

NGĀ HOA O TE MĀRA REO

The Friends of Te Māra Reo
Kawerongo / Newsletter #1, Kōanga / Spring 2020

Ko te Ao o te Kōwhai¹



E hoa mā, tēnā rā koutou katoa.

One of the earliest pages on the Te Māra Reo website announced:

Anyone who uses the web site or otherwise has an interest in the garden and what we are trying to do is welcome to join our group of friends -- we will add your email address to our mailing list, and let you know whenever our "News" page is updated, when new pages are added to the site, or there are other developments or information we'd like to let our friends know about.

The "News" page has been updated 30 times in the decade since then (sometimes only once a year), but this is the first formal newsletter; I will do my best to make sure that there are more in the future: I'm hoping to produce the next issue some time between the Summer Solstice and Chinese New Year. We are sending this first edition to everyone who has asked to be enrolled as a "friend", as well as to those who have expressed an interest in the website, or contributed information, ideas or resources to the web site and the garden itself.

¹ *The budding of the kōwhai – Spring is here!* [Photograph by R.B. Te Māra Reo, 13 September 2015]

The newsletters will be fairly brief and to the point, directing you to pages on the website rather than duplicating their contents. They will also have some information or observations not to be found on the web site. Our aim is to alert you to significant developments, which you can follow up if you want to. If the only news is that nothing much has happened, you won't necessarily get a newsletter about it!

And if your mailbox is already clogged and this is an additional item you'd rather not have, please let us know and we'll take your name off the list.

This issue of the newsletter covers these topics: (1) Thanks; (2) How the garden is growing; (3) Recent additions and updates to the web pages; (4) Most popular plant names attracting visitors to our web site (including an intriguing front-runner); and (5) Māori plant names used in *Te Paipera Tapu*. But first, a note about the tragic passing of a good friend and fount of information over the years.

In Memoriam: W. Arthur Whistler

As I was starting to compile this edition of the newsletter, I received an email from a friend with the very sad news that Art Whistler had died at the age of 75 from Coronavirus-19, contracted while he was on a visit to Seattle from his home in Hawai'i. Art was an ethnobotanist, friend and scholar whose work has been invaluable to me in preparing the web pages relating to the plants growing in tropical Polynesia. You will frequently see references to his work on the "Proto-Polynesian" web pages. The news came to me just as I was about to write to him to ask for his help in answering some questions about the distribution of certain species in Eastern Polynesia. Indeed, *ka tata mate, e roa taihoa*. There is a very nice obituary on the University of Hawaii web site:

<https://www.hawaii.edu/news/2020/04/06/in-memoriam-art-whistler/>

Haere rā e te hoa aroha; mā te Ariki koe e hoatu te okiokinga tonutanga, ā kia whiti ki a koe te maramatanga mutunga kore.

Ngā Mihi – Thanks

We have been very fortunate for some years in being able to make use of photographs from the NZ Plant Conservation Network's database, thanks to the generosity of members of the network who have very kindly given us permission to use any they have taken. Three of them, Jesse Bythell, Mike Thorsen and Jeremy Rolfe, have also provided pictures from their personal collections. The others have been (so far) Colin Ogle, Mike Wilcox, Bill Campbell, John Braggins, Wayne Bennett, Jonathan Boow, Peter de Lange, Gillian Crowcroft, John Barkla, and also the late John Dawson (one of the foremost experts on NZ native trees), John Sawyer (with whom I had started a very interesting correspondence before his untimely death), and John Smith Dodsworth (whom I did not have the opportunity

to meet, but whose son, Sir David Smith-Dodsworth, gave me permission to use his father's photographs on our pages).

For the tropical plants, we have also had the good fortune to have had free access to photographs taken by Forest and Kim Starr (Starr Environmental, Maui, Hawaii), Gerry Carr (Botany Department, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu), Gerald McCormack (Cook Islands Biodiversity Database) and Daniel Forman (Honolulu). Others have also provided photographs and information from time to time, along with contributors to Wikipedia and WikiMedia, as noted on the individual pages – we are grateful to all these people, without whom we would have a very dull web site.

We recently received a substantial donation from someone who had visited the site, which will take care of this year's domain name and hosting fees. This was very welcome and completely unexpected (the only koha we have received in cash rather than in kind since 2011).

Ko Kōanga i te Māra ~ Spring in the Garden

Ka tangi te pīpīwharau, ko te karere a Mahuru²

Late Autumn and Spring are a time when birds and trees are closely associated, for food and for nest-building. We have not heard the pīpīwharau calling yet – we are visited by at least one pair of them each year. The koekoeā, the long-tailed cuckoo, has also appeared in recent years. The tūī, however, are very much in evidence. They, like the pīwakawaka and riroriro, have long been permanent residents, the beneficiaries and benefit

of the maturing of many of our native trees.



The great excitement this year, however, has been the arrival of three kererū in late autumn. This is the first time these birds have visited Te Māra Reo, and they exhibited a voracious appetite for the fruit of the horoeka (lancewood) trees, which were available in abundance in August (there is photographic evidence of that above). This surprised me greatly, because I had

always associated these birds with large, succulent fruit; it was wonderful to watch the skill and dexterity with which they harvested the tiny horoeka berries. I am hoping that these welcome visitors, too, will take up permanent residence in the garden.

² The shining cuckoo calls, the messenger of Spring. [Photograph of Kererū by D.S.A., Te Māra Reo, 26 May 2020]

The prolonged drought we had earlier in the year adversely affected some of the smaller established plants on the edge of clusters or in exposed places. Those under the shade of large trees mostly survived unscathed, but one of our koromiko and some tree ferns succumbed. The horopito also suffered, but new shoots have started sprouting from some of the branches, and I am hopeful that the tree will survive. Because of our dependence on rain water, I have to take a Darwinian approach to the welfare of the larger plants.

We have postponed any new plantings until we have the moso bamboo better under control, but we have made substantial progress on that front. It is a constant battle however, and the two-month vigorous growth season will shortly be upon us. This year we have invested in a heavy duty chipper which will enable us to dispose of the felled bamboo (some of the culms are 20 metres high), especially the fronds, turning it into mulch, and allow us to liberate the surviving trees and establish a new, more compact, “time travel” trail.

Additions and Updates to the Web Site

Since the last (April-June) news bulletin on the web site, four new pages have been put up, each covering several species and among them three local and seven inherited names and their etymology. These took quite a lot of time consuming research to prepare, but the process was very interesting and I was unable to stick to my plan to put up minimalist pages to close the gaps in coverage more quickly! Scanning through the pages on the web site you will see that this has been the pattern from the start. However I noticed that this is also the case on the NZ Plant Conservation Network site – some pages have very detailed information, others for the moment just the basics.

The new pages on Te Māra Reo are: (1) **Tūmatakuru** and **taramaea** (<http://www.temarareo.org/TMR-Tumatakuru.html>), both local names, but **tūmatakuru** (*Discaria toumatou*) is one of the plant names used in the Māori translation of the Bible, often paired with **tataraamoa**, to represent spiny or prickly plants, and the **taramaea** (*Aciphylla squarrosa*) is also sometimes called by this name. Both plants also have cultural associations. (2) A page organized as a guided labyrinth dealing with a variety of generic names for different types or associations of plants, their Polynesian cognates, and cultural and Biblical associations: **rākau** (trees and shrubs, inter alia); **taru**, **tarutaru** (herbage, especially grass and weeds); **otaota** (herbs, especially vegetables); **māhuri** (saplings); and **wahie** (wood for burning) – <http://www.temarareo.org/PPN-Otaota.html>. (3) A page devoted to the name **mauku** (referring to the fern *Asplenium bulbiferum* and some other plants) along with the term **pikopiko** (the unopened or newly-opening edible frond of this and some other ferns) – <http://www.temarareo.org/PPN-Mahuku.html>. (4) A page devoted to the generic name **piripiri** (<http://www.temarareo.org/PPN-Piripiri.html>), covering a variety of species, including ferns, orchids, shrubs, herbs and liverworts, which “cling” in an intriguing variety of ways.

Front-Runners in the Hit Parade

Since 2015, many of our pages have been included in Google Analytics reports, which give statistics on the number of times each page has been visited daily (among many other variables). Unfortunately, the pages in the original (pre-2014) format are not included; we are gradually shifting those over to the newer format, which is also coded for Google to scrutinize, but, as noted in the “Update” section, there are still about 50 of those not yet revised. As with everything else, mā te wā! Given that, however, there have been some consistent front runners, including one which is a continual surprise to me. The top 5 for each year from 2015 have been, in order of frequency:

2015 Jan-Dec	2016 Jan-Dec	2017 Jan-Dec	2018 Jan-Dec	2019 Jan-Dec	2020 1 Jan-15 Sep
Poroporo	Poroporo	Poroporo	Kauri	Kauri	Mānuka
Kauri	Kauri	Kauri	Poroporo	Poroporo	Poroporo
Pohutukawa	Pohutukawa	Tawa	Tawa	Mānuka	Kauri
Tawa	Tawa	Pohutukawa	Nikau	Nikau	Kōwhai
Manono	Manono	Rewa / Whara	Pohutukawa	Kōwhai / Whara	Whara



There is just one big surprise in the list – the consistently high ranking of “poroporo”, year in, year out, and in fact pretty much week by week, in searches for this word and visits to the web page. It does come up on p. 1 of a Google search for the name, along with other pages mostly also referring to one or more of the *Solanum* species designated by this name. There are 158,000 pages indexed for *poroporo*, and whether our page’s rise to the top is the cause or effect of its relative popularity I do not know. Even more puzzling is why this group

of rather nondescript plants should be so consistently searched for in Te Māra Reo year after year in comparison with dozens of other more prestigious contenders. Even though the shrubs *Solanum laciniatum* and *S. aviculare* have attractive flowers, they too are virtually weeds in many environments. If you have a solution to this puzzle, please let us know! The other two which have reached the top position, Kauri and Mānuka, are easy to explain. Kauri is one of Aotearoa’s iconic plants (although, interestingly, our page does not seem to rise near the surface in a Google search), and Mānuka has attracted a lot of interest over the last couple of years, because of the “Mānuka war” with the Australians. A search for “mānuka” will bring up page after page of commercial sites, but “mānuka name” brings us up on page 1, this week at least. The Mānuka web page may also have been popular in previous years, but it was in the old format until September 2018, and thus excluded from Google analytics.

Māori plant names used in *Te Paipera Tapu*

There are 21 specific Māori plant names used in the Māori translation of the Bible. This use of indigenous names to facilitate comprehension parallels the convention in English-language translations, but is highly unusual in Polynesian Biblical contexts. In Eastern Polynesian languages and Samoan, with very few exceptions transliterations of the Greek or Hebrew terms are usually employed for these words, with the occasional transliterated English term in Hawaiian. One of those is the word for “fig”, where the Samoan and Niuean translations use the Samoan word **mati**, the name of a local fig species with edible fruit, Hawaiian **fiku**, Māori **piki**, but Tahitian and Rarotongan stick to the Greek, **suke**. The only other use of a local name I have been able to find apart from the Māori translations is the use of **maire** (Rarotongan) or **maile** (Niuean) to translate “myrtle”; the Māori translations use **ramarama** (which is closely related to the Middle-Eastern myrtle – the English name is derived from the Greek, but the other Polynesian languages use adaptations of the Hebrew *hadas*. (This is discussed in more detail in the Biblical section on the page for **ramarama**: <http://www.temarareo.org/TMR-Ramarama.html#Paipera>.)

So far there are examples of this phenomenon on the web pages for 11 of the Māori plant names, plus a special page for Samoan **mati**, and another for two for six more general plant-related terms. This leaves just 10 to go, six of which will be add-ons to pages already completed. Almost all the examples quoted on the pages give both Māori and Samoan translations, as well as the English translations from the King James and Revised Standard Versions; sometimes other Polynesian languages and more English translations are included. When all the pages are complete, I will put a fuller overview of this topic in the Newsletter.

My interest in this phenomenon was aroused when I was doing research on Māori terms for ideas connected with law and government for *Te Mātāpunenga* – the early translations of the Bible and other early and mid-nineteenth century texts in Māori gave insights into how people understood and expressed certain ideas as the local and exotic legal systems were intersecting and evolving. The plant names came up in certain texts, and the contrasts with the ways they were expressed in other Polynesian languages inspired me to look at this side-issue more carefully.

Heoi anō mō te wā nei – ka puta atu anō tēnei kawerongo ā te raumati.



This newsletter was prepared for Te Māra Reo, <http://www.temarareo.org>, by Richard Benton.

The inset pictures are details from photographs by R.B., Te Māra Reo (Poroporo) & Apia, Sāmoa (Fausele).



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