

The 36 hectare Otanomomo Scientific Reserve, 10 km south of Balclutha on the road to Owaka, will be familiar to those who have driven to the Catlins or Kaka Point. It is an important remnant of fertile alluvial podocarp forest, a forest type which is rare not only in Otago but in most parts of New Zealand. Otanomomo is now the only place in Otago where this type of forest is reserved. At 100 km/h all looks well, with magnificent emergent crowns of rimu, kahikatea and matai towering above the canopy, but underneath is a different story. Substantial areas, particularly on the northern and western edges, are infested with Chilean flame creeper (*Tropaeolum speciosum*) and blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*). Chilean flame creeper is also abundant in treefall gaps elsewhere within the forest. At lower abundance, a suite of woody weeds – often garden escapees – can also be found. These include hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), spindle tree (*Euonymus europaeus*), daphne (*Daphne laureola*), flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*) and gooseberry (*Ribes uva-crispa*). The reserve is also home to a small population of the endangered tree daisy *Olearia hectorii*.

Fortunately, help is at hand. Dunedin Branch of Forest & Bird has been contracted by the Department of Conservation to undertake ‘close encounter’ weed control at Otanomomo, with the aim of restoring a self-sustaining native understorey that is resistant to further weed invasion. The project also aims to enhance and protect the population of *O. hectorii*.

Initial work, including identification of priority areas for control, and planning and cutting of access routes has begun; however during winter weed control work will be limited. The major weed control effort will begin in spring and summer when the weeds are actively growing and thus more susceptible to chemical herbicides, such as Vigilant gel. However some work has begun on cutting back blackberry and releasing native trees from competition, at the western end of the reserve.

We are also planning to relocate and clearly identify all individuals of *O. hectorii*, well ahead of the spring/summer weed control onslaught. This is the initial part of propagating *O. hectorii* and establishing long-term sites in which to plant them.

The project will depend heavily on the work of volunteers and it is hoped that members of the Botanical Society of Otago will be represented among them. Planning is underway for a Forest & Bird field trip to the reserve that will incorporate the opportunity for a look around as well as some hands on work. BSO members will be welcome.

In the meantime, if you would like to be involved, we can add you to our volunteer list, which is alerted to volunteer workdays by email. At present these workdays are taking place both during the week and at weekends. Please contact project leader David McFarlane by emailing miniwaka@xtra.co.nz, or phoning (03) 473-7259.