



Pukeiti NEWSLETTER

Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust Inc.

www.pukeiti.org.nz

After Lockdown

As for all of us, lockdown at Pukeiti came quickly, requiring urgent decisions. The gardens, like many, had to shut to the public and staff members were sent home.

Management understood, though, that arrangements would have to be made to tend the nursery and Vireya House. Jeremy Murray, employed as a temporary gardener, volunteered to take up residence in The Lodge studio unit and undertake maintenance duties for the duration of the lockdown. Pukeiti was his bubble, shared with Graham and Karen Chard, proprietors of the Rainforest Café, who reside in the accommodation above the Café.

Jeremy, an Australian, a qualified landscape gardener who previously operated a business in Sydney and more recently tended resort gardens on Hayman Island, was well qualified for the tasks ahead. His energy, great work ethic and skills ensured that when the Gardens opened in mid-May they still looked great. He was assisted from time to time by Graham and Karen. The weather was kind, but there were a few surprises. It did not rain for ten days and much of the place needed irrigating, particularly the nursery, and at times the irrigation system was subject to malfunction. Boy racers using the empty Carrington Road as a race track, evidenced by black tyre marks, were discouraged by Graham focusing a torch



Metrosideros fulgens

on the security cameras.

The gardens reflecting the good work and settled warm weather look as attractive as ever. The rhododendrons are well budded, harbingers of a colourful spring; the birdsong joyous and loud, no doubt, in part, the result of the TRC predator control programme (there is even a sign on the roadside warning of kiwis, which evidence indicated could be back in the surrounding bush); the hydrangeas bronzed with antique autumn flower colour, early camelias, wafts of scent from early *Daphne bholua* flowers, flashes of orange-red rata

flowers of *Metrosideros fulgens*, scattered azalea flowers, white *Luculia* in the Covered Walk, and in places carpets of *Parochetus* in flower add to the joy of a return visit to Pukeiti.

The staff are back on duty; workman are progressing the cycle track through the garden which will eventually reach the coast at Oakura; the family hut on Pukeiti Hill is nearing completion; the Café is open again from 10am to 4pm Wednesday through to Sunday each week. Your support would be appreciated.

It is time for another visit.

Lynn Bublitz



Parochetus communis - Shamrock Pea

A New Head Gardener

Scott Denham has been appointed to this position and commenced duties the day of lockdown, having moved from Auckland with his wife Amy, and set up home in New Plymouth. Unable to physically take part in work he has spent the time in lockdown learning a little of the history of Pukeiti and planning ahead. In addition to his management duties as head gardener he will be responsible for maintenance and development of Zone 1: the lawn, The Lodge, café borders and the Misty Knoll.

He is a young man who was born and raised in South Hampshire in a gardening orientated family. His father spent his lifetime working for the South Hampshire Council as a gardener in the city parks. His sister is a florist. Scott initially had no inclination to follow in his father's footsteps. He completed a degree in Health and Fitness. He always had a desire to travel and after spending five years working in the fitness world



then spent the next eight years travelling, visiting Sikkim, Nepal, and Vietnam, centres of rhododendron distribution, picking up the odd job here and there. After landing in Auckland, he married Amy, and took up a position of gardener at the Auckland Botanic Gardens. While employed Scott successfully began Trade Certificate qualifications. Recently he had responsibility for the South African Section of the gardens.

He is excited about his new job and the challenges he will confront and has the personality and drive to meet them.

We welcome Scott to Pukeiti.

Metrosideros fulgens Climbing rata Akakura

One of the many joys of Pukeiti through the winter months is the climbing rata. These lovely red flowers are a sign that possum control is working well, and the display is better each year. Unfortunately, there is a pest that we do not have the ability to control yet and that is myrtle rust. *Metrosideros* being in the Myrtaceae family is susceptible to this and it has been confirmed on *M. fulgens*. What we have yet to learn is how much of an effect the fungus will have on the rata.

Metrosideros fulgens is found in coastal and lowland forest throughout New Zealand except for Stewart Island.

Metrosideros is a genus of approximately 50 species of trees, shrubs and vines found in New Zealand and around the Pacific. Recent DNA analysis has shown that the varieties found in French Polynesia, Hawaii and other Pacific islands are closely related to pohutakawa *M. excelsa* and have probably evolved from it.



Luculia pinceana

Board Member Changes

Board Members Gordon Bailey and Doug Thomson are both eligible for re-election. Others interested should complete nomination forms which can be obtained from the secretary at pukeiti@pukeiti.com. Nominations need to be with the secretary no later than August 31.

Membership Subscriptions

Subscription notices will be posted in July. \$40.00 per family. The small increase was approved by last years AGM and will enable the Trust to further assist the Rhododendron Conservation Project which has gained international attention.

To The Hoarders and Archivists

A big thank you to all the members who responded to this request. We have filled in most of the gaps. We also have some very interesting plant catalogues dating back well into the last century that will help strengthen our case to the EPA.

Luculia pinceana

Luculia pinceana is a beautiful scented shrub which flowers in late autumn-early winter. Hence it is a picture at Pukeiti now. There are four species of *Luculia*.

These are *L. grandiflora*, *L. gratissima*, *L. pinceana* and *L. yunnanensis*. The previously described *L. intermedia* is now regarded as a synonym for *L. pinceana*.

L. pinceana comes from Nepal, India, China, Myanmar and Vietnam. It is found in forests or thickets on mountain slopes and stream sides in valleys from 600-3000m.

Two varieties of *L. pinceana* are commonly available in New Zealand. *L. 'Fragrant Cloud'* was selected by the late Os Blumhart. This is a deep pink coloured form. *L. 'Fragrant Pearl'* was grown by Glyn Church from seed he imported and then selected by Mark Jury from some seedlings Glyn had given him. It is a beautiful cream-white form.

Luculias are easily grown in a frost-free situation and are reasonably tough. Pruning is after flowering.

From the Members' Committee

Phew! What a start to the year...

The Pukeiti Members' year got started on Saturday February 15 with our 'Drinks and Nibbles in the Garden' day. This year we started the afternoon with guided walks. The weather was perfect, calm and warm but not too warm and not too sunny.

Rene took the short walk down to the water wheel and was going to include another area as well but, with the valued input of herself and other members, the walk to the water wheel filled all the time available. Two highlights of the walk were seeing a clump of the native orchid, *Earina autumnalis*, in full flower just above head height on the Tree Top Walkway and seeing *Brachyglottis turneri* alongside the waterwheel path. For many on the walk this was the first time they had seen this native perennial herb which has been introduced to Pukeiti and is not local to the site. The bright yellow daisy-like flowers were beacons of colour which immediately drew the members' attention.

Heather, Gary and Angela set off leading the longer walk in the direction of the new Family Hut which is situated just off the Conservation Track, near the junction with the Saxton Track. It was a pleasant walk along the Loop Track and Conservation Track to the hut although with frequent stops we did end up running a little behind time. At the hut we stopped and topped up with fluid and snacks. As it was still a building site, we were not able to enter the hut, but we did admire the location chosen for this facility. The group then split into two with one half returning the same way we came. The other half went by a more scenic route, through lovely bush which did end up being the longer way and quite strenuous for some of the participants. At the end of the day however, the group had a real feeling of achievement having walked over 7km along undulating tracks and few would have had difficulty sleeping that night! One of the trampers was a few days short of their 89th birthday! A big thank you to all members of the group who stepped up to help others.

When we got back to The Lodge there was an atmosphere of warmth and conviviality that was almost tangible.

Rene had made a lovely punch and I don't think a glass of punch has ever tasted so nice as it did after that tramp. The nibbles were pretty good as well. Everyone was sitting around and chatting about their different walks as well as all the things they had planned for the year including, for some, the Members' English Garden Trip that Graham Smith had organised for us.

The next function was 'Revive the Memories Day' on February 27. With more notice this year a good number of our members in retirement villages plus some other long-standing members, who don't very often get up to the garden, had a very pleasant afternoon tea at The Lodge. The weather, again, was kind and everyone was able to join one of the guided tours of the garden that Lara took for us. As the Committee members were cleaning up the conversation turned to this virus that was then still being reported as only really affecting Wuhan. Opinion ranged from it being a bit of an overreaction, to a new virus for which we have no vaccine and no natural immunity which was a bit of a worry. None of us though had sufficiently creative imaginations to even start to conceive what was about to unfold around the world and at home. We were still planning to have a large group helping to pack up the plant orders and having our Autumn Members' Day as per schedule up at The Lodge.

Fast forward three weeks and the Board Meeting was cancelled, The Autumn Members' Day was cancelled and the Members' Garden Trip to England was also cancelled. Shortly after this the government started recommending limits on personal movement and social distancing. It was decided at short notice that only three of us would process the plant orders and at midnight the day the courier picked up the orders, NZ went into Alert Level 4.

The weeks spent in Level 4 and Level 3 will have impacted all our members but some more than others. Some members have had to cancel family weddings and other significant celebrations. Others have had to farewell a partner or other family member from a distance and without the physical support of other members of the family and their friends. All members will have been impacted to a greater or lesser extent by the financial repercussions of the lockdown and by the closing of the borders. We are now in Level 2 with many more freedoms. It feels like spring, signs of life have returned to the community. We can burst our

bubbles, meet up with friends—albeit small groups – and go back to work, even if we're not 'essential' workers.

There are good signs that NZ may have dodged the bullet and avoided a major corona virus outbreak. The Washington Post rather optimistically reported a few weeks ago that NZ hasn't just flattened the curve, it has smashed it. I'm not sure we can be quite that confident yet and we do still have to be very careful. As I write this, social distancing between strangers and between groups is still required and no groups greater than 10 are allowed. The number of cases being detected has become very low but, whilst cases are being detected, there is a chance the numbers will escalate again. The responsibility is on us to do our best to stop this happening. As Dr Ahmed Ouma, Deputy Director of the African CDC so aptly stated "In the absence of a vaccine, we are the vaccine. Our behaviour can stop the virus dead in its tracks." Because of the situation being as it still is, we have reluctantly decided



Tomtit - A Pukeiti visitor

we should cancel the Mid-Winter Lunch scheduled for June 20. Who would ever have thought that less than two years after regaining access to The Lodge we would again be in a situation where we can't have functions there? Rest assured however, as soon as we are able to socialise safely in larger groups, the committee will organise a celebration up at The Lodge so we can all get together again. If it is close to an already scheduled Members' Day, we will just repurpose that day. If not, we will endeavour to organise a special event and will notify members via e-mail or phone.

In the meantime, I'm going to have a positive outlook and assume that by the end of June we will be back to Alert Level 1 and that all the planned events for the rest of the year will be able to proceed as scheduled. We hope to see you at them.

Heather Robson

Please mark these dates on your calendar

Members' Activities

2020

ACTIVITIES

Propagation Workshop

Wednesday July 22. Meet in Propagation area 9:00am.

Members, under Wendy's supervision, will make cuttings and divide perennials for use in the garden and for later Members' Sales.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 22

Soup & Roll Lunch

A walk round the Large Leafed Rhododendrons followed by a homely lunch in The Douglas Cook Room.

Meet in The Lodge. Tea and Coffee will be available from 10:00am. A guided walk around the Large Leafed Rhododendrons will leave from The Lodge at 10:30am. Craig will be available to take the less mobile members on the Mobility Vehicle.

After the walk, soup and a roll will be available in the Douglas Cook Room.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

Garden Visits

A selection of Taranaki gardens will be open for members to visit. Details in September's Newsletter.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17

Spring Members' Day & AGM

Details later in the year.

FRIDAY OCTOBER 30 – SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 08

2020 Taranaki Garden Festival

Volunteers needed for hosting in the Lodge and membership recruitment.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12

End of Year BBQ

RSVP Thursday, December 10.

Volunteering in the Garden

On any Wednesday that suits, meet up with the regular Wednesday volunteers outside the staff quarters at 9:00 to help with the garden maintenance. Any help is very welcome.

Members' Committee Meetings

Tuesday, August 18 – 9:30am - The Lodge
Tuesday, November 17 – 9:30am - The Lodge

Board Meetings

The June meeting will be held as a Zoom Meeting at a date to be finalised.
Saturday, October 17 – 9:00am, Board Room, The Lodge



Bookings for The Lodge facilities and Studio can be made on the TRC website

www.trc.govt.nz/gardens/venue-hire-and-tours/pukeiti-studio-accommodation/



Pukeiti

Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust Inc.



Taranaki Regional Council

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Chairperson
Gordon Bailey gordon.bailey@codc.govt.nz

www.pukeiti.org.nz
is worth a look!

TARANAKI REGIONAL COUNCIL

www.trc.govt.nz

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