

DONKEY SERENADE

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Editor - Lou Bartlett



Peter Caccia-Birch with Santa Claus & Mrs Claus enjoying the day.

Family Fun Day a Festive Hit!

The sun shone brightly for Santa and all the donkeys at Highfield Garden Reserve in Algies Bay on Saturday, December 6, when our annual festive family fun day brought smiles, laughter and plenty of Christmas cheer.

After a wonderful parade of beautifully decorated donkeys, families enjoyed the activities. There were free donkey rides for the children, games, races, stalls and a sizzling barbecue, along with a very special visit from the man in red himself - Santa, accompanied by the lovely Mrs Claus.

We had a fantastic turnout and, as always, felt incredibly well supported by our community. It was a truly special day filled with fun, friendship and festive spirit.



For more photos from the day, please visit the events page on our website: www.highfelddonkeys.nz/events
All photos are courtesy of Leanne Rynne from The Photo Shop in Warkworth, who very kindly offered to capture some wonderful moments on the day. Thank you, Leanne!



A serious bit of kit in the treetops!

A curious new gadget was installed at Highfield Reserve recently. That was no ordinary box - it's was a specialist acoustic recorder, and its job was to eavesdrop on the nightly chatter of pekapeka, our long-tailed bats.

This little device is part of a bigger project stretching along the Mahurangi East Peninsula. Similar recorders are already tucked away in Lawries Reserve and Algies Bay, quietly collecting sonic secrets after dark. It's pretty exciting to think we might soon get a clearer picture of what's fluttering around above us while we're fast asleep!

The Highfield recorder, funded thanks to the support of Cheryl Krull (Conservation and Biodiversity Advisor at Auckland Council), was perched high in the treetops listening 24/7. For the tech-curious: the AR5 model can

pick up bat calls from around 30–50 metres, and its data gets downloaded every 2–4 weeks.

These recorders don't just focus on bats. They're also used to detect calls from other rare species - kiwi during May and June, and bitterns from August through October. All of these taonga are species we hope to see return to the Mahurangi East Peninsula, and every bit of community trapping helps make that goal more realistic.

The monitor has now been removed from Highfield but will return later this year. Unfortunately no pekapeka activity was detected this time around but there is hope for the future.

If you'd like to geek out even more on pekapeka, The Bat Lab: www.thebatcolab.co.nz is a great place to explore - full of info, photos, and bat facts you never knew you needed.



Peter Caccia-Birch, Mark Becroft & Karen Ward (Pest Free Mahurangi East).



On 23 December 2025, author Jenny Roberts visited the local library to read *Donkey Tails* during the children's regular story time. A group of children and their parents settled in to hear the story and ask questions, after joining in the library's action songs.

A number of residents from Amberlea and their carers also stopped by after finishing their activities at the other end of the library, adding to the lovely mix of listeners. The children were especially excited to recognise people in the book and to see familiar donkeys and places from the park.

The library staff also shared some exciting news: the Central Library has ordered copies through Wheeler Books so that *Donkey Tails* will soon be available to borrow through the library system.

Jenny also had the pleasure of reading the new *Donkey Tails* on Donkey Santa Day earlier in the month, bringing children and adults together to enjoy the donkeys' adventures.

If you would like your own copy of *Donkey Tails*, please visit: www.highfelddonkeys.nz/shop

The fight against pests

(Stoats, weasels, ferrets, possums and rats)

Late last year, a few of us from Highfield went along to the inaugural "Festival" Event at the Mahurangi East library held by "Pest Free Mahurangi East".

Joining Forces for a Pest Free Peninsular!

We learned a little about what a unique spot we live in here on the Mahurangi Peninsula. The end of the peninsular, south of Martin's Bay is almost pest free enough to host a Kiwi population. All we need to do to make that possible is to continue to service and to expand the range of pest control measures available on the rest of our peninsular. There are many local initiatives throughout the area, all of which will fall under the support umbrella of "Pest Free ME."

Highfield has had an active Pest Control programme in place since around 2000. There are a total of 29 traps, 18 bait stations, and recently 4 of the new automatic traps (AT220) spread around the bush areas.

The catch rate has dropped off significantly lately, which is a good sign, as Highfield is part of the key 'Buffer Zone' in the Pest Free Mahurangi East initiative.

An important section of pest control that we can all work on easily, is the control of rats around our own homes. A breeding pair of rats can have up to two hundred offspring per annum. Just imagine how many birds' eggs they could eat! The most effective way to control rats in an urban situation is with a bait station.

Do you all have a rat bait station in your garden? If not, there are a range available at Mitre 10, or the Farm and Lifestyle Centre. There is far too much information to show here, so, please search up **Pest Free ME**. Let's all do our bit.



Predator traps set by PFME in the area near Highfield (in the top corner)

Community effort builds new Tōtara grove fence

Some years ago, we decided to plant the corner area with native trees. The site had originally been a rose garden during the time Alison Roberts was alive, but it offered a good opportunity to establish a small grove of natives. Brian McGrath kindly supplied many tōtara seedlings for the planting.

To protect the young trees from the donkeys, John Montgomerie generously provided an electric fence unit as a temporary solution. Remarkably, that "temporary" fence served us well for around 20 years, although it required a fair amount of ongoing maintenance. Eventually it became clear that a permanent fence was needed.

Materials for the new fence came together thanks to several generous contributions. From the estate of



Steve Luketina we received strainers, posts and a pipe gate, while Jim Hight supplied the wire. Local fencing contractor Malcolm Webster kindly helped by using his tractor to install the strainers and posts.

The final stage was completed by our team of heavy lifters, Jim Hight and Mike Anstett, who strained the wire, installed the battens and hung the gate. With that, the job was done and the tōtara grove now has a sturdy permanent fence to protect it. Watch this space - there's a very interesting programme that will be started here.



Peter Caccia-Birch with Ted.

Spotlight on Ted

Ted our jack, affectionately known as Teddy in his early days, was gifted to us in December 2013. He first lived in the park with the other donkeys, sometimes being separated from the jennies when it wasn't the breeding season.

Ted was named after the late Ted Roberts, who owned the land with Alison before it became the park. Around late 2015, Ted moved to Mahurangi West to live with Leo Van de Wijdeven who takes great care of him. Ted was the first of our patchy donkeys, recognised by their brown spots on a white coat. Before Ted, Hercules from Sandspit Motor Camp had been the father of many of our lighter-coloured donkeys.

Recently, Truffle spent time offsite with Ted. Time will tell whether we will soon welcome a new foal. We were all delighted to have Truffle home again - she was very much missed and has returned to the herd looking healthy and in great condition.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL: Annual membership is \$10 per household. Our financial year is from 1st July to 30th June.

For both new and renewal of membership/donations please send an email to the Membership Secretary at highfieldmembers@gmail.com with your full name, phone number and email address. Then direct credit the account below and include your **phone number** as reference. Highfield Garden Reserve and Donkey Society Incorporated **ASB 12 3095 0254516 00**.

Your help would be most appreciated.



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