

# Ōruapaeroa / Travis Wetland News

April 2021



## Dates to Remember

### Help restore Travis Wetland

Travis Wetland Trust Work Days are an opportunity to help the Travis Wetland Trust and Christchurch City Council restore the wetland. Meet people interested in restoring the native biodiversity of our city, share ideas and do some light physical work. Tasks vary according to the seasons and range from planting, release weed-ing and invasive weed control. Morning tea provided.

**When:** Third Saturday of every month 9am to 12.00pm.

**Where:** Meet at the Education Centre near the Beach Road car park.

**What:** Bring gumboots or boots, gardening gloves and clothing suitable for the weather and season e.g. sunhat, raincoat, warm hat.

#### Saturday Work day dates for 2021 are:

- 17 April, 15 May, 19 June, 17 July, 21 August
- 18 September, 16 October, 20 November
- 18 December with Christmas BBQ

## A note from the Treasurer

The Travis Wetland Trust 2021 financial year began in July last year. A subscription renewal form will be included with this newsletter if you have not paid a subscription for the current year. **The Trust account is Kiwibank 38-9018-0341728-00 and we are still able to bank cheques into a Westpac account. Subscriptions may also be paid by credit card on the website page "Contact/Membership Form".** Please help the Trust continue its restoration work at Travis Wetland by paying an annual subscription and/or making a tax-deductible donation.

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## New Year's Honour for Colin Meurk

Article: Dave Evans, Image: Grahame

Travis Wetland Trust President, Dr Colin Meurk, was recently made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to ecological restoration. We can certainly vouch for those services as Colin has been President of the Trust since its inception 30 years ago next year. Colin was instrumental in the saving of Travis Swamp from a future as a housing subdivision. Moreover, Colin has contributed to many valuable restoration projects all over the city and it's not uncommon for him to have two or more meetings per night!

Congratulations Colin, it's wonderful to see you get the recognition you richly deserve. We are honoured to have the experience and wisdom you bring to the restoration of Travis Wetland.



Christchurch  
City Council



## Pohuehue, Muehlenbeckia at Travis Wetland

- Article: Eleanor Bissell, Images: Grahame

We are lucky at the Wetland to have habitats suitable for all five species of pohuehue that grow in New Zealand; some of this genus of mostly climbers and scramblers are also found in Australia, South America and Papua New Guinea.

Our World Wetland day walk on 2nd February enabled us to see all five species!

Just off the walkway we sighted Muehlenbeckia australis; which is self established; the seeds having



Scrambling Pohuehue, Muehlenbeckia

been distributed by birds. Plants climb through taller trees which provide support; it is both the largest growing and largest leaved of the species and hosts butterfly and moth species. They feed on the flowers and fruit, mine the leaves; a moth burrows into the stem which it enlarges then the moth pupates! Even the dead leaves that fall to the ground are food for the larvae of a moth. Higher up the plant provides a safe environment for nesting birds.

As we neared the Top Dune Viewing Seat sprawling and spreading widely, Muehlenbeckia complexa competes with bracken fern. It is one of our most common and dominant pohuehue, providing birds and over 42 species of moths and butterflies as well as invertebrates with a plentiful food supply. Just as well it is not threatened, we need to ensure its survival.

Bushes quiver with life; Muehlenbeckia astonii is the only plant of the group to form a bush and is on the nationally endangered list. [This is because of habitat loss.] We noted its neater appearance along the track edge and the very large number of NZ praying mantis inhabiting the plants. Someone counted how many flies a mantis ate in a day, the total — 25! Bag moths, grasshoppers and other insects depend on the plants for their survival. It has masses of almost transparent, tiny whitish, juicy fruit. Flocks of birds can be seen feeding there when it is quiet! Lizards also use this habitat as their food supply is abundant!

Back by the Education Centre Muehlenbeckia axillaris thrives and is spreading on the drier Lizard Habitat. It hosts boulder copper butterflies as well as other moth and butterfly larvae. Further plantings are planned for the old dunes at Mairehau.

Muehlenbeckia ephedroides thrives also in dry conditions on the Lizard Habitat. It sprawls over the rocks looking barely alive because of its fine wiry appearance; it hides its exquisite tiny flowers to all but those with a keen eye; we have butterflies which are dependent on it. It is on the threatened plant list because of habitat loss. More plantings of it are planned for Travis.



Muehlenbeckia axillaris



Muehlenbeckia ephedroides

Areas like Travis Wetland are absolutely necessary for survival of so many species and the Muehlenbeckia family of plants are one of the most important as they host large numbers of species. Travis Wetland can't do it all. We need to ensure that there is space reserved for natural ecosystems to be interspersed throughout our city and suburbs to join up with our natural country side ecosystems.

Thank you to Geoff Henderson and Brian Patrick for your very informative contribution on Muehlenbeckia to the 2020 Canterbury Botanical Society Journal. This was very helpful when I was putting this piece together.





Tahou, Silvereye



Kōtare, Sacred Kingfisher



Cape Barren Geese



Starling  
Images: Grahame

## Butterfly Mystery

- Article: Eleanor Bissell, Images: Grahame

After two summers without seeing signs of butterflies using the native Ongaonga (stinging nettle, botanical name *Urtica ferox*) for increasing their numbers, we recently discovered most of the leaves on one of our plants had been chewed to the main vein! A welcome



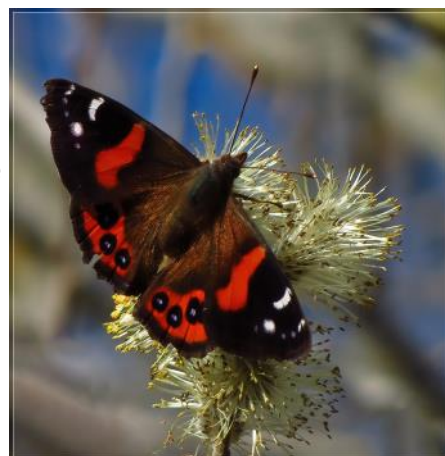
sight as we then sighted six chrysalises and one caterpillar in its 'J' clinging to a branch and about to pupate. Delightedly we assumed red admirals are still around at Travis! Declining populations of these fast flying and colourful butterflies are occasionally seen bask-

ing on flowers in the sunlight. The species is found only in New Zealand and will only lay its eggs on stinging nettle.

We thought we had it sussed!

But it's not quite that easy, as became apparent on closer examination of the yellow admiral butterfly life cycle and chrysalis. The ones we observed could perhaps be yellows. Yellow admirals are also found in New Caledonia & French Polynesia and are more frequently seen around Christchurch than reds. However, it is most likely that the ones at Travis are indeed red admirals as the yellows seem to prefer, according to the experts, the smaller introduced nettles for laying. Both butterflies lay greenish coloured eggs on the underside of the nettles and their caterpillars fold the leaf around themselves and live in the 'tent' while feeding safely. As they grow they moult five times before pupating. Caterpillars of both species are similar to the naked eye.

The red admiral butterflies feed on nectar and can live for up to nine months, that's if they manage to overwinter. Reproducing depends on avoiding their pupae being parasitised by exotic parasitic wasps! It's not easy to be a butterfly!



## Plant Identification Signs

- Article: Eleanor Bissell, Images: Grahame

Next time you are at the wetland look out for the new signs marking common native plant species around the wetland. We have had a number of positive comments so far so it seems people are really enjoying having the new signs. It takes me back to the days of the NZ Forest Service when they often labelled representative tree species along tracks near the road end. The signs are very smart looking and feature useful information about the plants, perhaps giving an idea of what to plant in your own garden.



A huge thank you to John Skilton, Colin Meurk, Karyn Durham and Eleanor Bissell for patiently putting together the info for the signs and choosing the sites for them. Thank you also to rangers Kenny and John who dug the holes and concreted each sign in.



## Waitākiri School Plantings

- Article and Images: Dave Evans

For many years classes from Waitākiri (formerly Windsor and Burwood) School have come to Travis to plant trees for Arbor Day. When I say “many” I really mean it, as there are now parents who came to plant as children coming back with their own children. Due to episodes of bad weather around Arbor Day in June the plantings have been rescheduled until later in the year. Especially late this year due to Covid. Even late November was not close enough to summer to get perfect weather and on Monday 30 November the plantings for 4 groups totalling 182 children had to be postponed until later in the week due to rain. The total number of children scheduled to take part in a planting over the week was 600, so it's a major task for the CCC rangers and volun-



## Travis Wetland Trust Meetings

The Travis Wetland Trust board meets monthly on the Tuesday following the work day, from 6.30pm — 8.30pm at the Travis Wetland Education Centre. The board extends a welcome to all who wish to attend.

## Travis Wetland Contacts

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