Tāne's Tree Trust Newsletter
Native trees for the Future
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Rob McGowan wins prestigious Loder Cup

***Tāne's Tree Trust trustee, Rob McGowan, is the 2018 winner of the esteemed Loder Cup, acknowledging individuals and groups who make an outstanding contribution to conserving New Zealand's native plants*. PICTURE: Sun Media**

By Kerry Mitchell

Tauranga's Rob McGowan has loved plants ever since he was old enough to grab one in his tiny fist. This fascination grew when he was given responsibility for looking after the fernery at the Greenmeadows seminary in the Hawke's Bay while training to be a Marist priest, and later, when he returned to his hometown of Whanganui and learned about the medicinal uses of plants from local kaumatua.

After retiring from the priesthood, he devoted the next 25 years to ensuring matauranga Maori (traditional Maori knowledge) in conservation management, ensuring the preservation of indigenous trees used for rongoa Maori, or traditional Maori medicine.

He has been heavily involved in the set-up of the Kaimai-Mamaku Catchments Forum and is one of the founders of Tāne's Tree Trust, a non-profit charitable trust that was established more than 10 years ago to encourage New Zealand landowners to plant and sustainably manage indigenous trees for multiple uses.

Rob is also the author of a book 'Rongoa Maori: A practical guide to traditional Maori medicine' and is a former member of the Bay of Plenty Conservation Board. This work has seen Rob named the 2018 winner of the esteemed Loder Cup, awarded since 1926 to acknowledge individuals and groups who make an outstanding contribution to conserving New Zealand's native plants. He describes the win as "quite wonderful". "It's an honour to share this award with some of the most prestigious names in botany in New Zealand."

After retiring from the priesthood Rob set up a plant nursery for the Tauranga Moana Trust Board and worked in the Kaimai Mamuku Forest Park. "This gave me a very good working knowledge of the bush."

Rob went on to work for the University of Waikato for about 10 years and now works part-time for the Department of Conservation for a group called Nga Whenua Rahui, a contestable ministerial fund established in 1991 to protect the integrity of Maori land and preserve matauranga Maori. He is also involved with the Wai 262 Flora and Fauna Claim lodged with the Waitangi Tribunal in 1991, which relates directly to the use of rongoa Maori, and arose out of concerns within Maoridom at attempts made by multinational pharmaceutical companies to claim intellectual property rights over New Zealand plants used by Maori for medicine. It has yet to be settled.

Rob says the Waitangi Tribunal itself has made a "huge" contribution to Maori health because it has given Maori back their self-respect. "It says we weren't rebels; we didn't disobey the Crown. We fought for our rights and lost. To know that history and to be connected to that courage really gives people confidence in their own abilities." Rob, known to his whanau, friends and colleagues as Pa from his days as a Maori mission priest, is not Maori himself – he is half Dalmatian – but is a fluent speaker of te reo Maori and is a practitioner of rongoa Maori.

Rob says rongoa is less about healing and more about keeping well. He makes a decoction, or tea, from the karamu plant to help people with diabetes and uses the tataramoa, or 'bush lawyer' plant to make a decoction to help ease tension and aid sleep. Rongoa is not a miracle cure, however, and people with conditions such as diabetes still need to follow the rules of good diet, plenty of fluids and regular exercise, he says. If you're a rongoa practitioner your first patient is the whenua (land) itself, says Rob. "There are some places you can't get your medicines from because they are unwell. If Papatuanuku (mother earth) is not well, how can you be well?" Rob says in regards to conservation management we should always ask the question 'does it hurt the earth or heal it'?

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"If the answer is no, it doesn't heal it, you don't do it. We are the guardians of the next generation's well-being. We don't own things; we hold them in trust for those who follow us. That doesn't just include people; it includes animals, plants and microbes. We don't have the right to deprive other living creatures of their future. Until we live with that realisation, all we're doing is pillaging the planet's resources."

Rob says people don't realise how sick our bush is. "Because I use the plants for medicine and food, when I go into the bush to look for them I find many of them are not there anymore. People ask why more traditional Maori medicine isn't used. One of the reasons is because the plants aren't there anymore.

"It's those little plants, those undergrowth seedlings; the mulch on the ground that holds the water long enough to percolate into the aquifers – that's what keeps our springs alive and our rivers running. Cumulatively things are deteriorating because the little things are missing. "A big tree can only stand tall because of the little plants looking after its base. We all look at the big trees and don't notice the little things. A rongoa person notices the little things."

Rob's personal plant nursery has more than 100 native species, some quite rare. He also loves to grow flowers, describing them as a great healer. "When someone gives you a bunch of beautiful flowers doesn't that make the sun shine? And that memory is good for your health. Children are healers too. Children's smiles do amazing things to very sick people. In fact, we're all healers if we learn how to smile a lot."

Rob says the idea that plants can talk is not a myth. "You don't just hear with your ears. You hear with your eyes and your fingertips. We have an ability to sense wellness or a lack of wellness. A mother can sense when her child is not well. You can tell when people are happy or sad by the look on their face. That's how you work with plants for medicine; you develop that connection."

Rongoa Maori practitioners tend to stay out of the public eye, says Rob. Some still experience "unconscious" ridicule from health professionals, and others find themselves exhausted by constant demand for their skills.

"Some have moved to Australia to get away from people. If someone comes to you for healing and you're cooking your tea, then they share your tea, and that becomes hard to manage. There was an old system of koha (donation) and that still exists to some extent, but lots of people demand rongoa as of right because they are Maori but they don't contribute anything."

Rob says the use of rongoa Maori in the mainstream health system is progressing "slowly".

"There is certainly interest there. One of the issues is that you can't practice in the mainstream health system unless you understand the mainstream health system. How do you know whether a plant is going to interact with a medication a person is on?

"The old people had a very good understanding of physiology and anatomy. They knew how the body worked. Modern people don't have that."

Rob runs regular rongoa Maori workshops alongside fellow practitioner Donna Kerridge. They are attended by nurses, physiotherapists, and sometimes doctors, who are interested in using rongoa Maori to complement their work.

"That's good because they can become good and safe practitioners. The whole safety thing is really important because you can overdose."

As well as the use of traditional plants, karakia (prayer) and mihimihi (massage) play a key role in rongoa Maori, says Rob.

"Sometimes with illness, the biggest obstacle to being healed is within yourself. That's when karakia is fundamentally important."

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Pictures from our recent AGM and Field Trip

Inspecting continuous cover radiata management at John and Rosalie Wardle's block at Oxford.

Listening to Jon Dronfield talk about beech management.

Above: Trustee Jon Dronfield describing the girth of a red beech tree – or was it a kingfish?

New trustee Jacqui Aimers.

The whole group at our AGM field trip near Reefton.

One Billion Trees – Update

Our February newsletter posed the question of what the One Billion trees programme might mean in terms of new or extra areas of afforestation and/or new added indigenous afforestation. At that point, less than three months since the programme was first announced, it simply wasn't possible to give a satisfactory answer to either question. What we had at that point was a programme that some might say, indeed some did say, was mostly hyperbole. However, it was/is a programme with potential - and one that gave a needed boost to forestry's profile. More detail was required but there were good reasons for thinking it had potential and that indigenous forestry was likely to play a key role within a successful 1BT programme.

Six months on, some of that detail is now available – and while more is required one can now see just how critical indigenous forestry is going to be to the programme. Crudely around half the programme will consist in business-as-usual replanting of the existing commercial forest crops as these mature and are harvested. It means an average planting rate of some 100 million trees per annum over the next 10 years and to achieve the overall goal of the programme will require an annual establishment/planting rate that is about double that likely from simply re-establishing after harvest.

In the period since the programme was announced Te Uru Rākau (Forestry New Zealand) estimates that 60.6 million trees have been planted, while surveying indicates 67.5 million seedlings have been sold for planting. Of this latter figure just under 10 percent (6.5 million seedlings for planting in 2018) have been directly funded by government. In terms of the exotic indigenous split, currently exotics account for 87 percent of the total and indigenous species 13 percent.

For the next couple of years, the programme is not expected to achieve the target of 100 million trees planted per annum – it takes time to gear up production – and commercial exotics most probably through a JV programme with Crown Forestry will likely dominate the 20 to 40 million extra (above the old BAU level) tree plantings. However, after that the additional planting rate is projected to rise to around 60 million trees per annum – with the exotics: indigenous split going to something approaching 70:30. To achieve this requires a relatively modest increase in the production of exotic planting stock. But for the indigenous sector to meet the role envisaged for it will require more than a doubling of the current programme producing indigenous planting stock. That is certainly doable but does pose several very real challenges – not the least being nurseries needing to know which species will be wanted and it generally costing more to establish an indigenous forest compared to an exotic one.

With respect to cost, on 13 August government announced extra funding (approx. $240 million) for the One Billion Trees programme. This money will be made available for:

- grants to landowners for the cost of planting and establishing trees, and indigenous forest regeneration. The aim is to encourage the planting of natives, trees for erosion control and environment-focused planting. Grants will be available later this year
- a partnership fund to create closer working relationships with regional councils, non-government organisations, researchers, training organisations, Māori landowners and community groups. This will help achieve the one billion trees target by enabling co-funding opportunities and use of existing know-how and experience.

These new initiatives will be funded through the Provincial Growth Fund (PGF) with some $118 million set aside for grants and a further $120 million for partnership projects over the next three years.

- Gerard Horgan

OFOF (OUR FORESTS OUR FUTURE) FUNDED FOR ANOTHER THREE YEARS

Early last year we completed and reported on 30 months' work under the OFOF2 banner. This work was generously supported by The Tindall Foundation. An application to continue this work was submitted to the Foundation and we have been funded for a further three years. The Foundation has always made it clear that their funding will always be strategic and aimed at getting valuable work started in such a manner as to become self-sustaining. In this case there is already good evidence that the OFOF work has been well received as we have already received three further related grants to broaden and extend the theme now termed OFOF3. We have two further grant applications pending.

While OFOF3 extends and enlarges the OFOF2 programme there are significant changes in its structure. An acknowledgement that we in TTT are the drivers of technical knowledge and experience has given us the opportunity to partner with TTC (Trees that Count) and we now have an MOU with them as well as formally providing that expertise. OFOF3 significantly extends our technical advisory role and also allows for a greater emphasis on NTVs (Non-Timber Values). These extensions have allowed us to bring in two new members to the team, Jacqui Aimers and Ian Brennan, who cut their teeth on OFOF2, and are now both trustees and project managers in the OFOF team.

We are deeply grateful to The Tindall Foundation for their faith in us and particularly for the way this has allowed us to expand our funding base and broaden our reach at a time when afforestation is such a critical environmental issue.

Introducing our new trustee: Jacqui Aimers

I am a nature-lover, scientist, writer, artist and mother of three young adults. I am passionate about wise use of natural resources and sustainable land management.

I have always loved trees and forests. I spent many hours as a child reading books while perched high in big, old trees where only the cat could reach me. I was sent to a very conservative, private girls' school to be turned into a young lady, which was largely unsuccessful. The school was mostly focussed on arts and humanities, but it was the sciences that excited me. A girl taking all sciences in that era (nearly forty years ago) was frowned on in conservative Dunedin. I had to go to the neighbouring boys' school for some of my classes. My mother despaired, but my father was secretly proud. I worked as a girl Friday in Dad's architectural firm in the school holidays and went on many site visits with him. He loved specialty timbers, particularly natives, and often specified them for his house and church designs. His love of fine timbers rubbed off on me.

When I was sixteen, my father took us to Northland to see Waitangi. I was impressed by the Treaty but was shocked when I found out about the destruction of most of our kauri forests. I had an epiphany while standing in the shadow of Tāne Mahuta and other giants. I had been given my calling. I wanted to support conservation of natural ecosystems and also sustainable forestry with high-value, specialty timbers. (This continues to be my passion.) After many arguments, I managed to convince my father to switch to using timbers from sustainable sources.

I went to university partly because I did not have a good reference from school, making it hard to get a good job. I had initially looked at doing a forestry degree but was dissuaded due to being female. Also, I wasn't interested in learning how to manage radiata-pine plantations. I enrolled for a science degree hoping to eventually work as an ecologist, wildlife scientist or something similar. My mother was very disappointed. She wanted me to do a fine arts degree.

I double majored in Botany and Zoology, with a focus on ecology and genetics. I worked as a botanist in south Westland for the NZ Forest Service in my summers, during politically fraught times when the NZFS was being wound down. I went on to do an honours degree in Botany, with a focus on ecology. My research thesis was on population dynamics of native forest in south Westland. I became active in environmental groups but was frustrated by the lack of reality regarding the need for timber and sustainable forestry.

After graduating, I did contract work as an ecologist in Westland. I then went to work at the Forest Research Institute (FRI), in part to escape sexual harassment and discrimination, but also to be involved in forestry research. My interest was in tree improvement and specialty timbers. I had hoped that being a female scientist was not such an issue at FRI but was disappointed in that regard. I also found out that radiata-pine was king and to mention native species was inappropriate, though I could talk about Douglas-fir and cypress species without getting into too much trouble.

I had been encouraged to study overseas, so headed off to Texas A&M University to do a PhD in forest genetics and tree improvement – while working part-time for the Texas Forest Service. My mother was horrified! But I got to work with some amazing people and being a female was less of an issue there. It was hard to leave, but I loved NZ too much, my father was dying, and I wanted my kids to be Kiwis. I hoped that having a good PhD would mean less sexual discrimination. However, while things had improved in the five years I was away, it was still an uphill battle to be accepted, especially now that I was a working mother.

I worked for 10 years at FRI in tree improvement, propagation and deployment and continued my interest in specialty timbers where possible. I kept up an interest in native species but was frustrated by a lack of opportunities. It bothers me greatly that New Zealand annually imports nearly $100 million worth of specialty timbers, much of which comes from non-sustainable sources, when we could be sustainably producing most of this type of resource within New Zealand.

I was highly productive at FRI and worked with some good people, but the politics were awful and I was made redundant after a spectacular funding fiasco, due to corruption that I had no part in. I started freelancing as a research consultant with a focus on forestry, sustainable land management and technical communications. I worked on contracts for various organisations, including the NZ Farm Forestry Association, various forestry training organisations, local councils, Ballance Agrinutrients (as science writer for one year), and APR Consultants (as senior research analyst for 2.5 years). I have had the pleasure of working with iwi and find their holistic ideology regarding land and resources to be refreshing and much more akin to my own thinking, particularly regarding kaitiakitanga.

I joined Tāne's Tree Trust about 18 months ago. My youngest son was nearly off my hands and I knew I would have more time to pursue my own interests. My only regret is that I did not join Tāne's Tree Trust earlier. I did not know about the scope of the Trust's work and that the Trust's vision is so closely aligned to my own philosophy. Recently, I have been working on the Trust's non-timber values project, within the Our Forests Our Future programme, and have helped with bid writing. I am keen to be involved in other Trust work and write more bids for funding, working alongside other Trust members.

And we say goodbye and thank you to Kirsten

After five years, Kirsten Crawford has retired as a trustee of Tāne's Tree Trust. Trained in ecology, resource management and project management, Kirsten worked with communities and organisations to establish and maintain collaborative restoration projects. She also ran an environmental management consultancy for eight years prior to switching to the non-profit sector to manage charities including the Dune Restoration Trust of NZ and Southern Seabird Solutions Trust. Kirsten has recently taken on a contract with MPI in the Maori Partnerships unit helping with the Regional Growth Fund. We wish her well and thank her for her contribution to the Trust.

DONATIONS: A note from the treasurer

All members should be aware that all donations, but not subscriptions, are eligible for a 33.33% tax rebate on your income tax. We will be able to send you a certificate of donation for you to submit to IRD with your tax return.

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