

CONSERVATION WEEK CELEBRATES THE OPENING OF THE OKAREKA MISTLETOE WALK

Paul Cashmore

Over 5 years of hard work by the Rotorua Branch of Forest and Bird and the Rotorua Botanical Society has come to fruition with the opening of the Okareka Mistletoe Walk in Lake Tikitapu Scenic Reserve on Friday 12 September as part of Conservation Week activities. While the walk itself was largely constructed by Forest and Bird members the two interpretation panels and two more for the yet to be completed Nature Walk on the other side of the reserve were entirely paid for by RBS through our EEF grant. RBS through myself was heavily involved in the design layout including text and photos for each of the panels.

Over 40 people including Rotorua Mayor Kevin Winters turned out for the opening ceremony which involved the unveiling of the two interpretation panels (see below) –one on the Okareka Mistletoe Restoration Project and the other on native mistletoes. Following speeches by representatives from each of the four organisations involved Henry Weston (Conservator, Department of Conservation, Bay of Plenty) and local resident Frances Blakely from the Rotorua Branch of Forest and Bird cut the ribbon to officially open the new track.

Attendees were given the opportunity to inspect the new interpretation panels and walk the new track and observe mistletoe plants at close range. Displays were set up nearby explaining the details of the project and the significance of mistletoe with John Hobbs, myself and Forest and Bird members on hand to answer any questions. The opening was followed by a light lunch.

For RBS this is probably the major highlight to date of our largely unseen and largely unrecognised work at Okareka since 2002. It was a public recognition of the project and the work that each of the four partners has put into it. The opening of the walk and the

interpretation panels also provides the only opportunity for the public of Rotorua to see and learn about mistletoes and the work that we are doing to protect them through this project.

For RBS it also marks another milestone – the completion of our first ever Environment BOP Environmental Enhancement Fund project. This bid which we were successful in applying for in 2004 has funded most of the plants we have used and a Growsafe Course for our key members. By far the largest component of the bid however was over \$5000 for interpretation panels. While this part of the project took the longest to complete due to negotiations between DOC and Forest and Bird on the track development, patience paid off and the different facets of the project all came together perfectly for our conservation week opening.



Figure 3: RBS President John Hobbs with Forest and Bird co-ordinator Frances Blakely at the entrance to the Mistletoe Walk.

Birds (and kereru and tuī) are important local dispersers of mistletoe seed

Native Mistletoes

Opesia antarctica

Mistletoes are semi-parasitic plants which grow on the stems of some trees and shrubs, drawing nutrients and water from their hosts. Look around and you will see many green mistletoe or pirita (*Opesia antarctica*) growing on five-finger trees, its common local host. Tupia antarctica is one of nine mistletoe species native to New Zealand. Another green mistletoe, *Doostylus micranthus*, is also found in small numbers in this area, growing on mahoe, kohuhu, and various exotic trees.

Populations of these mistletoes are scattered and localised. In the Bay of Plenty they are found mainly around certain Rotorua lakes, particularly in regenerating forest or scrubland where light levels are higher.

Mistletoes are under threat

Particular problems are:

- **Browsing by possums (mistletoe is a favourite food)**
- **Habitat loss**
- **Trimming or clearing of host trees**
- **A decline in the number and range of native birds (vital for mistletoe pollination and seed dispersal)**

It is therefore important for the survival of the significant *Opesia* mistletoe population that their habitat is protected and enhanced, possum populations are controlled, and birdlife is restored. The Department of Conservation has surveyed local mistletoe populations and is promoting various measures to protect and restore them in accordance with a national recovery plan.

Doostylus micranthus

Okareka mistletoe restoration project

A project has been under way since 2003 to remove animal and plant pests from a large part of Lake Tikitapu Scenic Reserve and an adjoining beech forest strip (both administered by the Department of Conservation). The main purpose of the project is to protect and expand the populations of two threatened native mistletoe species growing in this area.

The project will also benefit many other native plant species and wildlife and help restore the ecological health of the reserve. We are already seeing an increased abundance of native mistletoes, regeneration of native plants and increased numbers of native birds.

Work is being carried out by volunteers from the Rotorua Branch of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, the Rotorua Botanical Society and the local community, with assistance from the Department of Conservation and Environment Bay of Plenty.

you are here

We are:

- Maintaining a network of cut lines and bait stations and laying poison bait to control possum and rat populations to low levels.
- Controlling various plant pests
- Replanting with suitable plant species.

Many native mistletoe plants can be seen in this area of forest, especially along the Mistletoe Walk starting on your right, where more information is available.

Silvereye / Tauhou

Figure 4 and 5: The mistletoe growing panel and the Okareka Mistletoe Restoration Project panel