

## Utuhina Walkway

Graeme Jane, Elizabeth Miller & John Hobbs

On 15 May 2021 Rotorua Botanical Society met where the Utuhina Stream passes under Malfroy Road, in the Rotorua urban area. We explored its meandering course along a pathway that followed the western bank downstream to Old Taupo Road. A narrow fringe of rough grass, blackberry or old trees ranging from willows, redwoods, wattles and eucalypts to old totara and cabbage trees enclosed the stream. The fringe was usually bounded to the west by lawns or occasionally houses. Near the start of our walk the stream bank had scattered areas that had been used for garden rubbish and small patches of plants such as crocosmia, *Selaginella kraussiana*, and wandering Jew that may have been washed downstream, or spread from garden discards.

The stream bed had frequent masses of *Elodea canadensis*, patches of *Glyceria maxima*, a few large trout, and numerous oddments such as road cones, tyres and drink bottles, especially near Malfroy Road. *Diplazium australe* and *Deparia petersonii* were surprisingly common along the banks along with kiokio, mamaku, silver fern. Interesting native plants included scattered wineberry and, at one point, *Microlaena stipoides* in the lawn. Several large *Gunnera tinctoria* featured along the stream as well as patches of *Nandina domestica*. A group of large, old planted *Pinus muricata* and a small patch of *Ranunculus ficaria* with its large yellow flowers also attracted attention. There was discussion over a Helianthus, well past flowering, which was found to not have any tubers, so it was assumed to be a perennial sunflower (*Helianthus xlaetiflorus*), with small capitula. A few garden escapes such as *Aucuba japonica* and *Monstera delicosa* were seen below gardens on the other side of the stream.

A seat in a small, quiet clearing was a pleasant lunch spot, but the trip was brought to an abrupt stop during lunch when a phone call informed us that one of our vehicles had been broken into on a quiet side street near our start, and we returned to check out the situation and sympathise with the vehicle owner before gradually dispersing for the day.