



Hauraki Islands Forest and Bird is restoring an hillside of reverting pasture on Waiheke Island. This is the Atawhai Whenua Reserve given to the Society in 1992 and under restoration since 1994 (top panorama). Already it has been planted with 28,500 coastal forest trees and plants (bottom panorama was taken mid-1999). The 16.66 hectare property is in two halves known as the East and West sections. The land lies in view of the main road running up from Matiatia (where the ferry wharf is) to the edge of Oneroa village.

RUSSELL ST PAUL

'A Kindness Toward the Land'

For seven years now the Hauraki Islands Branch has been conducting a massive revegetation project on eroded, coastal hill-country pastureland in western Waiheke Island. Called Atawhai Whenua Reserve, this is one of the Society's newest reserves and totals nearly 17 hectares.

The first planting day occurred on June 20, 1993 in the pouring rain, with members of both the Hauraki Islands and Auckland Central branches helping out. Since that time approximately 28,500 trees have been planted in the reserve.

Annual plantings average between 4000 and 4500 trees, the majority being raised or 'grown on' in nursery beds on site. The remaining plants have come from a private nursery donor, branch members, and grants from the Waiheke Community Board and the Chisholm Whitney Family Trust.

The planting programme consists of a wide range of broadleaf and podocarp species, including species rare or uncommon on Waiheke Island. Planting on ridge spurs is generally dominated by pohutukawa with ngaio, akeake and taupata, while gully plantings are dominated by karamu, puriri, karaka and mahoe. Wetland margins get mostly manuka and cabbage tree with flax, hebe, makaka *Plagianthus*

divaricatus and kahikatea.

The reserve ranger, 71-year-old Don Chapple, has done most of the work, spending five and sometimes six days per week in the reserve. Society volunteers, members of the community and various community groups have assisted him over the years. Don was a recipient last year of an 'Old Blue Award' for the work he has done on the project.

The name 'Atawhai Whenua' is short for 'He atawhai ki te whenua', which means 'a kindness toward the land'. The land was first offered to the Society as a gift in 1992 by Nicholas ('Nick') and Annette ('Nettie') Johnstone, but it was to be four years before final possession of the property occurred.

When acquired the reserve consisted of around 85 percent of mixed retired pasture. Sixty-year-old kanuka was the only significant native species on the

property, but it was nowhere very abundant. Of the remainder, 10-12 percent was — and still is — in gorse, the largest patch of which lies on the slopes above Matiatia Bay. Don laments the fact that there were not more gorse patches, as they have been a boon in the revegetation process, providing nursery areas for young plants.

The revegetation project takes up only half the management time spent on the reserve, however. The other half is spent controlling a nightmare collection of exotic plant pests on the neighbouring, privately owned wetland. By far the worst of these weeds is moth plant *Araujia sericifera*, a climber that produces masses of windborne seeds to sprout into a carpet of seedlings on the drier areas of the wetland. Other pests include Japanese honeysuckle, white pampas, blackberry, woolly nightshade, Chinese

privet, tree privet, brush wattle, and various willow species.

The vision for the future is to restore the whole ecological sequence from ridge top through freshwater wetland to the sea. Part of this vision is to recreate kahikatea forest with pukatea, tree fern and cabbage trees along the wetland margins of the neighbouring property. This means working in co-operation with both the neighbours and Auckland City Council in the control of introduced plant pests throughout the wetland area. It is early days yet, but a dialogue has already been started and the signs are positive that this long-term project could be realised.

— Peter White, Hauraki Islands Forest and Bird. As a member of the national executive of Forest and Bird, Peter White has been compiling a status report on the Society's North Island reserves.

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