if you find a tui in that condition.

SANDY POINT



Draft Master Plan out for public consultation

A draft master plan for the Sandy Point Domain has been produced by the Invercargill City Council, after a lengthy engagement process with individuals and groups who have an interest in Sandy Point, including the Otatara Landcare Group, given Otatara's proximity to Sandy Point and the use made of it by many in Otatara.

The master plan is a 50 year strategy for the area, broken into 10, 25 and 50 year intervals, but for the purposes of this article, the 10 year strategy is the focus.

The plan can be found on the ICC website, within the Let's talk link. The full document is lengthy, comprehensive, very interesting and very worth reading. Have a look!

The plan is open for submissions, with a deadline of January 31 2024, so there is plenty of time to read, think and if necessary, add your voice to the consultation process.

The plan focuses on three key challenges:

- The domain remaining relevant to the future population of Invercargill and Southland, and catering for future recreational trends.
- The quality and appropriateness of existing infrastructure, assets, facilities and land use at the domain, and how these can be maintained and enhanced in the next 50 years.
- The potential impact of climate change and sea level rise on Sandy Point Domain, including the potential effects of inundation on assets and infrastructure, as well as the impact on existing activities in the domain.

The 10 year strategy for enhancing recreation at Sandy Point includes the beginning of the con-

solidation of sport and recreational activities and clubs, as some are currently duplicated. The consultation meetings resulted in representatives of the various clubs and activities talking for the first time, and realising they could work together in some areas, for mutual benefit.

Facilities and structures no longer required by clubs would be removed over the period.

The former golf course would become a 'multi-use' area including a dog park, disc golf and informal walking areas.

To promote 'visitor experience', Pitt Road would be sealed through to Links Road, completing a sealed loop road with the Sandy Point Road.

A visitor hub, incorporating maps and interpretative signage, telling the history of the domain, would be established at the entrance to the upgraded Pitt Road where it intersects with Dunn's Road.

A reason for sealing Pitt Road is that rising sea levels will result in Sandy Point road being flooded on occasion. Already, a combination of king

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Cycling is a popular recreational activity at Sandy Point.



Sandy Point draft master plan continued



tides and heavy rain have led to water pooling around the rowing clubs.

‘Visitor experience’ plans include the establishment of an ‘eco-sanctuary’ at the southern end of Sandy Point, with walks and trails and an ‘eco-adventure area at the north end, alongside Fosbender Park.

To build environmental resilience, the 10 year plan envisages the replanting and replacing of slash, broom and forestry areas in the proposed eco-sanctuary with suitable indigenous shrub and forest species, and building walking and horse

trails, and the enhancement of existing wetland edges with suitable indigenous shrub and riparian planting.

Following the 31 January deadline for submissions, there will be public hearings, with the opportunity for submitters to speak in person, followed by any changes if required. The final management plan will then be approved and implemented.

The link to the pdf of the plan is:

<https://letstalk.icc.govt.nz/sandy-point-domain-management-plan>

Otatara school pupils have their say Story and photograph supplied by the ICC

The public consultation process is a way for everybody in a community to share their thoughts, and the pupils at Otatara School are no exception.

As part of this process, Council connected with Otatara School to encourage tamariki living nearby to have their say.

This included a meeting between pupils, Councillor and Community Wellbeing Committee chairperson Darren Ludlow, and staff from Council’s Parks and Strategy, Policy and Engagement teams.

Councillor Ludlow said he had thoroughly enjoyed hearing the ideas the pupils had. “We don’t often get young people sharing their views, so to see how enthusiastic they were was really encouraging. I think we don’t always give young people enough credit when it comes to understanding what is happening in their communities, or in the wider world around them.

“But the reality is, the decisions we make in local government have a real impact on their lives – not just today, but in the future as well,” he said.

“It’s vital that we listen to a range of perspectives during the community engagement process, and I really commend both the pupils and the teachers at Otatara School for getting involved.

“The thoughts they shared were really articulate and well-considered, and they’d clearly put a huge effort into their work. It was great to see the



Above, Otatara school pupils Blake Hitchcock and Leif Adams were among the students who presented their vision for Sandy Point.

kids making their voices count, and engaging with local government at such a young age.”

Council Manager Parks and Recreation Caroline Rain said the Sandy Point Domain Masterplan sets out a strategic vision for the domain within the next 10, 25, and 50 years. Meanwhile, the Sandy Point Domain Management Plan outlines specific steps Council proposes to take in

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Otatara school pupils have their say Continued



regards to the management and use of the area during the next decade.

“Both the Sandy Point Domain Management Plan, and the Sandy Point Domain Masterplan, are key pieces in the puzzle to ensure this area continues to be a valued part of our community,” she said.

“It has been fantastic to see the tamariki of Otatara School get involved in this process, take ownership, and ensure their views are among those shared by the community.”

Otatara School deputy principal and class teacher Carla Werder said the school Ariki and Leaders had worked in every class, gathering insights and feedback from pupils aged between 5 years old to 11 years old, on their collective submission.

“We value student agency, and students having a voice in both their learning and their community – and taking an active part in it, too. They are our future, and having the opportunity to hear their views and be advocates for improvement in our community is important to us,” Werder said. “Their ideas are valuable, and need to be heard and shared.”

The pupils had enjoyed learning more about the Sandy Point area, and ‘dreamcasting’ when it came to its potential for the future, she said. “It has allowed our akonga to feel heard, and a part of the bigger picture of the future of

Otatara.” Pupils hoped to speak to their formal submission in front of Councillors later in the consultation process, she said.

Eleven-year-old Sophie Harvey said she wanted the Sandy Point Domain to be a healthy, pleasant place for people to walk their dogs. She and her family often walked their family pet there, but she had noticed issues with both rubbish and litter, as well as plants that could be dangerous for animals, she said.

“It makes me a wee bit upset, angry, and sad,” she said. “Looking at it [Sandy Point Domain] you can see it’s very pretty, and you can get a really good feeling there. People want to take their dogs there, but it needs to be made better.”

Meanwhile, Harper McDowall and Max McKenzie (both eight) were keen to see more development of the mountain bike trail network. Both used the existing network at Sandy Point Domain, and took part in local competitions, as did their families.

“Some of the tracks are really boring,” Max said. “I would like some super cool tracks with big jumps – more fun ones.” Harper said she wanted to see more variety in the tracks, to suit different skill levels.

“I want some super-duper ones that are really fun, and my dad could have some really hard ones,” she said.

Right, the pupils who met with the city council representatives, along with their ideas and suggestions for Sandy Point.

A common theme was for more activities, more litter bins and a water-park. Some asked, hopefully, for an ice cream shop and fast-food outlets...



YOUR COMMUNITY NURSERY



By Chris Rance

Southland Community Nursery has been operating for over 25 years here in Otatara. We are a Charitable Trust, and ‘community’ and ‘volunteers’ are at the heart of our operation. As a non-profit our aim is to grow locally sourced native plants and educate people on their use, their usefulness and the importance of nature to our own wellbeing.

Our brief goes well beyond just growing native plants, as anyone who volunteers here or has attended our workshops will know. Recently we hosted a workshop for Community Nurseries of Central Otago and Southland and people came from as far away as Clyde, Cromwell, Wanaka, Ohau and Queenstown.

Our focus is on working with volunteers and we have lots of experience in that area. For over 25 years we have held ‘Volunteer Fridays’ where people come from near and far, and for many reasons:

- Growing native plants for their own area.
- Advice on what grows best in their situation.
- Learning new skills – how to collect and clean native seeds or propagate from cuttings.
- New to Southland and looking for a network of like-minded people.
- Looking for a group which is sociable and accommodating.



- Wanting to help out on a nature-based project.

The glue of these socially rewarding and very productive Friday mornings is the legendary morning teas. I don’t provide them, the participants do and often from home grown produce from their own gardens. So popular are these

weekly offerings that we made a recipe book. Its available in hard copy from the Nursery for \$10 or you can read it on-line at:

www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz/how-the-nursery-works/

After all this time we are still getting a good number of regular and new volunteers (15-20 per session) and we produce over 8,000 native plants a year which go to a wide range of community projects, groups and individuals.

If you can’t volunteer on Fridays, you can support our cause by buying very reasonably priced native plants (\$5 each), or make a donation. Irrespective of buying plants we are happy to give advice on your planting project and encourage you to look at our website information on what grows well in Otatara and celebrate where you live and the plants that grow here best.

Or better still visit, see the many planting areas on our property or come along on a Friday morning anytime between 9am and noon.

Email Chris:

rances@southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz



Left, volunteers tuck into the legendary morning teas at the Southland Community Nursery.

MAKING OUR MARK



By Linda

Making our Mark

The Southland Community Nursery supported a recent workshop tutored on site by **Jo Ogier**, a Christchurch based artist inspired by the natural world around us in New Zealand.

Jo encourages us to look at the beautiful place we live in and find a way to create our own visual record.

We gathered leaves from plants growing very close to hand, (inclement weather prevailed!) and from these made drawings, printing blocks, hand-dyed cards, and used leaves to print directly onto paper.

Individual's print history ranged from nil to teacher level, however every one finished our weekend satisfied with what we had achieved and keen to continue expanding skills.

Our mark-making differed greatly, but by looking closely at the beautiful shapes, colours, texture and details, along with learning about new materials & techniques we were able to create a series of highly individual prints.

Observing, appreciating and relating to my Otatara environment grows my desire

to protect and enhance where I live, along with my respect for those who contribute to its well-being.

25 October 2023

Thanks Chris & Brian Rance for your wonderful facilities at your Community Nursery & Education Centre.



Go tramping...

Go tramping at Bushy Point—from the lookout seat along the edge of the totara bush!

Why? Because on the bush side of the track awaits the class of 2022 seedlings, now under pressure from competing grass, and simply tramping around them will give them a much better chance of surviving and thriving.

Just make sure no blade of grass is left standing near the plastic protector, and it's 'job done' in 10-20 seconds.

You don't even need tramping boots, and anyone can do it! Get the kids to lend a hand by spotting the seedlings needing help – no easy feat sometimes - but your feet can easily do the rest.

Give it some thought when you go for a walk?

Douglas Black



Above, seedlings swamped by grass, and left, in the open after a good tramp!

ICC is responsible for clearing Otatara's ditches

The recent heavy rain led to complaints in the Otatara facebook page on problems caused by overflowing ditches, and asking who has the responsibility to sort out the problem?

Pigeon Post contacted the Invercargill City Council about this, and Matthew Keil, Manager Infrastructure Operations, responded:

“During the recent flooding event, Council received several reports of blocked ditches in Otatara. When inspected by Council’s contractors they were not found blocked, but running to capacity with some overflowing.

“The probable cause of the blockages was identified as related to vehicle culverts at property driveways. Council is undertaking a detailed investigation checking these culverts in the affected areas along with our normal bi-weekly inspections.

“If you are observing problems with a culvert please contact Council and arrange for a maintenance inspection,” he said.

The ICC call centre at 2111777 will process a request for service and provide a number for reference. For more information on ditches and drainage, go to:

[<icc.govt.nz/infrastructure/drainage-and-sewerage/>](http://icc.govt.nz/infrastructure/drainage-and-sewerage/)



All about rats by David Whelan

Rats: Just because you have never seen them, doesn't mean they are not on your property!

What do we know about rat behaviour? Rats are omnivores with a varied diet and compete with local wildlife for food. They are a major threat to New Zealand's flora and fauna.

They eat wētā and other insects, snails, frogs, lizards, birds and bats, as well as the flowers, fruits and seeds of plants. Rats breed rapidly, making their populations difficult to control.

Ship rats climb trees and eat bird chicks and eggs, while Norway rats are good swimmers and also prey on ground-nesting birds. Ship rats will climb through cracks in walls and holes in ceilings and make their home in roofs. Most rats in Otatara are ship rats.

Norway rats will enter through a structure's foundations and may dig burrows under floors. They like areas that are messy, smelly, and easy to access.

Average ship rat home range lengths are in the order of 103–200m for females and 159–550m for males. Ship rats are weaned between 21–28 days old.

A litter of juveniles disperse over a distance of at least 800m by the time they are around 90 days old and approaching the age of sexual ma-

turity. Norway rats and ship rats are supposedly neophobic — they're afraid of new foods or situations although you wouldn't think so. Just because you have never seen them, doesn't mean they are not on your property!



How you can remove rats.

Prevention - Remove their food source and nesting grounds. Make sure the outside of your property is tidy — rats (and mice) like piles of bricks, timber, rubble, derelict cars or appliances, firewood heaps, piles of garden rubbish and overgrown parts of the section.

Clean up inside your home — rats (and mice) like old newspapers or magazines, boxes, rags and junk in cupboards. Don't leave pet food out overnight where rats can access it. Rats are known to hang around dog runs waiting for food and are also attracted to hen houses.

Rodent proof your compost bin. (<https://predatorfreenz.org/get-involved/backyards-and-neighbourhoods/rat-proof-your-compost-bin/>)

Control - by trapping and poisoning.

There are various trapping options to suit your needs, from simple Victor traps baited with pea-

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nut butter to larger Doc200 traps. Alternatively you can use poison bait placed in pet-proof tunnels (bait stations).

Set up three to three traps per backyard and place inside rat tunnels to keep children and pets safe. Place them on a flat surface near walls, compost or undercover. Make sure you always wear gloves when handling your trap or catches.

If you're not getting results, try a different spot. Try to check the traps daily until you're getting results and the catch rate goes down,

then check every week or so. If using poison, always place the bait stations at similar locations. Monitor your results. If you're not catching anything, you may need to try something different - move your traps, try a different bait.

Contact Otatara Pestbusters for help. Dallas can make recommendations for your property. All recommendations are family and pet friendly. And encourage your neighbours to get involved. That rat nest may be next door !

<https://predatorfreenz.org/toolkits/know-your-target-predators/rat/>

Free chew cards to check pest species and numbers

There would be few Otatara properties that don't have rodents or possums present from time to time.

Most remain unseen or unheard until the cat brings one in, or worse still, scuttling and thumping noises coming from the ceiling.

Worse again is chewing damage to your vehicle or house wiring or the smell of copious poop and pee.

Chew cards are an easy way to check for pest presence and Otatara Pestbusters is giving them away to anyone who wants to check.

They basically consist of a small piece of peanut butter impregnated corflute that you nail to the base of a tree, fence post or plank. Leave

them out for a week or so before checking them for tell-tale bite marks.

Possums crush the edges, rats tend to 'smash' them and mice 'groove' them. If you want to take hedgehogs out of the equation, place the cards high enough to be out of reach. Due to the peanut butter in the cards losing its attractiveness after a week or so, the cards are best used as a 'snapshot' monitoring tool rather than long term monitoring.

Contact Dallas Bradley on 021 784962 if you want to try some cards. More information on using and reading chew cards go to <https://landcareresearch.co.nz> and search for "chewcards".

Left a chew card. Centre, rat bite marks. Right, mice bite marks.



FIRST RESPONDERS



Ensuring the success of your planting project

Bushy Point is a good place to see native plant restoration in action. The aim is to turn paddock into bush and the best way to do that, in our experience, is to use the species that nature would choose to do that job, naturally.

‘First Responders’ or ‘Nursery Species’ have a role, and that is to prepare the way for the dominant species that will eventually grow in that site – ie, the totara, rimu, kahikatea, miro, matai that in hundreds of years will be the forest of the future.

In essence that means planting first the native species that grow fast, tolerate full sun, wind and frost, shade out the grass, and produce flowers and seed that bring in the insects and birds to spread more seed into the gaps that have been formed.

That can be done without even planting any of the canopy species with the expectation that those species will come in eventually. Also, when the ground has been prepared like this, ferns and a wider variety of species will also come in, with birds assistance.

The first responders we use most in Otatara (and Southland generally) are – harakeke (flax, *Phormium tenax*), manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*), broadleaf (*Griselinia littoralis*), mingimingi (*Coprosma propinqua*), cabbage tree (*Cordyline australis*), kotukutuku (tree fuchsia, *Fuchsia excorticata*), makomako (wineberry, *Aristotelia serrata*) Kohuhu (black mapou, *Pittosporum tenuifolium*), tarata (lemonwood, *Pittosporum eugenioides*), Koromiko (*Hebe salicifolia*), shining karamu (*Coprosma lucida*).

You might think these are ‘boring’ common species to use but they stand the test of time and almost guarantee success, if you use them in the right place.

Most have very attractive flowers, often scented, or full of nectar to attract native birds to your area. Photos of the flow-

ers and fruit of the above species are in this article.

Right plant right place

You will probably notice that the seedlings that land in your garden often seem to do better than those that you plant in a certain place. Different plants have different ground requirements.

All of the above species will tolerate sun, wind and frost but whether the ground is ‘wet’ or ‘dry’ will determine success to a large extent. Bushy Point has two distinct forest types – dry totara forest on sand dunes (summer dry/drought prone), and kahikatea swamp forest on seasonally wet peaty soils.

You will notice that in wetter areas we have planted flax, toetoe, mingimingi, manuka, and cabbage tree and in the drier areas broadleaf, kohuhu, lemonwood, koromiko and karamu. Fuchsia and wineberry like a mixture.

We do plant some totara in dry places, and kahikatea in wet places but we largely expect that the birds do that job for us, dropping seeds into

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Below, tarata (lemonwood, Pittosporum eugenioides)



First responders continued



both areas and the trees suited to those areas will thrive.

It is also worth noting that a very wet area can be 'dried out' by planting wet-tolerant plants, making the ground more suitable for a wider range of species over time.

It is also expected that when the trees grow high enough to shade the flax, the flax will die out as they are not shade tolerant, creating gaps for other species to establish.

These gaps provide sites for plants such as pate (seven finger, *Shefflera digitata*) and other shade tolerant plants and ferns will form in the understory – without us having to plant them.

There is lots of advice including plant lists and plant tolerances on the Community Nursery web-site at

www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz/restoring-your-patch/

We are also happy to talk to you about your particular site and visit to give advice if needed. Remember that locally sourced plants are best adapted to the local environment.

Restoring new areas of native forest gives a great sense of satisfaction and in some ways helps amend for past forest clearance, but protecting older growth forest first is always the top priority.

Brian and Chris Rance

*Below left, koromiko (*Hebe salicifolia*); below right, mingimingi (*Coprosma propinqua*).
Bottom left, black mapou, *Pittosporum tenuifolium*. Bottom centre, harakeke (flax, *Phormium tenax*). Bottom right, kotukutuku (tree fuchsia, *Fuchsia excorticata*).*

More photographs are on the next page.



First responders continued



Left, manuka
(*Leptospermum scoparium*)

Below, makomako
(wineberry, *Aristotelia serrata*).

Above, shining
karama
(*Coprosma lucida*).
Right,
cabbage tree
(*Cordyline australis*)



Planting for fruit eaters

Plant the following to encourage fruit eaters to your place:

Common name	Botanical name	Plant type	Wet	Dry	Sun	Shade	Frost
Broadleaf	<i>Griselinia littoralis</i>						
Cabbage tree	<i>Cordyline australis</i>						
Coprosma/ Mingimingi	<i>Coprosma propinqua</i>						
Fuchsia*	<i>Fuchsia excorticata</i>						
Kahikatea	<i>Dacrydium dacrydioides</i>						
Pepperwood	<i>Pseudowintera colorata</i>						
Totara	<i>Podocarpus hallii</i>						
Wineberry	<i>Aristotelia serrata</i>						

*Note: Fuchsia needs moist soil, it cannot tolerate very wet or dry conditions.

LOOKING AFTER PANDA



A shout-out to good cat owners

Following the story in the last issue of Pigeon Post on the growing concerns about the devastation being caused by feral cats in New Zealand and Australia, and the appeal for responsible cat ownership, Barry Smith wrote this piece about their cat.

Many cat owners would identify with this story. Micro-chipping, fitting cats with bright collars and bells, and even keeping them indoors, will help protect our precious native birds and wildlife.

Way back in about 2006 a small black (with a little bit of white) kitten was born at the Panda cattery in Otatara. Hence her name, Panda, as opposed to her panda-like colouring.

From the cattery she moved to the SPCA and then, at the age of two years, when we were looking for a pet for our children she got introduced to our home.

She was a little bit institutionalised and found the smothering, loving-to-bits aspect of our children a little too much at times and so she latched onto me as her personal slave.

Well, the girls have both grown up and married and have cats of their own and Panda has been left in our care into her old age. Do I really want this cat? No, not really, it was for our children, but I don't like seeing animals suffer.

So, at the age of seventeen, (about 85 human year's equivalent), when she began to get poorly and was losing weight, she was taken to the vet.

They gave her a check-over and her weight had gone from three kilograms down to two kilograms and tests revealed she had an enlarged thyroid. But as they said, "Don't worry, there is a treatment."

Further investigation revealed that this treatment would be for the rest of her life and the application of ointment into her ear on a daily basis is costing \$100 a month (The pills were \$160 a

month). As well we were told she had to have a low sodium diet. A special cat food, another \$60 for 1.8kg.

Phew, \$160 a month (I'll see if I can get cheaper cat food somewhere else). How long is this going to last? I looked up the internet and found the exciting news that our cat could well live up to a further five years and this coupled with six-monthly vet visits means that our cat's name has been upgraded to the \$10,000 cat.

So now we have a cat that doesn't wake up at 4am and doesn't race down the hallway at a gallop and doesn't (very often) tear paper into tiny bits. But she is still our cat and part of our family.

Now, what really annoys me about cats isn't actually cats, it's people, those people who don't de-sex their cats, those people who allow their cats to indiscriminately breed and those people who go and dump these cats somewhere near the bush as "they will have plenty of birds and lizards to keep themselves fed".

Let's face it, there are people like that who care so little about our natural environment and those animals whose ancestors have been here for thousands of years.

So this is the question I have for all those out there who are good cat owners, who have cats as companions (let's face it, they are great stress relievers) and cats as good companions for children.

How do we deal with the results of those entitled people who aren't good cat owners and who could probably be called environmental terrorists.

The estimated population of feral cats in New Zealand is 0.2 -2.4 million and we have our own population of feral cats in Otatara. If you see anyone dumping unwanted animals, then report them to the Invercargill SPCA .

FIRE SAFETY TIPS



Supplied by FENZ Invercargill

As we leave behind the short winter days our attention turns to spring cleaning around our properties, trimming hedges and burning vegetation.

If you are looking to burn, planning is key. It doesn't matter what size your fire is, assessing the environmental conditions both on the day and for the next few days is essential for a successful burn.

A bit of time spent anticipating the worst-case scenario, and preparing, will ensure you are not outsmarted by fire. You can check the fire conditions and see if you need a permit to burn at www.checkitsalright.nz

Tips for having a safe fire:

- Stack your vegetation at least 30 meters away and on the downwind side of any hedges, trees, fences, building or other combustible material.
- Make sure your smoke doesn't impact your neighbours or wider community.
- Check the forecast and make sure there are no strong winds predicted for the next two days.
- Consider having several small fires, rather than one big one. Small fires are easier to control.
- Ensure you have enough equipment to keep your fire safe. This includes hose (plugged in, turned on and near the fire site), spades or tractor for big piles.
- Keep an eye on your fire throughout burning and watch out for any changes in weather. Be prepared to put your fire out at a moment's notice.
- Once you have burnt, check the fire site a number of times and make sure it is out. Fires can flare up months after they have been lit.

If you have any questions about burning you can ring us in Invercargill on 0800 65 65 61

Pigeon Post ICC grant and planning for future issues

The Otatara Landcare Group has received a grant of \$3,171 towards the printing costs of the Pigeon Post, awarded by the Community Wellbeing Fund of the Invercargill City Council.

This very welcome grant will enable the OLG to publish two issues of Pigeon Post in the next few months, this current summer issue and a winter issue, planned for distribution in late autumn next year.

The OLG committee is most grateful to the Community Wellbeing Fund for its support over recent years for Pigeon Post, which has enabled the production of four issues a year.

Additional funding will now to be sought for the next summer issue, to be produced in late spring 2024. Possibilities include seeking sponsorship or advertising, which will all be considered next year. Currently, one issue of 1200 copies of Pigeon Post, for each letterbox in Otatara, costs \$1 560, which will probably increase slightly.

Pigeon Post is also available on the OLG website in colour, and a possibility is making the magazine available only in a digital version, but there is considerable value in each household receiving a printed version.

All editing and design is free of charge, and the Otatara postie delivers free too, so the only cost is the printing.

All suggestions are welcome—email [<otataralg@gmail.com>](mailto:otataralg@gmail.com)

THE RIGHT FOOD



By Sue Johnson

There is a huge surge of growth in the garden at the moment. So much to do with veggies to plant and flowers to stake and it's time for feeding.

Once the soil temperature gets above 10c the activity in the soil swings into action. Soil microbes begin to break down organic matter which provides nutrients for plants.

Compost would be our first addition to the soil. Forking this in will open the soil, letting in air. Compost will also help to retain moisture and will hold any added nutrients, and will prevent leaching.

Compost on its own is not always the most nourishing, but improves the soil structure. This allows the roots to grow freely through the medium, collecting food as they go.

Compost varies, depending on how it is made. If manure is added to the heap, it will be a more nutritious mix. In areas that are frequently cropped, such as the veggie garden, it will give much better results if the plant food is replaced each planting. Favourite additions of mine are blood and bone, sheep pellets and a variety of seaweed and fish combinations.

Sheep pellets are particularly good at improving soil texture as well as feeding. They tend to be mild and can be placed in the ground immediately under newly planted seedlings. Once you have dug a hole, put the feed directly in the bottom of the hole and mix it with the soil. When the plant's new roots develop they will grow straight into good soil. Scattering sheep pellets around can be

wasteful. You want to put it right where the plant will find it.

Granular fertilisers are available to boost plant

growth. They can be quite specific. You may have noticed an NPK ratio on the packaging. N is for nitrogen – usually used to promote leafy growth and 'green up' pale plants. Lawn fertiliser is high in nitrogen. P is for phosphate, often used for root growth, and K is the symbol for potassium, which promotes fruit and flower development. You will find vegetable fertiliser has N:P:K:

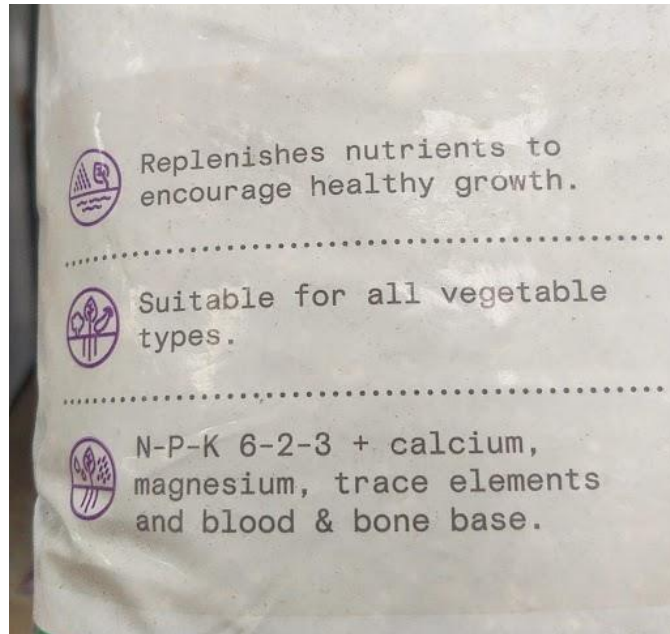
6:2:3. Many veggies need good leaf growth so this

fertiliser is high in nitrogen. Potato fertiliser, on the other hand, will have less nitrogen as you don't want to encourage a fine crop of leaves, with no spuds beneath!

For fruit trees and berries, potassium is the hero. The N:P:K ratio of fruit and citrus fertiliser is 5:4:7. Potassium also used to encourage flowering. Fertiliser compounds also contain minor elements such as magnesium (a favourite of citrus), calcium and sulphur.

Feeding through spring and summer should consist of small, frequent applications. Large dumps are invariably leached away before they can be absorbed. Lawn feeding is always better done this way. Lawns need feeding, otherwise they become patchy and weedy.

Each time you mow, you remove a quantity of growth – it needs nourishment to keep replacing itself. Too much at once will keep you pushing that mower every weekend!



Ever wondered what the letters and numbers mean in your fertiliser? Sue explains...

STEAD ST PUMP STATION



Update from Environment Southland

The Stead Street Pump Station replacement project reached a significant milestone in early October with the road being resealed and reopened to two lanes of traffic. We appreciate the impact this work has had on commuters travelling between Invercargill and Otatara and want to thank the many road users for their patience.

As part of this phase of the project, the team also completed the below-ground works to install the outlet pipes and the main structures of the viewing platform. The temporary sheet piles were removed from the estuary, meaning the crane could be relocated to the pump station side of the road. The short section of the shared cycle and pedestrian pathway was asphalted and reopened.

The contractor, Fulton Hogan, is well underway with remedial works to address design and construction issues, resulting in the concrete slab supporting the Archimedes screw pumps being built 440mm higher than it should have been.

Hydro-demolition is being used to break out the concrete in localised areas within the pump station and reduce the height of the supports while retaining the surrounding structure and reinforcing steel. This solution means that the new pumps will operate as originally designed.

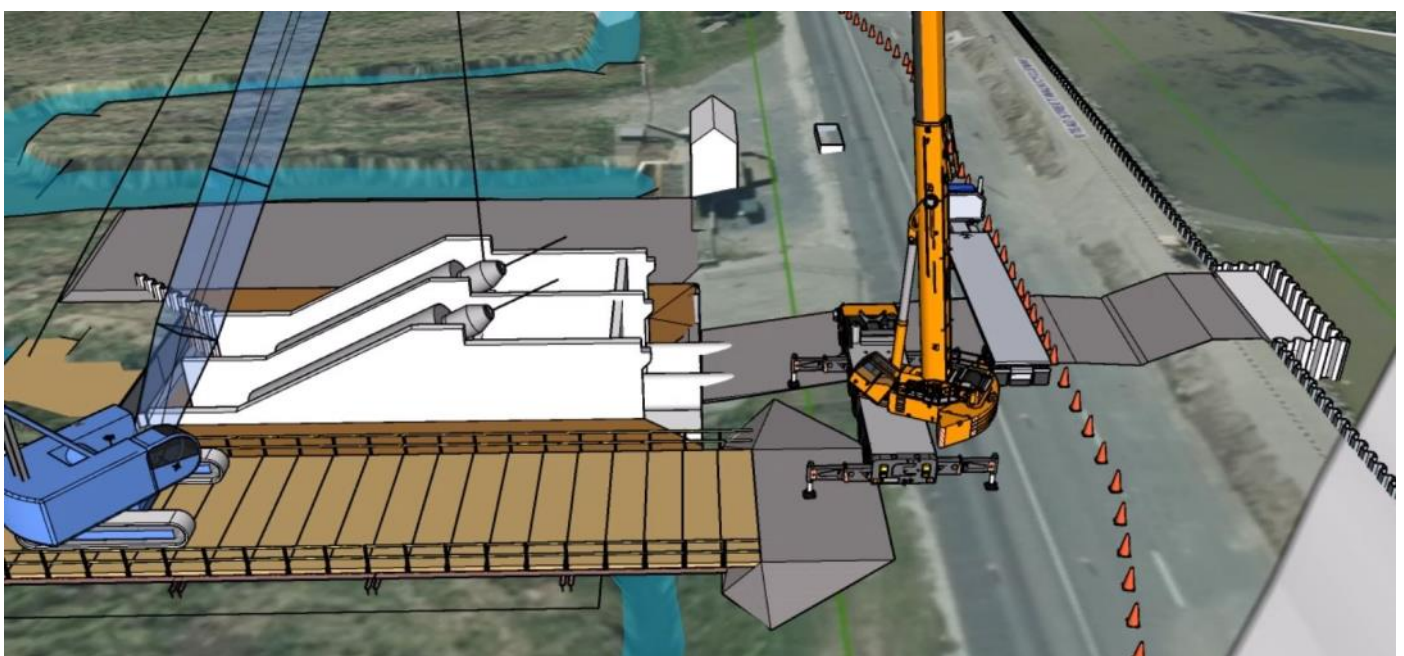
Environment Southland will recover the costs of this work from both parties responsible for the errors, and Southland ratepayers will not bear the cost for this remedial work.

Some particularly exciting aspects of the project lay ahead, including the installation of the twin pumps, likely to take place over a week in March, and the design, fabrication and installation of Waihōpai Rūnaka-led Mahi Toi elements adorning the viewing platform and pump station.

These design and narrative components, which are still being developed, will form part of Te Ara Tūpuna, building on the recently completed Invercargill City Council climate resilience project on Stead Street and Airport Avenue.

We expect the new pump station to be fully commissioned in late April 2024 and anticipate only minor traffic delays at key times, such as for the installation of the pumps. The temporary speed limit of 30 km/h will remain in place as Fulton Hogan needs to work near the road.

Below, an artist's impression of the two large Archimedes pumps being installed in the new pump station.



Otatara Landcare Group Membership



If you are not already a member and would like to help support the work of the Otatara Landcare Group, just fill in the form below and come and join us. We appreciate all our members both for their contributions of time and financial support. We can't do it without you.

Membership Form

Please complete form for membership or if you require a receipt for any donation and email to otataralg@gmail.com.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Numbers: (Hm) _____

(Mobile): _____

Email: (for newsletters and events) _____

I give permission for my contact details to be retained exclusively for the purposes of communication in relation to the activities of Otatara Landcare Group.

Subs:

Subscription for Life Membership \$50

Donations: also welcome! *NON-PROFIT CHARITABLE ORG. INC— CC47928*

All donations of \$5 and over are tax deductible within allowable limits.

Donation: \$ _____

OLG bank account **03 1355 0805312 00**

Please use your surname and “olg subs” or “olg don” in reference boxes.

Alternatively, send completed form with cash to our treasurer

Lloyd Esler – 15 Mahuri Road, Otatara

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Please contact the Otatara Landcare Group if you have any questions, suggestions or problems relating to the Otatara and Sandy Point areas: otataralg@gmail.com



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www.otataralandcare.org.nz, Email: otataralg@gmail.com

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