

The Magazine of the Friends of Pukekura Park

Volume 8, Number 3
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... it's as if we have lost an indispensable encyclopaedia
- and it was the only copy left . . .

We dedicate this issue to
David Medway.

(June 26 1939 - October 3 2013)

Internationally recognised naturalist
and fountain of knowledge of
Pukekura Park.



Photos David Medway



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Schefflera 'Condor' flowers in Pukekura Park

David Medway

This very large-leaved *Schefflera* (Family Araliaceae) was introduced to New Zealand by Dick Endt of Landsendts subtropical garden in Auckland. In 1977 he collected a cutting of a tree growing in rainforest high up on the steep slopes of the Colanuma Gorge in southern Ecuador. It appeared to be an undescribed species of *Schefflera* that Endt called "Condor" after the nearby Cordillera del C ndor. All of the *Schefflera* 'Condor' plants grown at Landsendts originate from this tree. Endt considers *Schefflera* 'Condor' to be quite rare in the wild. It flowered only three times in thirty years at Landsendts (www.landsendts.co.nz; Endt *The subtropical garden at Landsendts - a plant collector's dream* (2009: 126-127).

Five of six specimens of *Schefflera* 'Condor' received from Landsendts on 28 June 2001 were planted in upper Primula Dell on 4 October 2001 (*Planting Book* 6/2000-7/2004: 13, 16). Two of those plants still survive. One of them flowered for the first time in 2012. In early August I noticed that it had several inflorescences bearing developing flower buds. There were about 40 buds on each of eight inflorescences. In late November each of the buds bore numerous very small male flowers. I saw only Bumblebees (*Bombus terrestris*) and Honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) feeding on these flowers during my observations of this plant over the following weeks. One or two Honeybees and up to five Bumblebees at a time were regular visitors until late December when they stopped visiting the flowers which by then may no longer have provided a food source for them. All of the inflorescences dropped off the plant at the end of January 2013.



Plate 311 of *Flora Peruviana, et Chilensis* (1798-1802).

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According to the *Catalogue of the vascular plants of Ecuador*, which is available on the Internet at www.mobot.org/mobot/research/ecuador/welcome.shtml, there appear to be several undescribed *Schefflera* species in Ecuador. *Schefflera* 'Condor' may still be one of them. Its compound leaf and inflorescence are very similar in appearance to the compound leaf and inflorescence of *Actinophyllum pentandrum* as those features are depicted in Plate 311 of Ruiz and Pavon *Flora Peruviana, et Chilensis* (1798-1802). That publication is also available on the Internet at www.botanicus.org/title/b12851358. *Actinophyllum pentandrum* is now *Schefflera pentandra*. It occurs in the Cordillera del Cóndor region.



Bumblebees feeding on *Schefflera* 'Condor' flowers.

Photos David Medway



(Above) New compound leaf of *Schefflera* 'Condor'.



(Right) *Schefflera* 'Condor' with inflorescences.

Park spring update

**Sheryl Clyma
Assistant Curator Pukekura Park**

Winter leading into spring has been a very busy time for staff in the Park. Two large projects have created new gardens to plant and provided new opportunities to develop areas.

Planting of new areas in the Childrens' Playground at Pukekura is underway. There is a walking track for the children through a small area of bush where we have provided plants of interest to them such as Hen and Chickens ferns (*Asplenium bulbiferum*), Kumerahou (*Pomaderris kumeraho*), and Kaka Beak (*Clianthus*). To provide some colour against the bush backdrop we have planted *Camellia* 'Fairy Wand', *Azalea* 'Kirin' and *Justicia pauciflora*. All of the gardens will be mulched and turf will be laid to complete the area.

Bags have been installed around the large island at the head of the main lake, and a step-up platform built so that the Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) and Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) can climb up easily on to the island to nest. Native *Carex* grasses have been planted there. Soon the staff will be planting around the lake edges where the goal is to plant feature trees and shrubs that will provide seasonal colour and focal points. Some of the feature trees are *Prunus campanulata* 'Pink Cloud', *Prunus subhirtella* 'Pendula Rosea', and *Acer palmatum* 'Osakazuki'. Some of the shrubs are *Viburnum plicatum* variety *tomentosum*, *Camellia* 'Quintessence', and *Daphne odora*. More *Cyathea medullaris* tree ferns will also be planted along with *Asplenium bulbiferum* 'Maori Princess' and native *Carex* grasses.



Abutilon 'Lucky Lantern' has been added to the bank above the Wisterias by the Tea House. These *Abutilons* will grow only 50 cm tall and should add a point of interest to the area. *Azaleas* planted in the Tea House bedding are *Azalea* 'Guanda Red' and *Azalea* 'White Aline'. They will be planted around the main lake when the summer bedding change-over occurs. Landscaping around the new Fernery development is still underway. A new garden bed has been created on the Fred Parker Lawn, and the existing bed has been reshaped and edged with railway sleepers. The stone steps leading down to the lawn have been removed and will be replaced with lawn.

The mixed *Daffodils* (*Narcissus*) and bulbs planted along the bush margin at Brooklands and between Brooklands Zoo and The Gables are putting on a beautiful display at present. *Iris*'s will add their colour. The Iceland Poppies (*Papaver nudicaule*) at Brooklands lawn have performed well this year and will be replaced in October when the summer bedding is planted.

Opening of the new playground - October 18th.

UC Davis Arboretum acknowledges Dr George Mason's generosity.

Dr George Mason was the catalyst for a New Zealand garden at the University of California, Davis. The UC Davis Arboretum now includes a Carex, Hebe and Phormium collection, propagated wild-collected seeds from New Zealand, and provides horticulture staff, students, volunteers and community members with opportunities to learn about New Zealand plants.

“Thanks to your vision and your foundation gift, the staff, students and community of UC Davis came together to build a new garden collection for the UC Davis Arboretum. This new collection, inspired by your advice and suggestions, celebrates the floristic history and the special plants of New Zealand. As a co-creator of this new garden you brought a new focus to the Arboretum.”

- from the citation presented to Dr George Mason by the UC Davis Arboretum.



Left: Elise Smith, local scientist and ecologist; Secretary, Friends of Pukekura Park; advocate for plant records linked to Geographic Information Systems; and liaison co-ordinator with the University of California's Davis Arboretum.

Centre: Mary Burke, Director of Collections and Planning, UC Davis Arboretum.

Right: Dr George Mason, agricultural scientist, botanist, and conservationist of New Plymouth; alumni of Auckland University and University of California, Davis. George's immense contribution to the preservation of New Zealand's flora was recognised by Mary Burke during her recent visit to the Friends of Pukekura Park.

Accessibility and continuity of Park records.

Mary Burke, Director of Collections and Planning for the University of California's Davis Arboretum visited the Friends of Pukekura Park recently to liaise with Elise Smith on the presentation of David Medway's comprehensive catalogue of significant plants.

Mary Burke also highlighted the importance of Geographic Information Systems, GIS, in public gardens. "GIS extends our senses", she says, "it brings records to life and turns a map into a conversation." Elise Smith is leading the Friends along this path.

Mary was particularly impressed with the calibre of the Botanical Records Officer, Ian Hutchinson, whose extensive botanical knowledge, coupled with inputs from Friends like Dr George Mason, will now form the mainstay of plant information in the Park.

Francis Hamar Arden - the "skilled gardener" of early Pukekura Park

David Medway

At its meeting in July 1893 the Recreation Grounds Board resolved to "make arrangements with a skilled gardener for the planting out of native shrubs" in the Grounds (*Taranaki Herald* 11/7/1893, p.2). The Board engaged Francis Hamar Arden for the purpose. Arden, who was known as Hamar, was a local artist and gardener. Either he or his father, who died in 1895 and was also known as Hamar, had previously donated plants to the Board (*Taranaki Herald* 12/10/1891, p.2; 9/7/1892, p.2). It was reported that the Board had arranged for Arden "to superintend the planting out of native trees, and he is at present engaged putting in tree ferns round the large lake. Mr Arden has given a load of tree ferns, and another load is coming from Mr Standish next week. Mr John Skinner has given a large quantity of pampas grass, and Constable Hickman has also promised a lot of cabbage trees, and donations of puriri and other trees are being made, so that if the weather continues fine a good deal of work will be done" (*Taranaki Herald* 22/7/1893, p.2). The October 1893 meeting of the Board received a letter from Arden "reporting as to the tree planting and other work done under his supervision, and advising as to future planting. Mr Arden was present and conferred with the Board on matters mentioned in his letter. The Board cordially thanked Mr Arden for the great interest taken by him and for the good taste and skill shown by him in the discharge of his duties". Arden's account for £6 was passed for payment (*Taranaki Herald* 10/10/1893, p. 2). The next Annual Report of the Board mentioned that during 1893 "Nearly three thousand native trees and shrubs have been planted out under the superintendence of Mr Arden, and a large number placed in the nursery" (*Taranaki Herald* 2/5/1894, p. 2).

The April 1894 meeting of the Board instructed the overseer for the month to arrange the autumn planting with Arden (*Taranaki Herald* 7/4/1894, p.2). The September 1894 meeting received a letter from Arden "suggesting alteration and improvement to the Grounds, kind of trees, and where they should be planted" (*Taranaki Herald* 8/9/1894, p.2). The Annual Report of the Board for 1894 mentioned that "During the year a series of working bees were held, and a great deal of useful work was done under the direction of Mr Arden, whose plan for the permanent planting and ornamentation of the grounds will result most advantageously" (*Taranaki Herald* 21/3/1895, p.2). The 1894 working bees supervised by Arden are fully described in *The Magazine of the Friends of Pukekura Park* 4(2)(June 2009), pp.6-7).

In March 1895 "several members of Recreation Ground Board, accompanied by Mr H. Arden, made a general inspection of the Grounds, and they were sorry to find that many of the native shrubs and valuable ferns had been dug up and taken from the Grounds. Several of these shrubs and ferns were only got by the Board from different parts of the district after a great deal of trouble and expense. The Board has now almost given up any hope of replacing them. If they are subject to such returns as this for their labor and efforts in planting rare, choice, and valuable ferns and shrubs, they will have to restrict visitors going into the grounds" (*Taranaki Herald* 13/3/1895, p. 2).

The following letter from F. H. Arden appeared in the *Taranaki Herald* of 23/4/1895, p.2: "The planting season is close at hand, and several citizens of New Plymouth have asked me what sorts of trees are wanted for planting in the Domain, and as there may be, and should be, others who wish to help in decorating their beautiful grounds, but who do not know what to give, will you allow me, through your columns, to give a list of the plants that would be most acceptable and appropriate at the present time. Besides the exotics, donations of native trees are much wanted for replenishing the nursery bed, and I am sure they will be most gratefully received by the Board. They should be carefully mattocked or dug up – not pulled out by the roots – as a score carefully raised are worth a hundred pulled out. The month of May will be the best time to send plants, as I shall be in the Grounds constantly during that month.... The following is the list:- *Grevillea robusta*, *Ficus macrophylla*, Lawson cypress, Norfolk Island pine, Chilian pine, *Cedrus deodara*, Austrian pine, *Cryptomeria elegans*, Silver tree, Tulip tree, *Casuarina* or shiok, Paulowina, Camphor laurel, Olive, Plane, *Balbrogia lucida*, *Retinosporas* (any variety), Magnolias, Rhododendrons, Alder, Mountain ash, Tamarisk, Yucca, Fan palm or *Kentia* palms, Washington palm; and any native trees, not too large, especially – Honeysuckle, Hinau, Rimu, Fern trees, Lacebark, Wharangi, Mountain toi,

Pittosporum trifolium, Nikau”.

It was announced that working bees in the Recreation Grounds would resume on 25 April 1895, but those planned for that day and on 2 May 1895 were postponed because of wet weather (*Taranaki Herald* of 22/4/1895, p.2; 3/5/1895, p.2). However, working bees were held on 9 and 16 May 1895 (*Taranaki Herald* 15/5/1895, p.2) when plants received in response to Arden’s public request were most likely planted out under his supervision. One of the plants requested by Arden was the Moreton Bay Fig (*Ficus macrophylla*). Only one specimen of this fast-growing species is known to have been planted in the Park. It seems probable that the now gigantic specimen which is so prominent near the Waterfall was received by Arden on this occasion and planted in its present position on one of the working bees he supervised in May 1895. It is almost certainly this specimen that is clearly visible in the photograph of the Lily Pond, now Hatchery Lawn, which is reproduced in *The Magazine of the Friends of Pukekura Park* 7(3)(October 2012), p.7). The photograph is undated but is entitled “Recreation Grounds”. Presumably it was taken before November 1907 when the name of the Park was changed from Recreation Grounds to Pukekura Park.

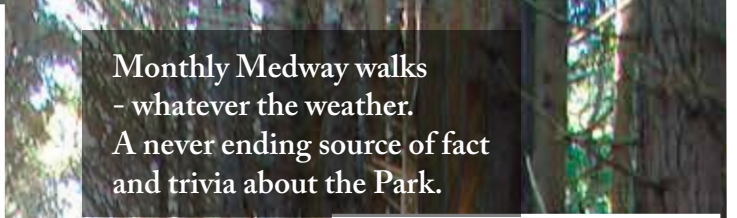
In July 1895 Arden wrote to the Board “suggesting the work and tree planting he thinks necessary should be done in the grounds. It was decided to thank Mr Arden for the valuable suggestions contained in his letter; also for his kind services in the past, and that he be informed that the Board greatly regrets its inability, on account of poverty, to incur any further liability during the present season, as the annual subscriptions received amount to less than half those of former years, and that the bank overdraft, for which the members are personally responsible, stands at nearly £100” (*Taranaki Herald* 16/7/1895, p.2).

Francis Hamar Arden died at New Plymouth on 19 December 1899, aged 57 years. A short Obituary mentioned that his favourite hobbies were arboriculture and painting (*Taranaki Herald* 19/12/1899, p. 2; 20/12/1899, p.2).



Tulip Tree - one of Arden’s recommended trees to plant
Sketch from the Ian McDowell collection

Monthly Medway walks
- whatever the weather.
A never ending source of fact
and trivia about the Park.



A tiny sample of David's huge photograph collection
- all generously made available to The Friends.
His research skills found historic illustrations as needed.



David Medway was a lead member of the Friends of Pukekura Park for over ten years. He joined the Committee in 2006 and became President in 2009. A role he held until his untimely death.

Being an internationally recognised naturalist, he kept meticulous records of birds, plants, fungi and insects, and their inter-relationships. He published numerous articles on the wildlife of Pukekura Park, and captured thousands of photographic images.

He spent many days in the Puke Ariki Research Centre and other libraries, finding and methodically cataloguing information; using a range of sources - photos, journals, plans, newsletters and newspapers. He read through years of press articles and related the reports to historic photographs. He pinpointed tree planting dates, structural changes and other information about the Park which had been lost to memory. David's research has become the corner stone of our understanding and appreciation of the history and ecology of Pukekura Park.

Recently David completed the cataloging of over 500 significant plants in Pukekura Park. This is no ordinary catalogue, as he not only identified the locations and names of some very rare and interesting plants, but also researched the history of each: the source of the plant, planting dates, associated records, previous scientific names, and any associations with the citizens and history of New Plymouth. This catalogue tracks the history and the work of the curators and staff of Pukekura Park. It documents the travails they experienced, and the excitement they had while working with such a wonderful botanical collection.



Thank you, David,
for the legacy of information collected and shared for the benefit of future visitors to Pukekura Park.

The Camellia Quest

Ian Hutchinson
Botanical Records Officer

Over the last few months I have been devoting time to a survey of the Camellia collections in Pukekura Park to determine what we have, and identifying many plants where their cultivar names have not been known. I think it is safe to say that now I probably know where most if not all the Camellias are in the Park, including some in fairly obscure locations. For the latter I have made a series of sketch maps to indicate where the plants are.

There are many Camellias in the Park for which no records exist in any form, either as to when they were planted or what cultivars they might be. There are instances where plantings have been recorded loosely under "Pukekura" and so I have had to become a detective and try to figure out where the plants actually are. Mostly I have found them through a process of elimination and thinking outside the square. There have also been instances where plants have been incorrectly identified so this has meant a lot of methodical and painstaking research to try to shed some light on them. This is challenging work, but it is very satisfying when a mystery is solved. Most of the plantings that I have checked were between 1956 and 1971. This 15-year period seems to have been a busy time for the planting of Camellias in the Park. There was also another sizeable burst of Camellia plantings in the early 1990s. There are other plantings that fall outside these times but they were much less numerous.

I started with the collection that is on the bank below the old Curator's residence on Victoria Road. The records for this existed in the form of an old sketch map and a list of plants in the outwards books. I have worked on checking and cross-referencing the list and plan against the plants that are physically on the site. This collection was initially started in September 1956 and there were successive plantings in June 1963 and again in June 1990. In between these main plantings there have been a few replacement plantings but nothing major. The other collections I have checked are the one at Shortland Street entrance and along Swan's Walk, the collection across the southern boundary of Brooklands Zoo (which was part of an Arbour Day planting), and the collection in the western corner of Brooklands at Kaimata Street. It has been a pleasant surprise to discover how many of the original plantings are still alive. Through a lot of research I have now confirmed and recorded what the survivors are, and I will get these lists typed up in due course so we have an electronic record of the collections. It will come in handy in the future when adding this information to the database. Because many of the cultivars were previously unknown to me, the research that was needed has meant I have also learned a lot.

As well as checking the above collections I have been working on the identification of some of the old Camellias which are still present mainly in the lower part of the Park. This continues the work started by David Medway who had already identified some and documented them in previous editions of this *Magazine*, for example *Camellia japonica* 'Welbankiana' and *Camellia japonica* 'Triumphans'. It would appear that some of these "golden oldies" could have been planted between about 1895 and 1914. These plants are examples of cultivars that came into cultivation during the nineteenth century in Europe and Australia and it would appear they made their way to New Zealand largely through Australia and the United States with a few from England in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

During the last few months with David Medway's help I have had some success in naming several of the old unknowns. This has been a slow process, working through lists of possible names in a process of elimination. Sometimes one is lucky enough to strike gold first try and other times the drawing board has had to be revisited many times. David has been most helpful in checking my identifications and I think it is fair to say that we have made a good team on this endeavour. Some of the successes are the identification of the Camellia with variegated flowers at the Band Room, the Camellia with double-white flowers near the Band Rotunda, and the large spreading Camellia with rose-red flowers besides the Wisteria at Brooklands. The plant by the Band Room turns out to be a cultivar originating in Italy called *Camellia japonica* 'Madame de Strekaloff' which first appeared in an Italian nursery catalogue in 1853. The Camellia near the Band Rotunda is *Camellia japonica* 'Dido'. This cultivar, named in 1848, originates from the garden of William Macarthur at Camden Park in New South Wales. The Camellia at Brooklands is another Australian cultivar called *Camellia japonica* 'Great Eastern' which name dates from 1872.

David and I have also been working on the identification of some of the old Camellia cultivars which are growing at the Te Henui and Waireka cemeteries. Between us we have made some good progress. Again, these plants all appear to be nineteenth century cultivars so the list of heritage Camellias is increasing. It is my hope that at some time in the future we will propagate these old cemetery cultivars, growing them on to become part of a greater collection of heritage Camellias in the Park.



Ian McDowell sketch

The Camellia sketch is from the collection by the late Ian McDowell. The Friends of Pukekura Park have access to these stunning sketches thanks to David Medway's relationship with Ian and the McDowell family.

Thanks you David for obtaining these treasures.

A cruel tree condemned to death

Ron Lambert
Senior Researcher Puke Ariki

Every few years a native tree from coastal northern New Zealand hits the media limelight as a homicidal horror approaching that of Frankenstein's monster or Hannibal Lecter. With a Latin tag that is, indeed, a monster - *Heimerliodendron brunonianum* - the species is also known by later authors as *Pisonia brunoniana* which is only slightly less of a mouthful. *Pisonia* is, however, perhaps better known as the "bird-catching" or, more recently, as the "bird-killer" tree. *Pisonia*, a member of the Nyctaginaceae family, is a genus of about 30 species mainly tropical or sub-tropical. The natural range of our Parapara is northern New Zealand, the Kermadecs, Norfolk Island, Lord Howe Island, and Hawaii. The strikingly attractive foliage of the 8 to 10 metre-high tree resembles that of Karaka (*Corynocarpus laevigatus*). It is now extensively grown for that reason in gardens in frost-free areas of New Zealand. Two variegated cultivars are known and they are the more common garden plants. The species is now rare on the mainland as it is a favourite food of possums, goats, and cattle. The exceedingly sticky mature fruits are capable of trapping small birds such as Silvereyes (*Zosterops lateralis*) and House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) which are unable to escape and often die. Robert H. Govett officially first drew science's attention to the plant's bird-catching abilities. In a paper read to the Wellington Philosophical Society in 1883 he described Silvereyes trapped by a tree growing in the garden of his father, Archdeacon Henry Govett, in New Plymouth (*Transactions New Zealand Institute* Vol. XVI, p. 364). I can readily confirm that brushing against ripe seeds will also immediately transfer them, in considerable numbers, to clothing or shoes and then to fingers as removal is attempted.

The controversy of 1932

The Parapara, as a "bird-catching" tree, hit the local headlines in 1932 when Vogeltown resident John Wheeler reported that a Morepork (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*), attracted by other smaller birds caught on the sticky seeds, had died in the tree (*Taranaki Herald* 30/7/1932). The story, as they say today, "went viral" and was subsequently reported in the *Auckland Star* and a number of other newspapers around New Zealand. Local park superintendents in the north quickly moved to re-assure the concerned public that "it is proposed to remove the fruit which is a menace to birdlife" (*Auckland Star* 9/9/1932). Thomas Horton, Pukekura Park Superintendent, admitted "there was one specimen in the park but it was not bearing seeds this year" (*Taranaki Herald* 30/7/1932).



Pisonia brunoniana flowers

In subsequent letters to the *Taranaki Herald* “the tree has been roundly condemned for its cruelty” (*Taranaki Herald* 15/9/1932). “Bird Lover” wrote: “I was amazed to read that any man (John Wheeler) should grow such a tree and apparently be pleased to count the number of fantails and silvereyes killed.....Surely the owner could be persuaded to destroy the tree” (*Taranaki Herald* 4/8/1932) and “E.C.C.” from Hastings thundered: “Surely this should not be permitted....How anyone could keep such a tree on their property that causes such untold suffering, is difficult to understand” (*Taranaki Herald* 12/8/1932). As a result of the furore, Thomas Horton gave a talk over Radio 2YB on the Parapara and “its power of dealing death to all manner of birds” (*Taranaki Herald* 5/9/1932). The following month W. W. Smith, local naturalist and Superintendent of Pukekura Park from 1908 to 1920, wrote opposing the tree’s “annihilation” from gardens as was being advocated by many correspondents (*Taranaki Herald* 15/10/1932).

Pukekura’s “Bird-Catchers”

A large Parapara once grew in Pukekura Park near the bridge between the children’s playground and Palm Lawn. It was removed several years ago. It was probably this specimen that A.B. Scanlan avows had its seed pods secretly removed each year by bird enthusiast, Clarice Allan Douglas, who lived in nearby Pendarves Street (*Taranaki Herald* 3/12/1985). Miss Douglas (1879 -1943) was well-known in New Plymouth as a long-time member of the High Schools Board of Governors, the Library & Museum Committee, and the New Plymouth Choral Society. Today there are several variegated Parapara plants in Pukekura Park. Some may be seen part way along the path from Bellringer Pavilion to the Band Rotunda. There is also a group of pure Parapara plants just inside the entrance to the Park at the western end of Fillis Street.

The on-going debate

The “bird-catching” tree debate still appears every so often in the news. In 1999, “N. Rogers” of Onehunga, Auckland, took the Department of Conservation to task for wanting to remove escapee Lorikeets instead of destroying Parapara (*New Zealand Herald* 14/8/1999). In 2004, North Shore residents called on the Auckland Regional Authority to “outlaw (the) bird-killer tree” (*East and Bays Courier* 5/5/2004). Two years ago, a “killer tree” in Nelson was removed after two children found Fantails (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*) caught (*Nelson Mail* 11/5/2011).



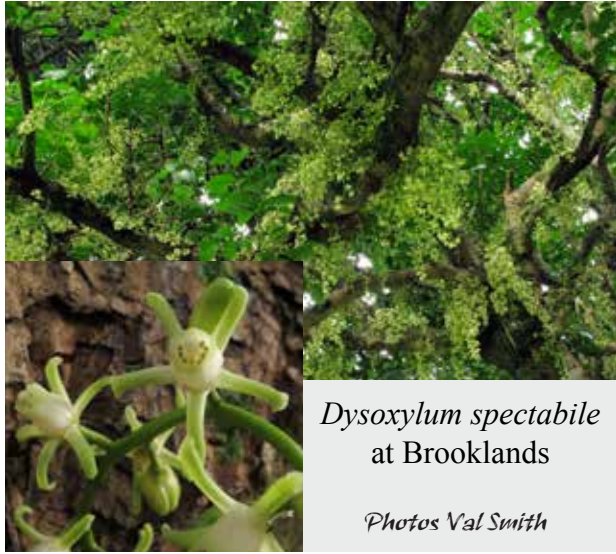
Unripened *Pisonia brunoniana* seed pods

Photos Ron Lambert

Recent Guided Walks

Val Smith

Early Winter



Dysoxylum spectabile
at Brooklands

Photos Val Smith

Skirting the western side of Brooklands lawn, participants on the June walk could not ignore *Camellia japonica* ‘Emperor of Russia’, estimated to be about 100 years old, at the start of its flowering season. Nearby, Kokekohe (*Dysoxylum spectabile*) was at its floriferous peak, living up to its Latin species name meaning “showy, spectacular, eye-catching”. *Dysoxylum* (Greek “bad wood”) refers to the unpleasant smell and taste of bark from some species of the genus, and may be more difficult to pronounce and remember. Both Camellias and Kokekohe are valuable nectar sources for birds, and a Tui (*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*) was observed delving into the greenish-white, waxy, tubular Kokekohe flowers. These are borne in long panicles from branches and trunk, sometimes right down to the ground, a characteristic referred to as cauliflory.

After enjoying the late autumn sunshine and last vestiges of deciduous foliage on the lawn area, we encountered early winter coolness in a tunnel of evergreens as we progressed (slowly) towards our target, Kauri Grove, where native trees, predominantly Kauri (*Agathis australis*), were planted on approximately 10 acres fronting Brooklands Road in the 1930s. The Kauri were thinned about 20 years later and again in 2002, with the surplus material left to decay naturally on the forest floor. In 2009 abnormal resin bleeding around the base of a number of maturing trees caused concern, as at that time *Phytophthora*, a microscopic plant pathogen, was associated with Kauri dieback in Northland and Auckland. Investigation of affected Taranaki trees found no *Phytophthora*, however, but infestation by *Armillaria*, a natural decay fungus in indigenous forest, which was perhaps proliferated by the large amount of thinned debris. Some treatment has been undertaken, and so far the trees show no sign of dieback, but the prognosis remains uncertain.

Back up Brooklands Drive to the carpark, we saw a young Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*) showing similar-looking resinosis, but with no apparent side-effects. The urge to snatch, crush, and smell a leaf of the Queensland Lemon Myrtle (*Backhousia citriodora*) was irresistible, but no-one was tempted to scramble down to the chainmesh fence for a closer look at the Chilean Bellflower (*Lapageria rosea*), considered by some to be the most attractive flowering vine in the world. Finally, two large South African succulents, the Candelebra Aloe (*Aloe arborescens*) with upright spikes of bright orange-red flowers, and the Dune Aloe (*Aloe thraskii*) in bud - both favoured by our nectar-feeding birds - were a fitting end to another enjoyable and informative walk.

Mid Winter

In contrast, the July walk, which meandered around the main lake, focussed on the major development of the Recreation Grounds (which later became Pukekura Park) during the three decades or so between its formal opening in 1876 until about 1910. Many of the features visitors enjoy so much today hark back to the early vision, knowledge, skills, and sheer hard work that enabled the construction of a dam to form the main lake and “Manhattan Island” (no longer an island), the band rotunda, the first tea house and pergola, fernery, and initial large-scale plantings to soften what was then an almost bare gully. Change is inevitable and maintenance ongoing, and the extent of present major lake work using modern knowledge and equipment evoked an interesting comparison with that of a hundred years ago, undertaken by men with shovels and wheelbarrows. Plants were not neglected entirely, but took second place on this walk.



Flowering *Aloe spinosissima*
in Traffic Islands Garden

Late Winter

Scheduled to look at the Camellia collection, and timed also for peak Magnolia flowering, the August walk began at the TSB Stadium entrance. An early plant of interest along Racecourse Walk (which pre-existed the Park) was *Streblus smithii*, from the Three Kings Islands group. A “milk” tree with zig-zag branches and dark green, glossy leaves, it was named after Stephenson Percy Smith, a surveyor who lived much of his life in New Plymouth and served on the Recreation Grounds (Pukekura Park) Board. He was with Thomas Cheeseman when the botanist discovered it.

The Camellia species and hybrids, with flowers varying widely in form, size, and colour, hosted a flurry of Tui in a feeding frenzy, completely ignoring their delighted audience as they dashed between their favoured nectar sources. The more open growing, larger flowering *reticulata* Camellias from southwestern China were not in flower, but were mentioned in passing. It was a fallen bloom of intense yellow that made *Camellia nitidissima* the plant of the day. Native to southern Guanxi, China, and areas of North Vietnam, the species was introduced to the Western World as *Camellia chrysantha* in the 1970s when political relationships improved. Spectacular as the individual flowers are, however, they are easily missed on the underside of the low spreading branches, but the foliage alone is beautiful, especially in the early growth of spring, and again in autumn.



Camellia nitidissima flower

The Magnolia Bank features huge 50-year-old species and more recent Jury hybrids, which extends the flowering display. Some were yet to bloom, while petals from others drifted down like giant snowflakes in the light breeze. Then, in the area of Stainton Dell, we saw less showy, but plants special in other ways - a rare evergreen Maple (*Acer laurinum*) from Indonesia; a *Schefflera* from Ecuador, not yet scientifically described and named; the Amazon Snake Tree *Cecropia albida*, with large silvery leaves; also from South America, *Laurelia sempervirens*, a close relative of the New Zealand Pukatea (*Laurelia novae-zelandiae*); and the Abyssinian Giant Banana (*Ensete ventricosum*), which takes about seven years to flower and then dies. Specimens such as these help to make Pukekura Park a botanical garden as well as a recreation reserve.

Early Spring

Early morning showers held off for the duration of the September walk, which started at the Traffic Island Gardens, looking at species of Aloes, Palms and other plants normally associated with hot, dry climates. The Bird-of-Paradise plant, *Strelitzia reginae* from South Africa sported a flower or two, the huge Australian Giant Spear Lily *Doryanthes palmeri* had two long heavy spikes of orange-red flowers, and the first rapidly emerging flower stalks from the mass of glaucous, spiny South American *Puya* prompted discussion on these amazing South American bromeliads. As we progressed down Jellyman Walk, huge native epiphytes on the still mainly leafless deciduous trees were silhouetted against the sky, and early Rhododendrons, including several of the red *arboreum* forms, made bold splashes of colour. Tall Kowhai (*Sophora microphylla*) in full golden flower, and their complement of Tui, towered above, and at eye level the London Plane (*Platanus acerifolia*) bark was a mosaic of soft earthy colours. The sound of machinery operations near the Lily Pond discouraged lingering, and the final walk back up to the cars was past large specimens of the Chinese Fir *Cunninghamia lanceolata* (China, Taiwan and North Vietnam), prized for its soft but durable wood; Klinki Pine *Araucaria bunsteini* (Papua New Guinea), now threatened by habitat loss, and Bunya-Bunya Pine *Araucaria bidwillii* (Queensland, Australia), with edible nuts favoured by the Aborigine people. All three were planted in September 1978.



Strelitzia reginae flower

There is always something new to see, hear, learn, and enjoy in the Park.

Brooklands Zoo gets its blues

Anna Willetts
Keeper Brooklands Zoo

Brooklands Zoo welcomes the arrival of “Bert” and “Ernie” our Eastern Blue-tongued Skinks (*Tiliqua scincoides scincoides*). They came to us from Hamilton Zoo a couple of months ago and have settled in well, Ernie is on display in the barn while Bert is kept off display for possible future handling and encounter purposes. They are docile creatures and are easily conditioned to being handled.



Photo Brooklands Zoo

Eastern Blue-tongued Skink

Eastern Blue-tongued Skinks originate from Eastern Australia and are often found in bushland and suburban areas where conditions are suitable. They grow 30 to 60cm in length with a large bright to dark blue tongue which they use to ward off enemies and can hiss loudly if disturbed. Their colouration is brown to grey patterned scales along their whole body. They are omnivores so we feed them a wide variety of fruit, vegetables, edible flowers, and insects, and use calcium and vitamin powders to ensure they get everything they need. They also require special environmental conditions so we provide them with moist, heated areas in their enclosure, so they can thermoregulate themselves. They also have an ultraviolet light source so they get enough uv rays to help them produce vitamin D which aids healthy bone and body condition. We often get them out to bask in natural sunlight as there is nothing like the real thing. They will shed their skin a few times a year. Our boys are 20 years old and they can live up to 40 years of age in captivity.

These skinks are a great addition to the collection so next time you visit the Zoo come and say hello. If you can't find Ernie ask the staff to show you his favourite hiding spot.