



**DUART HOUSE GARDEN TOUR:** Although the photos were taken last November, when the various gardens were looking their best, Duart House makes for a lovely, peaceful destination at any time of the year. The well-planted and tended flowerbeds just look different as the seasons change. And who better to show me round the three-and-a-half-acre Council-owned property, than the two main volunteers who have been working tirelessly for the past few years to help create the showpiece that is there for everyone to enjoy.



Joan Ruffell, whose main interest lies in planting natives, mostly in the lower reaches of the garden by the little Duart Stream, has been toiling in the gardens for the past six years and co-ordinates a small band of volunteers. They have put heart and soul into improving the grounds and supporting staff from Recreational Services.



Complementing Joan's interest in natives is Maggie Brown, who is a trained horticulturalist, as she enjoys caring for and helping to design the many and varied beds filled with colourful perennials. That's her speciality.

Helping the two stalwarts are three or four other retirees who know how to push a barrow and fill it with weeds, prunings and other garden waste.



A circular lawn at the front of the house is planted with a wide variety of perennials, as are the side lawns, which are lovely spaces to stroll through via neatly mown grass walkways.



Here you can admire the various, well-chosen flowers and see the attention to detail with some roses espaliered on wires growing at different heights.



Heading towards the more natural areas, there are shallow steps bordered with extensive plantings of renga renga which clearly thrive in the dappled shade.



Nearby is the remnant of a huge and ancient macrocarpa tree, covered in moss with plantings becoming established in its

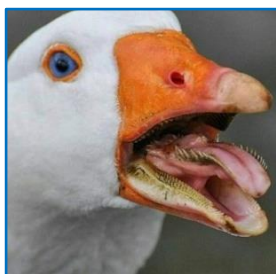
crevices and a rather large tree growing out of it. The more I visited, the more I noticed.



The steps lead down to a limestone path which runs beside a little wetland and, from there, you can walk past native plantings to pause at a bench close to a well-used bird bath.



There just isn't space to take everything in, so best to visit and see it all for yourself. If you'd like to volunteer to help, call Maggie on 027 877 6476 or Joan on 021 101 6954.



**SMILE PLEASE:** Geese don't have teeth as such but have the next best thing... they have rows of sharp, serrated structures made of cartilage called tomia on their beak. These are grooved to form dozens of sharp ridges known as lamellae. The pointed structures on the margins of a goose's tongue are called conical papillae. I didn't know this until I saw a close-up and personal photo of a goose's mouth on the David Attenborough for the Nobel Prize Facebook page.

Geese are grazers, with their diet consisting primarily of grasses, grains, leaves, roots, stems and other low-lying vegetation, which they supplement with

small insects, rodents or even fish they find while foraging.

These sharp serrations help them to rip and pull up grasses and aquatic plants. They also help clamp down on small mammals and insects. The conical papillae and tomia work together but aren't quite tough enough to chew food into smaller bits. The food is actually swallowed whole and then broken down by a separate organ called the gizzard, a muscular chamber located near the stomach, that reduces organic tissue into smaller, digestible bits.

Other birds such as ducks and swans have similar serrations.



**HEN HEALTH:** As more intensive poultry farms close because of changes in animal welfare legislation, many people who are not used to having hens now have a few free-ranging on their town sections or life-style blocks.

Unsurprisingly, when first rescued, many hens are in poor condition and all are traumatised. As these photos of a newly rehomed hen show, the birds may be underweight, missing feathers, pale, lack strength, have sore feet, be

host to mites and/or worms and feel generally debilitated and stressed.

The SPCA recently published a helpful article on raising backyard chickens which you can read [here](#)



**Top Tips:** Provide fresh, clean water and keep it out of the sunshine; the coop should be well-ventilated and have an indoor space where the birds can shelter, sleep, roost and lay eggs in clean nest boxes.

You can use straw or wood shavings in the box.

Some food-grade diatomaceous earth can be added to the bedding to help with parasite control; find a shallow container and put dry dirt, sand or peat in it, as hens love a dust bath;

the outside area should, ideally, have short grass to avoid grass impaction from eating long grass; feed good quality layer pellets and plenty of leafy greens, such as kale; hens don't have teeth, so provide them with a small container of grit to help them digest food when it is in their gizzard and provide extra calcium when they are laying. If well-cared for, hens can live for ten years plus.

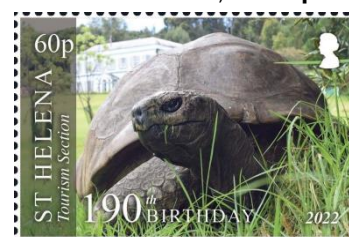
**Fun Facts:** Chickens love berries, meal worms (which are a great source of protein), oatmeal, pumpkins (the seeds are a natural de-wormer), raisins, sunflower seeds and, sparingly, plain yoghurt.



**SENIOR CITIZEN:** At 190 years old, Jonathan, a Seychelles giant turtle who lives on the South Atlantic island of St Helena, is the oldest living land mammal. He is also the oldest living chelonian, the reptile order that includes turtles, terrapins and tortoises.

Recorded as being born in 1832, though he may actually be older, Jonathan lives at Plantation House, the residence of the Governor of St Helena.

He has his own carer and veterinarian and enjoys a diet of cabbage, carrots and lettuce - plus his personal favourites, locally grown bananas and guavas.



While taking life at his own slow pace, he enjoys the company of his fellow tortoises with his favourite pastimes being sunbathing, sleeping, eating and mating. Go Jonathan!

## PICTURE PERFECT

Someone who has a lot of experience with the wild Kaimanawa horses is Ros Rowe, founder of the highly regarded but recently closed Leg-Up Trust.

Ros posted this great photo from her most recent visit to the ranges on Facebook and I knew there had to be a story behind it.

In Ros' words, "Tommy Waara is not your average horse trainer. Raised to 'break' horses by force, he didn't take long to find a better way. That way led to a horse/human relationship of mutual benefit."

"In 2014, he took part in the inaugural Kaimanawa Heritage Horses Stallion Challenge, and beautiful grey Te One is one of two horses he trained for the competition, designed to showcase the versatility of Kaimanawa horses."

Annual bus trips into the ranges allow people to witness these horses in their natural environment, and Ros says a highlight is the sight of Tommy and Te One appearing on the skyline above a stream to pick their way down to the muster yards. "As they splash through the water to be engulfed by a crowd of kids at the stream's edge, it's hard not to shed a tear at the notion of Te One revisiting his birthplace, secure in his new life and showing no sign of wanting to return to his roots."



**INS AND OUTS:** An interesting fact popped up on my Facebook feed. Exeter Cathedral in England has a 14th century door that is mentioned as an entrance for cats.

From 1305 cathedral accounts show an allowance for quarterly payments of 13 pence 'to the custors (guardians) and the cats'. They kept the rats and mice down following a recorded incidence of mice eating a robe believed to have belonged to Joseph of Aramathea.



Installing a cat flap nowadays is easy and it means that your moggy can come and go at will, which is what cats like to do. You can choose from a no-fuss, no-frills design, get one which works with a magnetic collar or one which synchronises with your cat's micro-chip.

My two old SPCA boys are kept inside at night to limit their hunting and keep them safe and, if one or other, or both, aren't in by bedtime, the cat flap is set so that, when they do come home, they can't get out again until the morning.



**BIRDWATCHING:** I have a mature flax bush which decided to flower last December, something it hasn't done for many years.

Very soon, tuis noticed the colourful flowers and, for about a month, I had a regular visitor call by off and on each day for a sip of nectar.

Flying past at speed, the tui appears black with a flash of white and it's really only when the sun catches the bird's plumage that you notice the iridescent blues, greens and bronze. The white tuft of feathers on its neck is called a 'poi'.





**TELEPHONE TREE:** Trees are like people; some have more character than others and some hold secrets.

Take for example, the gnarly old pepper tree beside the Francis Bacon Studio in Keirunga Gardens. Its twisted form and numerous hollows remind me of something that Beatrix Potter would have written a charming story about, creating playful inhabitants and painting them. Last year, while a teenager was climbing up the tree, their mobile phone fell into one of the many cavities and all attempts to retrieve it failed. I wonder when this ancient tree will give up its phone secret.



**BAT RESCUE:** "Well done!" to members of the Houston Humane Society, who helped rescue some 1,500 Mexican free-tailed bats during the massive storm which brought many parts of the US to a standstill at the end of December.



The frigid weather caused the tiny bats in the colonies under the Waugh Drive Bridge and in Pearland to lose their grip and fall 'cold-stunned' onto the roads below, where, at first, they appeared to be dead. Thanks to the efforts of Mary Warwick, Director of the Texas Wildlife Rehabilitation Coalition and volunteers, over 1,500 bats were saved (sadly some did die from the fall) The survivors were kept in Mary's attic space and, when the weather warmed up six days later, a crowd of supporters watched them being released. You can read more about the unusual rescue on the group's FB page.

**MONKEY BUSINESS:** In January's newsletter, I mentioned about the amazing and, at times, unbelievable photos of animals, birds, fish, insects and plants which are posted on the 'David Attenborough for the Nobel Prize' FB page.

It took a double take to see that, what looked like a family of tiny monkeys in a tree, were actually orchids. This is a photo of *Dracula simia*, an orchid which is native to tropical south-east Ecuador and one which, unsurprisingly, is also referred to as the 'monkey face' orchid.



I was so flabbergasted at what seemed unreal, that I 'Googled' *Dracula simia* and, sure enough, up popped similar photos and all the background information.



**CREEPY CRAWLIES:** Insects, while a vital part of biodiversity, aren't my favourite topic to report on.

However, as I was walking over the Hikanui Pā site, I was intrigued to see about thirty, rather eerie-looking empty shells dotted all the way up the trunk of a pine tree and decided that they looked like abandoned cicada cocoons.



Dr Belinda Sleight, Community Advisor at Biodiversity Hawke's Bay, sent me a great link providing lots of information about these, at times, noisy insects. I didn't know that it's only the male who 'sings' or that the nymphs live underground for up to three years before climbing a tree (or suitable structure) to shed their final nymph casing. That is what I saw. Here is the link... <https://teara.govt.nz/en/cicadas>

**ADOPT A PET:** This month is National Pet Adoption Month and there could be no better time to encourage those who have room in their homes and in their hearts to take on an animal in need. The SPCA's shelters are full of unwanted kittens, puppies, adult cats and adult dogs. Other organisations such as HUHANSZ, Greyhound Racing NZ's Great Mates Rehoming Programme, Retired Working Dogs NZ and Viks Rescue are also doing their best to give unwanted animals a second chance.



*'Adopting one animal won't change the world, but it will change the world for that one animal.'*

