



**HAMILTON GARDENS** is the most popular visitor attraction in the Waikato region, with a million people coming each year to enjoy the 54 hectare, award-winning gardens for a leisurely day out or to attend some of the more than 2,000 events held there annually. It is managed by Hamilton City Council.

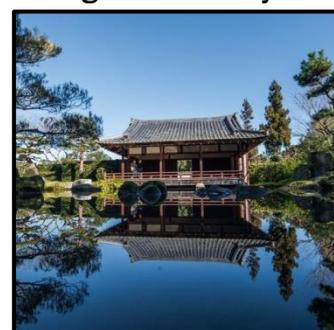
I had read with interest about the latest addition to the site - the Ancient Egyptian Garden, which was opened last May and found out that this is the first recreation of this garden type in 2,000 years.

You enter the sacred garden of an Egyptian temple, gaze upon the hieroglyphs carefully copied from archaeological sites that tell stories of kings and gods. You can take a moment to sit in the shade of the pergola among the sacred plants and imagine you have come to the temple to ensure the gods will grant your soul safe passage through the underworld into the promise of the afterlife. This is a garden of symbols, deeper meanings and the oldest in the garden's story.



For visitors, Hamilton Gardens is a living museum that tells a story of cultures and civilisations through beautiful, inspiring, and iconic gardens. It is where you will discover a world of imagination, exploration, beauty, and inspiration.

From Italian Renaissance to traditional Japanese, right through to modern California and Surrealism, you will travel through centuries and stroll through history as never before.



Development of the gardens began in the 1950's, when the Hamilton Beautifying Society lobbied for a public garden and initially it occupied 4 hectares. The design of that top area was and still is planted in the gardenesque tradition with specimen trees and flower beds set in flat lawns. Most development has occurred since 1980, growing in scope and vision to become a unique showcase for the story of gardens. This has been made possible thanks to huge community support and grant funding.



There are plenty of rave reviews on Trip Advisor. Several caught my eye... 'Last visited about 8 years ago, so was amazed to see the gardens had got even better! The new rooms are great, and revisiting the old rooms was still a great experience and we noticed new things. The Katherine Mansfield room was spectacular; "Well done!" to whoever designed and built that one. The Surrealist Garden was amazing and fun, and worthy of the heaps of photos taken. A must see and do when you visit or pass through Hamilton.'



'We had a great day wandering around in Hamilton Gardens which are beautiful and a great luxury in the middle of a city. Whether you're a keen gardener or not you'll enjoy a walk around the gardens and, best of all, it's free!' Another impressed visitor recommended the \$20 Guided Tour which takes 75 minutes, during which you'll learn much more about the many amazing and award-winning garden designs



from the experienced guides. More info @ <https://hamiltongardens.co.nz/visit/>

**INCY WINCY SPIDER:** While I don't suffer from arachnophobia, spiders are not my favourite species. Particularly when they're a large black house spider!

During a recent spring-clean, this big girl emerged from the French windows as I was re-oiling them. She and her husband now live in the garden.



In New Zealand, there are around 2,500 different kinds of spiders and three stand out as ones to avoid... the Katipo, Redback and White Tailed. My neighbour got two very nasty bites from a White Tailed spider, so if I ever see one, it is dispatched without hesitation (unlike harmless ones). They're easy to identify as they are quite long and thin and have a very obvious white tip to the tail.



**CRUEL TRAPS:** In what appears to have been a not-very-subtle message to dog owners, four extremely cruel, baited leg-traps were laid in Tainui Reserve at the end of October. As Tainui is a very popular off-leash dog exercise area, this was an extremely disturbing incident.

It's beyond sad to see how the previously peaceful reserve has deteriorated since 2019, with anti-social behaviour by risk-taking mountain biking teenagers rife, graffiti, regular vandalism, theft of signage, damage from unauthorised mountain bike tracks, the waahi tapu Hikanui Pā still being subjected to what a 2021 Report by Archaeology Hawke's Bay describes as 'on-going neglect' and 'unchecked damage', two large, man-made slips, the Peace Plaque celebrating the Peace Walk stolen and not replaced six months later, two older female walkers assaulted, including one on the Pā – and now this.



As co-ordinator of *Friends of Tainui Reserve*, I reported the illegal activity to the police for follow-up.



**BIRD IN THE HAND:** SPCA Area Manager, Bruce Wills, let me know about a rescue with a happy ending recently. A Welcome Swallow/Warou had become trapped inside a building in Napier's CBD. The bird had managed to get through some bird netting covering the building but then couldn't get out.



It had been trapped for a few days and, following many unsuccessful attempts to catch it, the office staff called the SPCA. Bruce told me that it took 3 SPCA staff and a considerable amount of perspiration to catch the wee visitor. When taken outside to be released it sat on one of the SPCA officer's hand recuperating for several minutes, allowing these photos to be taken before it flew off. Well done to all concerned for going the extra mile to undoubtedly save this little bird's life.



**FREQUENT FLYER:** And, talking about going the extra mile, Sweet Hanna has probably collected more air-points than many seasoned travellers, as her jet-setting lifestyle has seen her living in both New Zealand and the UK.

Her servant, and human mum Sue, told me that in 2010, when she was four years old, Sweet flew to London with her, where she lived until 2018; then she flew home to Havelock North and lived here, until going back to London in 2019, before finally returning home recently to retire. Pets really are family.



**BIRD FLU PANDEMIC:** One of my overseas readers e-mailed me to tell me that Europe and the UK is in the grip of the largest-ever outbreak of Avian Flu. I 'Googled' this and read articles that reported 48 million chickens and other farmed birds had been culled. 48 million... that number is almost

inconceivable and totally calamitous for the poor birds, farmers and owners of domestic poultry.

This latest outbreak has also killed huge numbers of seabirds, like gannets, guillemots and puffins and has spread to wildfowl and game birds. Countless chickens and turkeys have had to be culled in the UK. As of last month, to protect flocks, the UK Government's Chief Veterinary Officer made it mandatory that all chickens, turkeys etc., are to be kept indoors.

Apparently, the virus is being spread by wild birds and the long-term implications for seabirds are worrying. It's possible that the virus may even transfer across species, e.g. to a fox that eats a dying bird etc.

Even though we're far away from Europe, migratory birds coming from the Northern Hemisphere could well bring the disease to our shores.



## PICTURE PERFECT

There was little skill involved in getting this photo, as about twenty greenfinches perch patiently every evening alongside a lot of sparrows in a silver birch tree waiting to be fed.

The late afternoon sun makes the male bird appear more yellow than olive green. These stocky finches were introduced from Britain by Acclimatisation Societies in the 1860's and are common throughout much of the country.

Greenfinches are the largest of New Zealand's introduced finches. A sturdy bill allows them to crack larger seeds than other similar species can manage. They mostly feed on seeds, including those from different crops so, in some areas, they are considered a pest but they also eat aphids, caterpillars, moths, flies, beetles and bugs.

For more information on the greenfinch and other birds check out:- <https://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz>



**BATHING BEAUTY:** Just like us, birds need water to drink and water to bathe in. Your garden is your oasis and it can be an oasis for birds and insects too, particularly during the hot, dry summer months we have here in New Zealand. Putting a birdbath in your garden may also attract birds that don't eat seeds but which will help get rid of pests.

Water helps keep a bird's body cool, both inside and out. Bathing also removes dust, loose feathers, parasites and other debris from a bird's plumage and they enjoy it!

The best place for a birdbath is in a fairly open space and in the shade, so that birds can see predators and it's not too hot. My two bird baths are close to a tree and I enjoy watching the birds bathe and then fly up to the branches to preen themselves as they dry off.

**Top Tip:** Use a stiff brush (and occasionally a water-blaster) to clean the birdbath and replenish the water every few days to keep it fresh.



**BARGAIN BUYS:** Keep your eye out for cheap garden ornaments with potential. It's amazing how a bit of paint can liven up inexpensive or lack-lustre items.

The little metal dachshund foot scraper and small concrete and rusty iron cats were unloved until a black test pot and some left-over paint transformed them, while the proud cockerel and his farmyard friends were second-hand, plain concrete,

until someone with an artistic flair brought them to life. Up-cycling unwanted or previously neglected objects into unique outdoor ornaments is very rewarding.



**MAJOR MILESTONE:** The QEII National Trust announced recently that a 8.9-hectare forest which Wairarapa landowners, the McDonald family call 'The Gorge', has officially become the 5,000th area in New Zealand to be protected with an Open Space Covenant in partnership with the Trust. <https://qeii-national-trust.org.nz> Since 1977, a total of 180,258 hectares of private land has been protected in perpetuity through QEII covenants - an amazing achievement.



**HAPPY ANNIVERSARY:** Celebrating thirty years since the miniature train track was established in Keirunga Gardens, Keirunga Park Railway Club volunteers provided crowds of locals and out-of-town visitors with great family entertainment over Labour Weekend. You're never too old to enjoy a train ride!





**WAIKAHU WETLANDS:** Prompted by a reader who mentioned that they were enjoying visiting the Waikahu Wetlands at Waitangi Regional Park and had been particularly struck by the numbers of Royal spoonbills nesting there in partly submerged trees, a friend and I went to see it for ourselves.

We agree. The spoon bills were quite a sight (we counted about sixteen) though they were too far away for a



great photo. The birdlife there and in the nearby Horseshoe Lake appeared to be thriving with mallard, pukeko and families of black swans with cygnets of different ages, all getting on swimmingly well.



Four major rivers meet at Waitangi Regional Park:- the Tūtaekurī, Ngaruroro, Old Ngaruroro (Karamū-Clive), and the Tukituki.

The inland wetland, which now covers 15 hectares, was known as 'Waikahu', meaning to 'cloak in water, or amniotic fluid'. Sadly, since



colonisation, about 98% of Hawke's Bay's wetlands have been lost, which makes the interconnected mouths of these four rivers particularly important, both ecologically and in recreational terms.

The two drone photos provided by the HBRC were taken before and after flooding.

We parked the car in the main carpark, walked under the road and rail bridges and circumnavigated the wetlands (passing Horseshoe Lake first). The track had been recently mown but it is fairly rough in places and it pays to wear good footwear and take binoculars.

Waitangi Regional Park will feature again in the February newsletter as it's a great place to visit.



**PENGUIN PICS:** Keen local photographer, Lynne Roberts, let me know that she'd recently gone on a four-day photography retreat based at well-known conservationist Gerry McSweeney and his wife Anne's Lake Moeraki Wilderness Lodge in South Westland.

The Lodge has worked with DOC for the last 33 years to protect the penguin - and nature more generally.

The workshop was run by NZ Photography Workshops



with one guide and 6 photographers. The group made two trips to a protected wildlife area, with Gerry as their guide, to wait and watch the rare Fiordland Crested Penguins (Tawaki) waddling about, taking in their surroundings and, if safe, hopping up to their nests. Lynne described seeing the penguins as, "An amazing experience and great privilege." The Tawaki is one of the rarest of New Zealand's mainland penguins and has a DOC rating of 'Nationally Vulnerable, Declining' with 2,500 - 3,000 breeding pairs. Their main threats are people, stoats and dogs. On their way to the lodge, the group travelled through Haast Pass, stopping to take photos of a couple of waterfalls.



**Fun Fact:** Tawaki lay 2 eggs; the first is smaller than the second and they are laid 3-6 days apart. Typically, even if both eggs hatch, only one chick is raised, although in favourable years both chicks may survive in around 12% of cases.

**TE MATA TRIG:** Just space to let you know that, if you needed any excuse to go up to Te Mata Peak to marvel at the spectacular 360° views from the top, you can now admire the handiwork of talented ceramic artist Judith Rosamund, who returned recently to refresh the porcelain china tile map of Hawke's Bay which she created under the 399 metre trig back in 1999. The much-photographed trig must surely be the best vantage point in the Bay.



If you're aware of a conservation champion or something relevant going on in Hawke's Bay, please let me know and I'll be happy to follow it up:- [jessicamaxwell2017@gmail.com](mailto:jessicamaxwell2017@gmail.com)



**"Whoever said you can't buy happiness forgot little puppies!"**

Gene Hill

