

Getting away from it all

If you like birds and bees and cabbage trees, then the Harakeke Reserve is the place for you.

The Department of Conservation gave me my first look. I'll be back for many more looks. And so should you.

"For those who like to get away from it all, this is just the place," Colin Ogle, DoC scientist, told me.

"It's one of the biggest natural areas we have near to Wanganui."

PRISON
DoC controls a 250-hectare block out back of the Kaitoke Prison, and going down to the mouth of the Whangaehu River.

When the forestry people first came, the old woolshed standing in the area had "Harakeke" on it, so the first forestry block was named after it.

"This is one of the most important sections of sand dune country that we have on the Wanganui coast," Colin said.

It is mainly known to people who approach it along the beach, who visit the well-known black-backed gull colony.

It's a natural area, unspoiled by vehicles.

"It's more natural than any of the dunes that we have nearer the airport," Colin said.

BOXTHORN
DoC has had workers killing boxthorn, gorse and pampas grass in a Restart programme organised by the Labour Department.

"They were supervised by Cliff Edwards of DoC and they really did a good job," Colin said. "The pampas was growing with toe toe in mixed

patches and it was only after a few minutes instruction that they learned to tell them apart."

Pampas has now become a major threat to exotic forests.

"There are areas of Himantus where it is almost solid pampas," Colin said.

"We wanted to keep the toe toe but not the pampas."

Colin has identified 91 native plant species and 113 exotics on the Harakeke Reserve.

ENDANGERED
There are also four endangered species on the reserve.

DoC has negotiated access to the reserve with Timberlands, which controls the forestry there.

Visiting the black-backed gull colony, you have to watch where you walk, with baby gulls running about hiding their heads in clumps of mar-ram grass. Fluffy tails in the air.

The parents shriek overhead but are all noise and no action.

We drove to another area and Colin showed us three harrier hawk chicks in a nest, which his son Rhys, 18, had found a week before when he was doing volunteer work on the reserve.

ESTABLISHED
Colin showed us patches of the endangered plant *Sebaea ovata*, which is well established on the reserve.

So go to Harakeke. Take the Kaitoke prison turnoff, don't go to jail and keep on going through the forest, and you will be there.

Cabbage trees, birds and bees



WE FIND the harrier hawk nest. Colin Ogle, left, John Barria and DoC information officer Lois Scott.



THREE HARRIER hawk chicks tell us to go someplace else.



JOHN BARRIA, a conservation worker, with a black-backed gull chick.



DOC SCIENTIST Colin Ogle shows us *Sebaea Ovata*, an endangered species thriving at Harakeke.