

# TRUE COLOURS

## Our 'Bugman' Trustee

By Ruud Kleinpaste

I've always had an interest in Entomology, the science of invertebrates, creepy crawlies, yes: bugs (although I actually graduated from university with a degree in Silviculture). My first few years as an entomologist for MAF were a bit of a struggle - nobody liked insects and everybody wanted to know how to kill them.

As a good public servant I usually distributed that sort of information to growers and gardeners alike.

Then it dawned on me that this was a crazy situation; bugs needed a bit of positive PR, a better public profile... They needed to get credit for the amazing jobs they do in the ecological scheme of things.

The radio talkback show 'The Bugman' was born 17 years ago on Newstalk ZB and it was one of the weirdest shows of its time. People rang up to ask for a method to kill, no, eradicate ants and all they got was a lecture on the incredible ecological niche they occupy in the garden. Native roaches? Same kind of lecture; spiders on the weatherboards? Daddy Longlegs' in the corridor? Leave the poor things alone!

Every now and then you get one of those smarty-pants callers intent on catching you out: "What good does a blowfly do, then, eh?"

That story is quite simple, really: Who do you think is first at the scene of the accident when you drive over a possum? Yep, you got it: the gravid female blowie will deposit a dozen or so

eggs in the ears, eyes, mouth of the cadaver, and anywhere else it can find ... The maggots that hatch from these eggs are the undertaker squad that immediately commence with the recycling of that furry animal; so it won't lie on the road like a miniature speed hump for six weeks or more!

This female blowfly can smell freshly dead meat from miles away and her extremely sensitive antennae will guide her to it without any trouble.

Of course, when you are having a barbecue in the suburbs, the same flies will also detect the sausages, lamb cutlets and steaks, no matter how fresh they might have been when you bought them.

All things in this world are ecologically related. Being a trustee for Project Crimson is really no different from being an insect conservationist. One of my dreams for the next few years is to change people's perceptions about insect pests 'damaging' plants, especially native pests associated with native plants.

Here's an example:  
 Juvenile pohutukawa leaves (and sometimes also those of rata) are often distorted by the sucking activities of the native pohutukawa psyllid, a small, aphid-like insect. The telltale signs are dimples in the leaves where the psyllid's larvae live.



*Project Crimson trustee Ruud Kleinpaste*

Why would the pohutukawa produce shelter sites like those dimples for its own, private, sucking pest, which nicks the nutritious, sweet phloem sap from its leaves?

Enter some ant species that cruise the dimpled leaves and lick the sweet honeydew excreta from the psyllid's bottoms. These ants love that honeydew-poo and they'll do everything possible to protect their tiny 'cattle' on those leaves.

In the process of protecting the psyllids on the leaves, the ants also protect those same leaves from chewing insects that may cause more important damage.

The perfect triangle of leaf, psyllid and ant - everybody wins; and the actual damage to the pohutukawa is negligible, although it may look quite dodgy.

Wouldn't it be nice if people in garden centres and nurseries would stop spraying the pohutukawa leaves with dimples? Wouldn't it be nice if they marketed these plants as ecological communities, rather than as 'damaged pohutukawa'?

I can hear the barbecue conversation already:  
 "Do you know, I bought a pohutukawa ecosystem today! Oh yes, a complete menage á trois and it's based on excrement!"

I bet you, nobody would notice the blowfly then!

## Coming Up...

### **Island Care Clean-up 4 April 2004, Auckland**

Island Care is a voluntary, non-profit organisation that promotes clean waters, coast and sea by raising public awareness of each person's responsibility to respect and protect the coastal environment. It regularly organises public events to clean up coastal debris on island shores.

Join in the annual clean-up of Rangitoto and Motutapu Islands this year on 4 April. Last year, 15 cubic metres of debris was collected from Rangitoto's coastline! Free ferry passes will be provided. Registration is essential - visit <http://pulpdesign.com.au/islandcare/> for more information and the registration form.

### **Biosecurity and Biodiversity – Forging The Links 21-23 July 2004, Rotorua**

This is the New Zealand Biosecurity Institute's National Education and Training Seminar (NETS) which looks at biosecurity and the safeguarding of New Zealand's biodiversity.

Speakers range from those involved in international biosecurity issues, such as the Invasive Species Specialist Group and the Australian Quarantine Inspection Services, to scientists from research institutes and staff working at New Zealand's biosecurity coalface.

Project Crimson's own Philip Simpson will be giving a talk on a community initiative he is involved with in Takaka, and representatives of the Kaharoa Kokako Trust and the Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust will also be speaking. Talks from environmental groups will be open to the public. Registration details and a draft programme are

## Project Crimson on the Coast

For years to come, summer visitors to East Cape will have the local community and Project Crimson to thank for the brilliant red blossoms that are associated with the Kiwi Christmas.

The pohutukawa is traditionally associated with the beautiful scenery of East Cape, but by the end of last century, the trees were no longer thriving, as they were suffering from possum attacks, stock damage, and the effects of fire, weeds and land clearance.

Te Araroa is one of the numerous community projects around East Cape which are helping to restore red blooms to the coastline. Community volunteers come from marae communities, local landowners, the Te Araroa Progressive Association, the Department of Conservation (DOC) and school students from Te Waha o Rerekohu Area School (which is named after a famous pohutukawa in the school grounds).

Over the last five years, they have been planting pohutukawa in blocks of land along the 21 km of coastal verge between Te Araroa and East Cape.

As well as tree planting, the work involves fencing to provide protection from stock, pest and weed control and

watering of young plants during dry summers. Funding from Project Crimson has helped with the purchase of seedlings and fencing material, and local Maori landowners have taken responsibility for the care of the trees.

"Project Crimson is really taking off on the Coast" says Andy Bassett, Gisborne Area Manager for DOC. "Although the land we are planting is privately owned, the pohutukawa are visible to all visitors who come to enjoy the splendour the East Cape has to offer."



***Te Waha o Rerekohu Area School pupils with pohutukawa seedlings ready for planting***



Project Crimson has seven Crimson Trails throughout New Zealand, in Auckland, Mt Maunganui, Rotorua, Wellington, Golden Bay, West Coast and Southland/Otago.

These wonderful walks, hikes, and drives throughout New Zealand lead locals and visitors to some of the most stunning pohutukawa and rata specimen and stands in their region.

Each Crimson Trail also includes aspects of the restoration and regeneration programmes currently being undertaken by Project Crimson, the Department of Conservation and local councils and communities in the region.

Go exploring - [www.projectcrimson.org.nz](http://www.projectcrimson.org.nz)

To contact Project Crimson: Phone (09) 414 0466



## A Special Tree

By Dr Stephen Clarke, Official Historian Royal New Zealand Returned Services' Association

"The native pohutukawa is known as New Zealand's 'Christmas Tree' because of its bright red blooms during the Christmas season.

In the Wellington harbourside suburb of Eastbourne grows a pohutukawa with special significance as the first memorial to commemorate the Gallipoli Campaign.

On 14 July 1915, the Eastbourne Beautifying Society invited the Mayor of Eastbourne, Mr J.P. Kelly, "to plant two fine Pohutukawas [sic] in Rata Road [sic], in commemoration of the brave deeds done by our soldiers in Gallipoli", reported the Dominion the following day. The children of the juvenile branch of the Eastbourne Beautifying Society then completed the planting in the street with pohutukawa.

A plaque was later erected and the trees specially cared for in the early years by the juvenile branch. The fact that these trees were planted only two and a half months after the landing at Gallipoli makes the pohutukawa at

Eastbourne the first ANZAC Memorial in New Zealand. It is interesting to note that the very next day after the planting ceremony the first wounded soldiers back from Gallipoli were landed in Wellington.

Twenty five years later on ANZAC Day 1940—the first observance of the Second World War—the significance of the now historic pohutukawa of Eastbourne was explained by the Dominion President of the NZRSA and Eastbourne resident, Hon (later Sir) William Perry MLC, in an address to 600 returned soldiers and official guests, including the Prime Minister and diplomatic representative of the Allied countries, at the Wellington Town Hall.

The NZRSA-sponsored function was an official event to mark New Zealand's Centennial. In a fitting gesture to honour the ANZAC bond, President Perry presented sprigs from the historic pohutukawa to visiting representatives of the Returned Sailors & Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia (now known as the RSL). The NZRSA intended to follow up this gesture with seedlings for each of the state headquarters of the League in Australia."



*The memorial pobutakawa on Rata Street*

Today, we know it's more appropriate to plant northern rata in this area. But we are pleased to see this significant but relatively unknown 'living memorial' to ANZAC continues to prosper on the corner of Rata and Oroua

## Restoring the Crimson Coastline in Westbay

According to Howard Williams, a resident 'old-timer' whose family had a farm at Cape Foulwind on the South Island's West Coast, the rata once flowered thickly in the gullies – creating a red glow in summer. However, the trees were cleared in the creation of the farm.

Two years ago, Westbay Propagation manager Deane Keir, DOC and Project Crimson began a project to restore the rata and native plants along that coast. Assisted by Project Crimson funding, Westbay Propagation grow the plants for this project and oversee the planting, while DOC, individual volunteers and Conservation Corp help with planting and land management.

The horticulture class at the local Buller High School has also been involved, planting mainly flaxes in the area.



*One of the Buller High School biology class students helps with planting on the first day.*

Since the project kicked off with a ceremonial rata planting two years ago, DOC and the volunteers have helped plant shelter belts of native plants and the first of the 2500 rata which are planned for the site over the next few years. About 500 trees will be planted this year.

Westbay Propagation has also grown and donated 50 northern rata plants to a project at nearby Charleston, as well as donating plants to various other local groups including the Brownies. This year, Tauranga Bay residents who live near the project site, and DOC (Hokitika), will receive rata for local plantings.

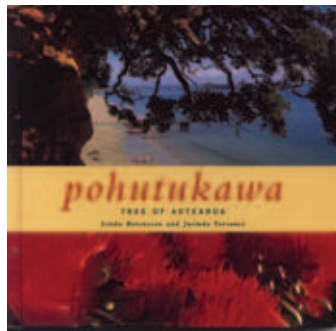
## 'Pohutukawa Tree of Aotearoa' up for grabs

To go into the draw to receive one of three copies of the rare, out-of-print book "pohutukawa, Tree of Aotearoa", email Project Crimson by 26 March 2004 at [info@projectcrimson.org.nz](mailto:info@projectcrimson.org.nz).

This beautifully illustrated book, written by Linda Bercusson, (published in 1998) has completely sold out in New Zealand. Project Crimson has secured the last copies and has three to give to our supporters on email.

Send us an email with one sentence that best describes your feelings towards pohutukawa and/or rata.

This offer is open only to people on email and ends on 26 March 2004. We will advise the lucky three people via email at the end of March and publish their names in the June edition of True Colours.



## Contact Project Crimson:

Address: P O Box 301 027, Albany  
Phone (09) 414 0466 Email: [info@projectcrimson.org.nz](mailto:info@projectcrimson.org.nz)

## Grow Your Own Rata

If you fancy taking a DIY approach to growing rata, you'll be pleased to know that rata are easily grown, and require little or no aftercare. Growing rata from seed is preferable to cuttings, because it is easier and it ensures that genetic variation is maintained, however it's important to know that if you intend to propagate rata from seed, you should use only seed that has been gathered from trees occurring naturally in the area.

The small wind-dispersed seeds are shed from April to June and these should be collected from trees that have flowered earlier in the year.

To propagate, scatter seeds on trays, ensuring they are visible, and keep in the shade. They can take up to 20 days to germinate and grow well from September onwards, although Autumn is also suitable. The plant requires plenty of light and will not become established if conditions are too dry. Seedlings should be pricked out into small pots when they are large enough to handle safely, then grown until they are about 50 cm tall.

Transplanting should be undertaken in Autumn or Winter, and seedlings should be planted in the ground in well lit

areas, or as epiphytes in baskets in well established trees with well draining scoria. Watch out for the greatest threat to northern rata, possums, which eat the leaves, buds flowers and young shoots of the tree. Possums can kill a mature rata within two years and in some areas they have contributed to the dieback of extensive areas of rata.

If you'd rather plant the 'ready made' variety, several nurseries stock northern rata which have been propagated from seed collected in the southern North Island. Check if these nurseries stock rata that is grown from seed collected in your ecological area.

These nurseries include:

- Terra Firma Ltd Taupo Native Nursery, 155 Centennial Drive, PO Box 437, Taupo. Tel (07) 378 5450
- Plantwise Nursery, 1 Summit Road, Lower Hutt. Tel (04) 567 1732
- Wairarapa Nature Nursery, Norfolk Road, RD1, Carterton. Tel (06) 378 8969. (Seedlings propagated from Tararua Ranges)
- Titoki Nursery, Palmer Rd, RD1, Brightwater. Tel. (03) 542 3712. (Rata from northern South Island)

(from McKessar, K and Sawyer, J 1999: Northern rata (*Metrosideros robusta*) in Wellington Conservancy. Published with funding from Project Crimson)



## Fashion Icon

When you are stuck for a gift idea, or need to add to your own wardrobe, remember that Project Crimson t-shirts are available for purchase.

Choose from a stylish fitted black 'T' in men's, women's and teens' or a red singlet for women's and teens' sizes \$35.00 each. If you prefer a looser fitting T, you might wish to order a larger size than you normally would.

Order on-line at [www.projectcrimson.org.nz](http://www.projectcrimson.org.nz), or contact Project Crimson if you do not have access to the internet.

