

## Launch of "Auckland's Remarkable Urban Forest"

Mike Wilcox (editor)

This book by Mike Wilcox is Auckland Botanical Society Bulletin No. 29, and was launched on 12 October 2012 at an event at Wesley Community Centre, Mt Roskill. A gathering of 123 people attended (Fig. 1), comprising Bot Soc members, representatives of environmental and community groups (e.g. Tree Council, Forest & Bird), Auckland Council staff, property managers, environmental consultants, arborists, community leaders, and politicians. Catering was by Eventz on Show, and Mike Wilcox was the MC. Mei Nee Lee and Peter Hutton manned the book sales table (Fig. 2).

MP for Mt Roskill, the **Hon. Phil Goff**, started proceedings with some kind words of welcome to the gathering, and saying how much he thought the book would be of interest to residents and also those having responsibility for trees in the City (Fig. 3).

In between the various speeches, and as an introduction to them, **Mike Wilcox** interspersed a few remarks about the background to the book. "It is about Auckland and its trees and I hope it will be of

interest to residents and visitors alike. What is remarkable about Auckland's urban forest? It is its range of forest types, its botanical diversity, its high value for recreation, and the way the urban forest is a living record of the city's history from the 1840's to the present day.

"There are three main dimensions to the book – firstly, the classification and broad description of the various types of urban forest; secondly, the particular species of trees that occur in and characterise our city, and thirdly, the spatial make-up of the urban forest – north, south, east and west, with emphasis on the 19 Local Boards as the geographic units. I hope Local Board members will enjoy and benefit from the book. Parks and trees are just one aspect of what they have to deal with. Here, in Mt Roskill, we are in the Puketapapa Local Board area and a part of Auckland with a very good representation of urban forest – native bush, native revegetation, exotic woodlands, recreational parks, and historic homesteads.



Fig. 1. The audience at the book launch, Wesley Community Centre. Photo: Josh Salter, 12 Oct 2013.



Fig. 2. Peter Hutton and Mei Nee Lee minding the sales table. Photo: Josh Salter, 12 Oct 2013.



Fig. 3. Mike Wilcox being congratulated by Phil Goff. Photo: Philip Moll, 12 Oct 2013.

"Auckland Bot Soc is proud to bring out this book, and especially so this year, as it is our 75<sup>th</sup> Jubilee. Our Society has long had a close connection with the urban forest, probably best depicted in Lucy Cranwell's Botany of Auckland, where several of the urban blocks of native bush are highlighted. Some of these, for instance the Grafton Gully bush, have been almost totally lost due to development, and Smith's Bush has the Northern Motorway going through it. Bot Soc has sometimes got involved with bush protection, and also with submissions on management plans for the extensive Hillsborough chain of coastal bush reserves, and with Kirk's Bush at Papakura.

"I have had a good time exploring Auckland to prepare this book, and hope people will enjoy the result. I have had a good deal of encouragement and help with it from our Bot Soc Members. I wish to mention Romily Atkinson and Margi Keys (North Shore) and also Yvonne Baker and Melissa Marler, Leslie Haines and Helen Preston Jones. Ewen Cameron (Vice President and Life Member, and Curator of Botany at the Museum), has been especially supportive."

The book had its beginnings in descriptions of the trees at Unitec and in Cornwall Park – the study grew and expanded from there. The new Auckland spurred me on. The Botanical Society has visited and reported on many of the bush reserves, so the book brings that literature together. I have tried to include not only the big, well-known parks like the Domain, Cornwall Park, Western Park, Western Springs and so on, but the smaller neighbourhood parks and village greens, too, and also Auckland numerous sportsfields. These have trees that make up a large component of the urban forest, and feature prominently in the book. Here at Wesley we have War Memorial Park right outside, the Lovelock Running Track, sportsfields, walkways, playgrounds, and trees – part of a string of reserve land alongside Oakley Creek.

How to manage such a complex estate, a forest like no other? The idea of having an Urban Forest Collective is floated in the book, with the suggestion that it could be a focal point for urban forest management, and could commission scientific research by Universities and Crown Research Institutes directed at urban forest matters. The Auckland Council, through its many departments, service centres, and contractors has the task of looking after much of the urban forest. Bot Soc is keen to keep involved with Auckland's urban forest and biodiversity, and all the exciting future developments.

The book is informally dedicated to those who propagated and planted trees, those who donated bush, those who deal with pests and weeds, those

who manage and care for trees (arborists, groundsmen, gardeners). Care groups, Friends, volunteers in hundreds – many of you here today. Kia ora, well done! You have put your time, energy and skill to good use, and your heart and soul into it as well. May I mention a few people who have made a great contribution to the urban forest: Graham Falla (Mangemangeroa), John Smith (Puhinui Stream), Wendy John (Oakley Creek), Sel Arbuckle (rock forests), Colin Bradshaw (Domain Nursery), Roy Clements and Elizabeth Walker (Meola Creek), Rhys Gardner and Alan Esler (urban forest botany), and a founding member Rich Afford (1937) of Bot Soc who planted trees in Gribblehirst Park.

**Julie Fairey** from the Puketapapa Local Board spoke fervently about some urban tree projects in this part of Auckland, including revegetation work in Molley Green Reserve – the source of Oakley Creek.

"Thank you for the honour to speak this afternoon, and for our area, Puketapapa Mt Roskill, to host this launch. *Auckland's Remarkable Urban Forest* is indeed a remarkable book, quite encyclopaedic in nature, right down to the entry for my own local neighbourhood park, Molley Green Reserve, on p166, which reads: *This is an open reserve, rather poorly drained, with no particularly interesting trees. It is one of the sources of the Oakley Creek.* I hope that in 20 years' time, when Mike comes to revise this book that the work the local community has started this year, in this park, putting in a wetland and planting many thousands of plants, will mean it gets a more fulsome entry, like the wonderful Monte Cecilia Park detailed immediately below.

"The conclusion of the book mentions the opportunity that a unified Auckland Council gives us to have a unified tree policy. It puts forward the exciting idea of an *Urban Forest Collective* and an *Urban Tree Board* which could, as Dr Seuss might say "speak for the trees." This seems a very valuable initiative, especially in light of new tree rules put in place recently which are sadly a threat to the remarkable trees of the future.

"Thank you again for the opportunity to speak and congratulations on this significant achievement, a very valuable resource for our communities."

**Ewen Cameron** spoke on behalf of Bot Soc as publishers of the book, saying that it typifies Mike's philosophy on Auckland's forest plants – looking at the big picture and recording and enjoying its diversity.

"It's an attractive book well laid out in separate chapters based on composition, localities and grouped in interesting ways" said Ewen "and I particularly like the chapter on Floristic Composition:

trees from different parts of the world and the tables of diverse information, e.g. the 100 commonest large trees of Auckland's urban parks, school grounds, etc. (based on 650 sites): pohutukawa, puriri, totara, pin oak, cabbage tree (p.98); the major street trees (546 streets): titoki, willow myrtle (*Agonis*), *Melia*, flowering cherries, *Tristanopsis* (p.92)".

Ewen noted that "it has been a very easy book for the Society to support, as Mike has written it based on his personal observations, taken most of the images, contracted the designers, obtained the sponsorship, and organised today's launch! As I said earlier, a remarkable man".

**Brian O'Flaherty** (Punaromia Publications), with **Julie McDermid**, as managing editors, produced the book, including arranging the printing in China. Brian remarked that he and Julie were pleased to be associated with Bot Soc in this project. He observed that as Auckland steadily grows in population and struggles to house everyone, all boys between the ages of 7 and 10 years should be required to be housed in tree huts – a good, practical use for the urban forest!

**Mark Bowater**, Manager of Local Parks and Sportsfields, Auckland Council, said that "the new Auckland Council came into being at the end of 2010, by amalgamation of 7 local authorities and 1 regional council. In terms of park management there are around 40,000 ha of regional parks and 10,000 ha of local and sports parks (over 4000 parks in total). Our public tree asset is considerable. Public trees help to define our city and the region. There are more than 300,000 street trees, over 400,000 specimen trees in parks, and the largest botanical collection in public ownership.

"The Local and Sports Parks Unit of Auckland Council has five Arboriculture and Landscape Advisors, plus a number of Park Rangers and Contract Coordinators with an interest in trees. Regarding park and tree management challenges, one of the biggest issues we face is from utilities, particularly in the road corridor. Tree protection is a matter of getting the balance right between regulation and rules, and best industry practice with

less bureaucracy. There are numbers of different legacy approaches to tree policies, and these are starting to be pulled together into an operational tree policy. Auckland Council staff are now thinking about the potential formation of some form of *Urban Forest Collective* agency, with a community-based focus."

Mark said that when he first opened the book he was impressed with the first few photographs: "large eucalypts bordering sports fields (combining two of my passions); the green vista from one of our central volcanic maunga; the London plane trees in Franklin Rd; the majestic stature of mature trees in Western Springs Park; and structural nikau in the heavily urbanised Queen St. The book provides a wonderful categorisation of our urban forest, from native bush remnants, to native revegetation projects, exotic woodlands, our very diverse home gardens, street trees, through to larger sites including parks, golf courses and schools. Congratulations to Mike on the dedication and commitment to producing such an outstanding book on Auckland's remarkable urban forest".

**Penny Webster**, Auckland Councillor, Rodney, Chairperson of the Strategy and Finance Committee, which includes the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and every Council member, and representatives from the Independent Maori Statutory Board, spoke on behalf of the Auckland Council, officially launching the book, mentioning the importance of trees in Auckland's heritage and environment, noting that the book provides a valuable guide to the city's parks and reserves, and wishing Bot Soc every success with it.

### Sponsorship

A book like this is a major undertaking. The ABS is an incorporated Society, and we are also registered as a charity. This means we are not-for-profit in a commercial sense, so any proceeds from the sale of this book will be going towards our Lucy Cranwell Grant Fund for university student research. As a charity, we qualify for grants ourselves, and we are very pleased to acknowledge and thank The ASB Community Trust, the Auckland Council, The Lion Foundation and The Sir John Logan Campbell Residuary Estate for their generous grants towards the cost of producing the book.



Sir John Logan Campbell Residuary Estate