

Pollen Island to be a scientific reserve

An island of shellbanks and mudflats, adjacent to Auckland's north-western motorway is to become a scientific reserve following a land swap between Ports of Auckland and the Crown. Pollen Island is presently tenanted by Forest and Bird which has advocated for its proper protection for more than a decade.

An area of salt marsh, mangroves, and other wildlife habitat, it is of national importance as a landform, with a fernbird population, and also a moth peculiar to just this place. Together with the nearby Traherne Island it forms an important habitat for thousands of international migratory and New Zealand wading birds, as well as threatened coastal birds.

Forest and Bird has played a key role in ensuring the protection of Pollen Island, leasing it from Ports of Auckland at a peppercorn rental in 1995, and managing it as the best remaining area of its type in the Waitemata Harbour.

The area was earmarked for future port development by the Auckland Harbour Board in the 1960s. Ports of Auckland bought the island when it purchased the assets of the former harbour board in 1988. While leasing it to Forest and Bird, the port company also assisted some of the conservation activities on the island.

Pollen Island is surrounded by the Pollen Island Marine Reserve, established after advocacy by Forest and Bird in 1995. It protects fish-breeding areas and the habitat of migrant wading birds and threatened local species.

The agreement to change ownership follows negotiation with Dr Nick Smith, then the Minister of Conservation, who vested the proposed Fergusson Wharf in the port company in exchange for \$1.6 million, an area of land along the Tamaki riverbank, and Pollen Island.

The Society is now in the unusual position in being a tenant of the Crown until the lease expires and the island becomes a scientific reserve. This will take about two years due to the complex exchanges of land around the port area.

Forest and Bird members and concerned residents campaigned to place greater emphasis on the wildlife of Pollen Island during recent hearings for a proposed heliport on the nearby mainland 'Pollen Island illustrates the need to be constantly vigilant,' says Central Auckland chair Kit Howden. 'The flight paths of helicopters may threaten wildlife around the island.'

In the initial resource applications, neither the applicant nor the city council had required impact reports on wildlife.

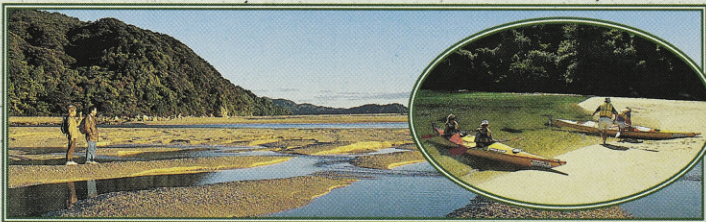


KIT HOWDEN

The handover of Pollen Island from Ports of Auckland to the Department of Conservation was matched by a gift of flotsam from South Auckland chair, Jan Riddick. 'This relic is symbolic of the mass of rubbish from the suburbs of Auckland that gets washed up on Pollen Island,' she told the chief executive of Ports of Auckland, Geoff Vazey (on left). 'It also illustrates the need for greater efforts in urban environmental action to reduce rubbish and clean up streams around Auckland's harbours.' Jan found the harbour board lifebuoy washed up on the island 10 years ago and resolved to give it back 'when and if the island were ever returned to the birds as a reserve.'

Pollen Island is to be designated a scientific reserve, following a land transfer announced by Dr Nick Smith (right) when Minister of Conservation. The shellbanks and mangroves are typical of the reserve which also contains considerable areas of saltmarsh.

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