

# Some observations on the germination of *Araucaria heterophylla* (Norfolk Island pine) at South Kaipara Head

Barbara Waller

For over forty years two large Norfolk Island pines have featured prominently in my life on the South Head of the Kaipara Harbour. These trees are purported to have been planted on the Pilot Station<sup>1</sup> site by William Spearman Young the first European farmer at South Head (1868 -- 1881). His descendants maintain that the trees came from the Bay of Islands as a reminder of his school days in Russell where the Norfolk Island pines were a novelty. Other people believe that they were planted as harbour markers by Pilot Station staff. However there is no corroborative evidence to confirm exactly when, why and by whom these pines were planted.

The trees are growing in a very exposed, windy and dry site. Despite serious damage from two lightning strikes, one in 1961 and the other about 20 years later, both trees have recovered and are remarkably healthy. They continue to produce a large number of cones every year. Dozens of seeds are scattered<sup>2</sup> over a very wide area, considering their size and weight; they germinate where they fall in the garden, in the gravel driveway, round the edge of a hard tennis court and among the roots of the parent trees. But none have survived past the seedling stage in situ for a variety of reasons<sup>3</sup>, but many accessible seedlings have been potted up and grown on for farm plantings.

Two other trees of a similar size and age growing in

a more sheltered and less dry site a few hundred metres away also seed prolifically. Sheltered from the main blast of the winds, their seeds fall in a relatively small area round the trees in comparison to those from the house trees. Most years some germinate but only one seedling has survived to become a small tree on the edge of a creek - out of reach of sheep. Occasionally there are, what I call "mast" years, when hundreds of seeds germinate. 1993 was the last such year. Whether we have another in the foreseeable future is uncertain due to damage sustained in the 1998 easterly storms (in this an adjacent and equally old *Cupressus macrocarpa* was uprooted, shearing off about a third of the lower and oldest branches). Rats are partial to the seeds and we notice increased rat numbers during "mast" years..

When seeds are collected for planting a sample is opened to estimate viability. We only plant if most are viable and the resultant germination has been very good. 1961 was the most successful year and the seed had been planted in rows in the vegetable garden. Most germinated and once large enough were transplanted. Nearly 40 years on these trees form a splendid double row helping shelter the house from southerly winds. Occasionally these young trees have cones but to date no seedlings have been found in their vicinity.

<sup>1</sup> The Kaipara Harbour Pilot Station was situated on the South Head from 1864 to 1874 when it was re-sited at Pouto on the North Head of the harbour.

<sup>2</sup> Strong winds carry them into surrounding paddocks.

<sup>3</sup> Stock grazing the adjacent paddocks, human removal and unsuitable site, e.g. under the parent trees.



## History of the Fallow Deer on Awhitu Peninsula

Wayne Aspin

Ewen Cameron's article on the Flora of Taitua Forest (Cameron 2000: 91) contained a quote by W. Black on the source of fallow deer in the Awhitu area; this has led me to write the present note. The fallow deer (*Dama dama*) "originated from escaped circus deer in Waiuku in the 1930s".

The most informed source on fallow deer at Awhitu is the late Mr Norman Douglas, who made a life long study of this herd (Stace 1987): "Mr Joseph Renal purchased a buck and a doe from the Onehunga Zoo in either 1909 or 1910, and shipped them to his land on the south side of Rangiriri Creek [east of Pollok]".

The whole herd (known as the Pollok herd) was built up from these animals and in the early days grazed amongst the scrub on Rangiriri Point. When this land was developed into pasture after World War II the herd gradually moved west into the mature bush in the valleys south of Pollok settlement. From there they have spread both south and north and also into the high sand hills on the west. Until about 1992-93 this remained a closed and unique herd; then after a big drop in the value of fallow deer meat a farmer released a light-coloured English strain of fallow deer into the wild and these unfortunately have interbred with the herd already established.

Farmers in the area are keeping an eye on the fallow deer numbers and allow controlled shooting to take place at times when the numbers build up. I do not think they are a serious threat to the fauna and flora as they are mainly grazers and not

browsers like red deer. If the numbers of the latter were to build up they would be a far more serious threat. Our best source of information presently, on the Pollok herd, is Mr Ray Lane, who like Mr Douglas, has made a lifetime study of them.

#### References

Cameron, E.K. 2000: Flora of Taitua Forest, Awhitu Peninsula. *Auckland Botanical Society Journal* 55(2): 94.

Stace, G. 1987: National Treasures the Douglas Score. Section 1 Norman Douglas, the man and his work. A video by Avid Productions Limited.



## Auckland Naturalists' Field Club Excursion to Rakino Islands in 1883

Mike Butler

The announcement for the excursion in the classified advertisements section of the Auckland Evening Star doesn't give the actual date, but was described as "Friday next (Prince of Wales's Birthday)". Tickets were available from named members, but it was noted that "The Committee will not engage to issue tickets on board".

Source: Auckland Evening Star 12 November 1883.

### Field Naturalists' Club

"Members of this Club with their friends, to the total number of 112, left Queen street Wharf in the P.S. Tainui, at 9 o'clock on Friday morning, bound for Rakino Island, outside of Motutapu. The run down occupied a pleasant two hours, at the end of which the steamer came to anchor in a semi-circular bay, opposite the island's only house. A large proportion of the excursionists landed in boats, while the rest went on further in the steamer to one of the two Otatou Islands [The Noises], hoping, as ardent naturalists, to be rewarded with new and rare plants, and possibly animals. Their expectations, however, were scarcely realised, for they got no new vegetable specimens, and schnapper, which was caught in abundance, can scarcely be reckoned a rarity. Mr Cheeseman, the Club's indefatigable secretary, found a specimen of the only melon indigenous to New Zealand (*Sicyos angulata*) [now *S. australis*]. Its fruit, at maturity, is only about the size of a bean.

Other rarities were the hymenanthus, and the rhagodia (very uncommon) which latter also occurs at Rakino. Several orchids, most of them common, were found. On the beach at Otatou was picked up a human jaw-bone (lower), with all the teeth save one intact, and perfectly sound. Each of the first double teeth was ground down in the most singular manner, as if the owner, when living, had been in

the habit of masticating very hard food (say fern-root). Judging from the teeth, Drs Moore and Purchas diagnosed the fragment to have belonged to a male Maori, aged between 50 and 60, who was possibly drowned in the harbour years ago.

Those who had landed at Rakino were most hospitably entertained by Mr Sandford, who lives here with his family, and raises sheep and cattle. The Club had evidently been expected, for extensive preparations had been made, and food and drink were supplied throughout the whole day. The excursionists had reason to be thankful to Mr Sandford and family for their very courteous attention. Rakino did not seem to yield anything very remarkable from a naturalist's point of view, and ferns and plants worth taking being rare, some attention was directed to oyster-gathering, and it must be confessed, with great success. Oysters abound on the rocks surrounding the island and are to be had in cartloads.

About 4pm, the Tainui arrived from Otatou, and re-embarkation commenced. The last stragglers were on board about 5.10, and a start was made for home. The route taken was the alternative one round the outside of Motutapu, by Rangitoto Reef, and through the Channel. Queen street wharf was reached shortly after 7, and the excursion had proved a most enjoyable one."

