



WAITANGI REGIONAL PARK is a great example of what can be achieved when a Council takes on a big project, the mana whenua and the wider community get behind it and funding flows through.

The park covers some 300 hectares of coastal land between Awatoto and Haumoana and, over the past six years or so, the Hawke's Bay Regional Council, supported by a multitude of organisations, individuals and volunteers, has transformed the previously neglected, wilderness area into an amazing, culturally important destination and a haven for wildlife.



The 'star of the show' is the Ātea a Rangi Star Compass. This is a dramatic circle of pou (posts) and a whaharoa (gateway) which was developed by the Ātea a Rangi Educational Trust in collaboration with the HBRC and installed in 2017. Local carvers created the pou, which represent the various points of the compass.



Signage around the park displays easy-to-read information on the navigation skills and tools of ancient Māori who navigated the oceans to arrive and settle here, the historical significance of the area, the importance of estuaries and depict a variety of coastal plants.



The Ātea a Rangi Star Compass and wetlands restoration is an award-winning project having won the Te Karanga o te Tui category in the 2019 Resene New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architecture Awards. The main purpose for building the Ātea a Rangi Star Compass was to ensure that the art of whakatere waka (traditional navigation) is passed down to future generations. This is done in a traditional



learning environment to a select few who sail and crew waka throughout the Pacific Ocean.



Once you've had a look at the carvings (and the amazing views), there is a pleasant, circular walk along a limestone path which then follows a grassy track around the wetlands and back to the carpark.

You can keep an eye out for some of the birdlife which call the wetlands home. On the day I visited, I saw a pair of shoveller ducks as well as



mallard and it was interesting to see the pou from different angles.

Last year, HBRC received a \$400,000 grant from the Ministry for Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE) to construct a toilet block at the park and provide a permanent electricity supply to the marquee. This much-needed development will be a game-changer for visitors and, hopefully, will come to fruition later this year. To view a great video, click on:- <https://youtu.be/ACc6QOUUnPhg>

WILDBASE HOSPITAL, based at Massey University's Manawatū campus in Palmerston North, is dedicated to caring for sick and injured native wildlife, providing medical and surgical care before returning the animals back to the wild.



Alongside treatment of native New Zealand fauna, Wildbase also provides assistance to other veterinary clinics, captive institutes and wildlife rehabilitation groups. The majority of the cases seen at Wildbase Hospital are native birds and reptiles. For all native wild birds, the aim is to release them once their medical and surgical treatments and rehabilitation are complete.

One notable patient that was seen last year was a Salvin's albatross. This individual was found washed ashore near Tangimoana beach in the Manawatū area. The large sea bird was transported to the Wildbase Hospital via coordinated efforts by the finders, local Department of Conservation staff and wildlife rehabilitators.

In the first 24hrs of its arrival, the albatross was assessed and diagnosed with several major concerns; emaciation and severe dehydration resulting in several abnormalities on blood tests and a large old wound to the neck.

Intravenous fluids and glucose were the first steps to stabilising the bird, before a general anaesthetic was done to take radiographs and perform surgery on the wound.



Surgery involved flushing sand and other debris from the wound, assessing what tissues could be saved, then removing any dead tissue.

The wound was sutured closed with particular attention to how the feathers would sit. If there were any notable gaps in the feathers, the bird would not be waterproof or buoyant, compromising its ability to survive in the wild.



Post-operatively, the Salvin's albatross was well-fed and re-introduced to swimming. After several weeks of care, it was released at Foxton Beach with the aid of the Manawatū Volunteer Coastguard.



I contacted its President, Grant Rigby and he explained that, for a number of years now, Coastguard Manawatū has been proud supporters of the Wildbase Hospital. "It's truly special for our volunteers to be part of releasing endemic species such as the Salvin's albatross back into the wild after their rehabilitation and treatment at Wildbase Hospital," he said.

"Personally, watching these sea birds take flight from our rescue vessel is a surreal experience and reminds me how precious and simple life is. Our core focus might be saving lives on the water but

as part of the Manawatū community, we have a responsibility to be good kaitiaki (guardians) of the environment for all of us - including our endangered marine life."

It was clearly quite a memorable experience as Grant told me, "I can still see the albatross's face and recall the beauty of this magnificent bird prior to it being released from our boat... such a credit to the Wildbase Hospital, and their team."

This case is a great example of how the Wildbase Hospital works with other communities to achieve its goals of treating and releasing our precious wildlife. To learn more about the Salvin's Albatross see:-

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/birds-a-z/albatrosses/salvins-albatross/>

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HELPING HOUNDS: Molly, the chocolate labrador has been meeting and greeting customers at The Print House in Havelock North for the past four years and has recently been joined by a rescued 'Gisborne Special' called Bayleigh, who was adopted from the Napier SPCA aged nine weeks. I read that having a dog in the workplace increases the desire to go to work; petting dogs is great anti-stress; dogs have a positive impact on productivity through their cheerfulness; they create better relationships and improve the image of the company as a good workplace. And of course coming to work with their owners is much nicer for the dogs than being left home alone.



PICTURE PERFECT: Right place, right time! This lucky shot of a male chaffinch sporting his colourful breeding plumage was taken in Keirunga Gardens while the trains were running. I had my camera ready to get a photo of one of the Keirunga Park Railway miniature trains coming over the viaduct, when I first heard and then saw the bird sitting on the track railing quite close by. Luckily the camera re-focused very quickly and I got one shot before the train approached and he took off.

Chaffinches are the largest of the introduced finches and are widespread throughout the New Zealand mainland and surrounding islands.

They frequently visit suburban gardens, especially in winter and are often seen feeding with sparrows, greenfinches and silvereyes around bird-tables, on lawns and in parks.

They feed predominantly on seeds in winter. Chicks are fed almost entirely on invertebrates both before and after fledging, and a large proportion of the adult diet is also made up of invertebrates during the breeding season. These include bugs, flies, beetles, moths, caterpillars, aphids, cicadas and spiders. For more information, go to:- <https://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz>



MEETING OPAL: While visiting the Havelock North Handmade Market just before Christmas, I met Opal, the three year old Brazilian macaw, who was strutting her stuff along the fence beside the stalls.

Opal belongs to Hastings bird enthusiast, Craig Wright and is a familiar sight, not only at the outdoor market but throughout Hastings, as she accompanies Craig everywhere.

Craig describes his hand-reared pet as, "Cheeky! Naughty! And someone who loves attention!" She certainly attracts that when she goes shopping in K Mart, The Warehouse and other local stores.



Craig told me that Opal has met some famous people in her time, like popular NZ comedian, Gish and some politicians... Winston Peters, Christopher Luxon, Helen Clark and Matt King to name but a few. However, when asked which party she supported, Opal wisely said nothing!



HAPPY HENS: Following on from last month's story about the rescue and rehoming of, what turned out to be over 3,000 caged hens, not 2,000 from Keighley's Poultry Farm, I asked Katharine White how her twelve new girls had settled in. It looks like they're super friendly and can't believe their luck!



Clearly, they're making the most of their second chance at life and are enjoying freedom, sunshine, dust baths and rain, none of which they had any chance of experiencing in their previous existence as caged hens. Katharine says Glory, the resident rooster, who is a bit of a ladies-man, is also very happy!



Someone else, who really stepped up, is kind-hearted Tina Carlton, from Carlton Lodge on Maraekakaho Road in Hastings.

In what was the largest of some five rescues Tina has carried out over the years, she picked up 140 hens from Keighley's and took them home to rehabilitate them slowly, with the help of her mum, former racehorse trainer, Dianne Sergeant. Here she is with some of the newly rescued hens.

Once they had adapted to living outside and regained their strength, Tina passed most of the birds on to friends and contacts who just wanted a few but needed time to prepare suitable accommodation for them first.

Tina said that hens are very resilient and that they adapt to their improved circumstances quickly. She also mentioned that Keighley's had been very good to deal with on the previous occasions she had collected hens from the farm.

Tina and Dianne introduced me to Kate, who was rescued over three years ago, is still in great health and continues to lay an egg almost daily all year round.

Sincere thanks to everyone who helped save and re-home these lovely hens.





FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Recently, I heard about a great programme developed by the Garden to Table Trust. This is a Charitable Trust that supports Primary and Intermediate schools and Kura nationwide to take learning out of the classroom and into the garden and then to the kitchen.



It means that thousands of kiwi kids gain knowledge and skills about growing, harvesting, preparing and sharing great food. Empowering young minds with these skills has a transformative and lifelong impact on their hauora (well-being) and on the world around them.

I asked Chantelle Cobby from Garden to Table to tell me more... "Garden to Table's goal is simple," Chantelle says. "It's to equip tamariki with the tools, skills, resources, and knowledge they need to grow and cook fresh, seasonal, and environmentally sustainable kai. It's all about disrupting the disconnection between our land and the table and transforming the way children think about food."



In a Garden to Table session, half of the class work in the garden, where they nurture plants, feed the soil, practice kaitiakitanga and discover how our Earth can produce nourishing kai. The other half works in the kitchen, where they cook the bounty while developing practical skills like measuring, chopping and weighing. Then, the entire class sits down together to celebrate their kai, kōrero and share their experiences in the garden and kitchen. Through it all, the children lead the way – with teachers, kaiako and adults simply acting as observers and guides.

Along the way, classroom learning is happening in real-life environments. The language of maths naturally emerges, as students measure, weigh and quantify ingredients. As tamariki boil, mix and simmer kai, science is put into action. And, as they explore the colours of the garden and plate their final dishes, they practice art. Through this, students become empowered, resilient and collaborative.



These positive impacts radiate far beyond the school gates. As tamariki take their new skills, knowledge and enthusiasm for seasonal dishes home to their whānau, ripples of positive impact are generated within broader communities. Over time, this builds community well-being and food security.

Chantelle explains that Garden to Table's dream is for every child in New Zealand to have the opportunity and resources to grow and share their own fresh kai as part of daily life. "Over recent decades, knowledge and skills in the kitchen and garden have been lost," she says. "The Trust's hope is to disrupt these patterns, empower tamariki as change-makers and fuel behavioural change that will last for generations to come."

I asked teacher, Anneke Fyfe from Peterhead School in Flaxmere, one of seven schools here in Hawke's Bay which is part of the programme, how the students benefit. "The programme gives the opportunity for all tamariki to shine," she told me. "It sets everyone up to succeed and feel success, which is especially important for those who do not succeed in the classroom and gives the tamariki the opportunity to explore horticulture as a line of work to get back to the whenua and caring for Papatuanuku. Gardening and preparing healthy kai from the produce provides the tamariki with important life skills which can be taken back and shared with whanau and community."



To learn more or get in touch with the Garden to Table team, visit:- <https://gardentotable.org.nz/> or e-mail:- info@gardentotable.org.nz

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



***'And I shall wait for you
For you to come back home
For my life is not much
Whilst you are gone.'***

A little poem by Athey Thompson

