

DONKEY SERENADE

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Editor - Lou Bartlett



Junction Awards: WINNER Non-Profit of the Year (South)

Donkeys at Highfield Garden Reserve have been crowned once again, Non-Profit of the Year (South) and runner-up in the Entertainment category, at the Annual Junction Awards.

Ox Wightman, Peter Caccia-Birch and Anne Hamilton (pictured above) attended the Junction Awards Dinner on the evening of Wednesday 25th June to represent Highfield and receive the award. Thank you to everyone that voted for us and for your ongoing support.

More coverage on all the winners and runners-up can be found online at: <https://www.junctionmag.co.nz/read-online>.



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Reviving a Forgotten Corner

It all started with a simple thought from Brian McGrath, who felt that this quiet corner could use a bit of a tidy-up. From there, the transformation began.

Peter Caccia-Birch reached out to Pita from Green by Nature, who took care of the weed control. Then, with help from Community Service and the Tuesday working bee team, they cleared out the undergrowth. Treescape came in to chip the prunings, giving the space a fresh new look.

Back in January 2024, Brian had given Peter a bag of Karaka seeds he'd collected from the Glade area in Highfield. He propagated those seeds, and is pleased to say that the seedlings have now been planted out in this very corner, aptly named 'Brian's Corner', bringing the project full circle.

Adding to the history of this spot, six Kahikatea trees that Peter planted here in 2002 are still growing strong. It's great to see new and old plantings coming together to rejuvenate the area.



Remembering Steve

We were all saddened by the recent passing of our friend and volunteer/committee member, Steve Luketina. Steve will be held forever in our hearts as one of the most generous people you will ever meet and his memory will live on at Highfield through all the work he did in the reserve and orchards. A plaque to remember Steve will be placed by a tree he planted last year.

In our fast-paced world, it's easy to forget the quiet power of nature. Forest bathing, or *Shinrin-yoku* as it's known in Japan, is the practice of immersing yourself in a natural environment - slowly, mindfully, and without distraction.

It's not exercise or hiking, but simply being present among the trees. Breathing in the forest air, listening to birdsong, noticing the sunlight through the leaves. These small, quiet moments have been shown to reduce stress, improve mood, and even boost immune function.

Next time you're near a patch of bush or native trees, perhaps up at Highfield, take a moment to wander, pause and just be. You might be surprised by how deeply refreshed you feel!



Can anyone guess the secret forest bathing location of Dan Marrow, Park Ranger and Peter?

Donkeys: More Valuable Than Gold

By Ox Wightman

Have you ever seen a donkey smelling a rose? Unlikely. Donkeys prefer thorn bushes or watermelon rinds. But behind their modest tastes lies a powerful legacy.

Donkeys have played a vital role in human development transporting goods and people, supporting agriculture and forestry, and providing income for communities in low- and middle-income countries. They're far more economical than machines. Their "fuel" often comes from agricultural waste, and their manure enriches the soil.

In some aid efforts, donkeys are replaced with machines, often with unintended consequences. Machines break down, spare parts aren't available, and maintenance is scarce. Everyone ends up needing the same machine at once, and when they fail, whole communities are left stranded. Worse still, access is often controlled by a powerful few, deepening inequality.

Today, donkeys are still a lifeline in conflict zones. In war-torn regions, they are used for transport and cultivation. In Ukraine, Russian troops used donkeys to haul ammunition. "They're bringing us donkeys – real ones!" a soldier said. "We're going to war on donkeys." A Russian General bluntly stated, "It's better to lose a donkey than two men in a vehicle."

In Gaza, donkeys have become essential escape vehicles. When evacuation orders come, families flee any way they can. One woman, who waited 14 hours for a donkey cart, said: "At the beginning of the war, I was



Photo courtesy of Canva.

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Meanwhile, here at Highfield our donkeys live in peace and comfort. They're well-fed, groomed, and checked regularly for health. Peter and his team of volunteers ensure they receive the love and care so many others go without.

Our herd's senior ladies are thriving thanks to thoughtful care, regular farrier visits, worm treatments, and good grazing. Council-supported fencing repairs and warm, dry stables make winter easier for all.

At Highfield, our donkeys catch up with their carrots. While in other parts of the world, their companions wait in silence, bearing the burdens of war.



AGM Reminder:

Date: Monday 18th August 2025

Time: 4pm **Location:** Mahurangi East
Bowling Club, 41 Hamatana Road, Snells Beach.
All welcome!

Thank you!

A big thank you goes to Andrew Way who recently donated some landscaping equipment to Highfield Garden Reserve.



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