

BIRD CALL

February 2019 Issue 45



oroikonui
ecosanctuary

What's New at Orokonui

We've had another busy summer at Orokonui, welcoming a constant stream of visitors from places near and far. For most, the forest and wildlife are the main attraction, but there are a variety of ways that people can experience our ecosanctuary . . .

In the last two months, for instance, we've hosted five weddings at Orokonui! Weddings, retreats, meetings and conferences provide us with an important source of income to support our core work enhancing our local biodiversity – and we offer a completely unique venue so it's a win-win, both for the conservation and for our guests!

Our fantastic Visitor Centre Manager, Sharee (AKA the Wedding Planner) takes care of this aspect of our work, making sure that each event runs like clockwork. For weddings, Sharee has a vast network of contacts to call on: the flowers, the cake, the music, the catering, the photographer - ensuring that our couples' special day is unique and memorable.

For the more active amongst us the Orokonui Challenge is coming up on the 3rd of March. Not for the faint-hearted, this tough and hilly 18.5km run showcases our beautiful local landscape, taking runners through the ecosanctuary forest, and nearby Orokonui Estuary and Doctors Point Beach. This event raises funds for the special food that our kākā and takahē enjoy. This year, seasoned race director, Alan Funnell, is organising the event. We challenge you to sign up – see our website for further details!

Amanda Symon – General Manager



Ben Thompson and Jardeena Still's amazing wedding at Orokonui - for more photos of their special day check out our facebook page!

Conservation Matters

It is often assumed that the focus of Orokonui is the restoration of its birdlife but first and foremost we are an ecological restoration project – meaning that the entire ecosystem from the birds to the bugs are restored to greatness.

Our wonderful herpetofauna (namely our lizards and reptiles) are an area of much work within Orokonui. Tuatara research, led by Professor Alison Cree from the Otago University, has been ongoing since our inception. Seven years on from the wild releases of nearly 100 tuatara the monitoring data has revealed nesting, a good survival rate and very healthy individuals. Tuatara may have been absent from the mainland for 500 years so our population at Orokonui is of international significance.

Other transferred species such as Green Skink, Otago Skink and Otago Jewelled Gecko are monitored regularly, and all are faring very well. Our ACO (artificial cover object) team has been monitoring for over 5 years now and their results are revealing a trend with the number of Southern Grass Skinks exponentially growing. They have also recorded Cryptic Skink within Orokonui for the first time and have shown that our Green Skinks are dispersing. In years to come we also hope to establish Forest and Duvauchelle's gecko - so there's a lot more work to come!

Elton Smith – Conservation Manager



One of the hazards of lizard monitoring – here a Kōrero Gecko finds refuge in a worker's boot!

Forest of Knowledge

The Orokonui education team is lucky enough to attract many students from Otago University, either as volunteers, as part of the university outreach programme, or in part time roles. Young graduate Korako Edwards, who has recently 'left the Orokonui nest', looks back on his time at the ecosanctuary.

My time as an assistant educator at Orokonui began in April 2017. Starting out I was quite nervous as I was only in my second year of an ecology degree at Otago University and didn't know a huge amount about New Zealand native flora and fauna. My worries were quickly eased with an abundance of support from the Orokonui team to learn on the job and begin to give tours when I was confident.



*Assistant Educator,
Korako Edwards*

A big part of my role at Orokonui was representing Kāti Huirapa ki Puketeraki and Kāi Te Ruahikihiki as mana whenua of the Orokonui area. This role usually involved doing mihi whakatau to welcome the visiting group. It was a privilege to be able to represent Kāi Tahu in this way and through this I have become much more confident in whaikōrero.

Another highlight of my time was gaining a wealth of knowledge about native birds, reptiles, invertebrates and plants. This knowledge helped me during my studies in ecology and has made me far more aware of current environmental issues within Aotearoa. I believe it is very important for us as Māori and mana whenua to take leadership roles within our communities concerning the health of rivers, forests and coasts.

Finally, I am very grateful for all of the wonderful people I have connected with through my role at Orokonui. A huge thank you to all of the other assistant educators who I worked with and special thanks to Tahu Mackenzie, Chris Baillie and Amanda Symon.

Korako Edwards - Assistant Educator

Volunteers' Voices

This year has kicked off with a plethora of offers from groups keen to assist us with all things Orokonui. We recently had the pleasure of hosting teenagers from an Otago Polytechnic summer programme aimed at introducing former refugee youth to independence and integrating them into Dunedin.

A lot of pruning was done in the pā harakeke with our valued guide Sue Hensley outlining the tikanga of the task and touring the guests through into the ecosanctuary for their first interaction with Tuatara, Skinks and the elusive Takahē who unfortunately stood us up this time! It was utterly fascinating hearing the teens take turns translating Sue's explanations, and seeing the looks on their faces when they heard that Tuatara eggs take at least a year to hatch.

This was an awesome day for all involved, although extremely hot with little wind! We sent the group off with encouragement to visit Doctors Point beach before their trip back to the big smoke. We look forward to hosting the likes of Wrightsons and ANZ team members, Students for Environmental Action (SEA) members, international student groups, members of the Unicrew volunteer initiative Silverline, and more in the coming months!

Alice Macklow - Volunteer Coordinator



Teenagers from Syria enjoy a beautiful day out volunteering at Orokonui.

Wishlist

A point and shoot (basic) digital camera - for volunteers and guests to use to create content for social media

Adhesive labels or stickers - can be any size, shape, colour or form as we can cut them to size - for the cafe to use for labelling items stored in the fridge



Open Daily 9.30am-4.30pm for Guided Tours and Self Guided Walks
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