

## The fowl and the pussycat

*Are cats lovable pets or the ultimate invasive pest?*

WRITTEN BY ANN GRAEME

The cat's caught a fantail and laid the bloody corpse on the mat. It's no good getting mad at the cat. If it was a dog it would probably roll over and act as if to say, "sorry! sorry! sorry!". A cat will just sulk and glower at your ingratitude for its feathered present – further proof, in the cat's mind, that people are stupid.

I find it is that contrariness, that independence, that affection given with discretion which makes a cat such a fine companion. And most people value the company of a non-human friend. For many, it is their most intimate link with the world beyond people. It's only a pity that your cat is also a natural killer. A Wellington biologist kept a record of all the dead animals his cat dragged in over its seventeen year life span. The list included 223 birds. In another study, over a three month period 130 cats brought home 267 birds and 191 lizards.

Nearly half of all New Zealand households own a cat, so it's clear that every year thousands, probably millions, of birds and lizards die in the jaws of these domestic pets.

But the studies quoted also showed that those same cats caught introduced rats, and it is rats that are the biggest killers of lizards and of nesting birds, their eggs and young. The author argues that cats do more good than harm and suggests that cats exert a protective influence on nesting fantails and rails. Tell that to the fantails in our local Kaimai forest – if you can find any fantails. Their numbers have plummeted. The numerous feral cats make scarcely a dent in the swarming rat population and fantails probably make a change to the monotony of a diet of rats.

But we're not talking about feral cats in native forest; where rats are out of control. We're talking about domestic cats in an urban or rural setting where rat control with poison baits is easy and effective – much, much more effective than anything a cat can do. Keeping a cat to catch rats and mice because they reduce the rat predation on birds, lizards and insects just doesn't wash any more. If that's your motivation, buy some rat bait. It's cheaper than cat food. The truth is that people keep cats because they are pets, and their value as pets is undeniable, inestimable and difficult (if not impossible) to replicate.

So, here's the scenario. You love your pet cat, you want wild birds in your garden and you don't want to be stricken with guilt and bloody corpses. What can you do? The answers may not be palatable. There are some places where owning a cat is simply irresponsible. The lighthouse keeper on Stephens Island is a tragic example but then, a century ago, he wouldn't have understood the consequences. The lighthouse keeper took his pet cat when he was posted to Stephens Island. Single-pawedly it wreaked havoc on the nesting seabirds and flightless insects and it exterminated the flightless Stephens Island wren.

Those wrens are gone now but other vulnerable species still survive in remote and wild places around New Zealand. If you are privileged to live in a forest remnant or beside a wetland or near a coastal spit, think of the effect of bringing in a cat, another introduced enemy to hunt the vulnerable native species still surviving there. New Zealand dotterels face introduced stoats, feral cats, dogs and even hedgehog predators. They don't need your well-fed tabby stalking them just

for fun and neither do the wrybills nesting on the river bank, nor the geckos, nor the fledgling bellbirds on the forest floor.

In places like this, don't have a cat. If you have a loved pussy, put a sunset clause on its life. When it dies, don't replace it. This is what the community of Lord Howe Island in Australia did when they realised that their cats were driving the endemic woodhen, a bird rather like our weka, into extinction. The feral cats on the island were eradicated and the family cats were neutered and allowed to live out their lives. Now there are no cats on Lord Howe Island – but plenty of woodhens.

Our much-loved cats died some years ago and we did not replace them. We looked at the wetland below the house and listened to the squeak of the fernbirds and the cry of the banded rails. They seem more numerous now and so do the fantails and riroriro and the weta and the skinks, but that is most likely due to our comprehensive network of rat bait stations. What we notice that is attributable to the absence of our cats, is that the birds are easier to see. Birds aren't silly. They are more inclined to fossick in the garden when there's no cat sunbathing on the lawn. But I miss them (the cats, I mean).

Most people don't live close to wild places. Like you, perhaps, they live in a city or a town or on a farm. There are no rare dotterels at the bottom of your garden. The issue for you is how much you value the common birds, both native and introduced, that live around your home. There are no simple answers. You may be lucky. A few cats are lazy and rarely bother to hunt. Others hunt all the time, even though they are well fed, because the urge to hunt is in their genes. You can try to frustrate their hunting prowess with a ball on a collar or some other device you might find. You can keep them in at night, when they really want to go hunting. Both strategies are in a sense perverse, preventing your cat acting like a cat, to satisfy your human wishes. And while keeping your cat inside at night is very important in Australia, where night hunting pussies gobble up nocturnal native marsupials, here in New Zealand it's the introduced mice and rats that get caught at night.

If you really, really value the birds in your garden, just don't keep a cat. But unfortunately, even that may make little difference in your garden because neighbouring pet cats, cramped in their tiny sections, may simply add your garden to their territories. In this case, the best solution is to try to tilt the scales in favour of the birds.

First: kill the rats. You don't have rats? Yeah right! Put some bait out, anyway. Try placing it discreetly near the compost bin in your garden if you have one. Rat control is the very best thing you can do for native birds, lizards and insects. Secondly: discourage visiting cats. Thirdly: make refuges in your garden for native species. If you have a feeding table, position it so that cats cannot reach it and the birds can feed in safety and feel secure. Look for trees which the birds favour. Then put metal collars around the tree trunks so neither cats or rats can climb them. The birds that make these trees their home can live and nest unmolested. A tree collar will also deter rats. It can be made of thin, pliable aluminum and painted so it doesn't look ugly.

Whatever our circumstances, seeing birds uncaged and free gladdens our hearts and enriches our lives. My husband Basil and I delight in the song of the riroriro, the twittering of the silvereyes and the acrobatics of the fantails, as well as the jaunty sparrows, gorgeous goldfinches and bossy blackbirds. I think that goes for most of us, so it's worth doing all we can to encourage birds to live around us.

WAIATARUA RATEPAYERS & RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Waiaatarua Ratepayers and Residents Association.

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911 West Coast Road

### Hall hire (bookings)

John Goudge - Ph 814 9744

### Library hours:

Thursday	10.00am - 12.00pm
Friday	7.00pm - 8.00pm
Saturday	11.00am - 12.00pm
Sunday	11.00am - 12.00pm

### WEB Site:

www.waiatarua.org.nz

**WAIATARUA QUIZ NIGHT – Saturday 19th July 2008, 7:30pm**  
**at the Waiaatarua Hall, 911 West Coast Road.**

Cover charge just \$5 per person. Please BYO drinks and also BYO nibbles – *this enables us to keep costs down so that everyone can enjoy a very affordable night out.*

**For more info please call Ian Ford on 814 8871**

## Library Report

Jeannette Ziesler

This month we have a large number of new books in the library. Amongst them are:

**Where Underpants Come From** – Joe Bennett went to China and found out. Highly readable

**Remember Me** – Melvyn Bragg continues his series exploring life in the sixties. Said to reflect Bragg's own life

**Sashenka** – Simon Montefiore was in NZ recently for Writers and Readers week and this Russian saga received wide acclaim

**Caging Skies** – Christine Leunens has set this novel in Europe during the Nazi years. A young Jewish girl is hidden by the parents of a Hitler Youth member

**Unaccustomed Earth** – Jhumpa Lahiri has produced a wonderful selection of short stories. One of our popular authors

**Novel About My Wife** – Emily Perkins has set her latest novel in London and it is getting very good reviews. I am about to read it myself

Spend these cold days curled up with a book.

## Neighbourhood Support Waitakere

Les Duffield

If you are registered with a Street Coordinator you would have been informed of all the recent suspicious activities in the Waitakere Area. By emailing the coordinators we can all pass on information for the benefit of all residents so please, find out who your Street Coordinator is and swap details.

Quite a number of suspicious vehicles have been seen in our area but each time they have been disturbed and reported. **NEIGHBOURHOOD SUPPORT works and the criminals know it.**

This month the Street Coordinators had a meeting at which Karl Nuttall gave a presentation on Civil Defence. It was an interesting evening with good ideas on what we can do to protect our families in an emergency.

Lastly there is a possibility in the future for the residents of Waitakere to have a patrol vehicle at our disposal, controlled by Neighbourhood Support. This would mean that we would have to find crews to man the vehicle, which would be used to patrol the area, reporting any suspicious activities to the police. This is being trialled on Herald Island and is already done throughout the North Shore. **If you have any ideas on this matter, please email me at [lesjudyj@xtra.co.nz](mailto:lesjudyj@xtra.co.nz).**

*Thanks, Les Duffield*

## Procedure for invoicing/payment for newsletter advertising

### ADVERTISING RATES

There are three categories/sizes of advertisement as follows:

#### RUN-ON

**Community:** Free to current, paid up WRRRA members who are community groups or individuals involved in not-for-profit activities, or who are placing other advertisements that are generally one-off in nature (eg babysitting, lawn moving). Included as space permits.

**Commercial:** \$25 per annum, regardless of number of issues published and the number of insertions required by the advertiser. Commercial is defined as any individual or organisation who is operating a business and does not fit the community category as defined above.

**Small Display – \$10**

**Large Display – \$20**

## From the President

Dave Pocock

Hi all, hard to believe that we are half way through another year already and the march to Xmas has started. At the time of writing this the hall re-decoration has been completed and the flooring people are about to move in, so all is on time for a June 23rd completion. Boy, is it going to be smart for our Debate on the 28th!

We had our first Meet Thy Neighbour function on 25th May and what a success it was with over 50 name tags filled in; actually they were address tags as we were known by where we lived to start with. Oliver Driver acted as host and welcomed each and every person and then we all enjoyed a totally informal chit chat whilst savouring some marvellous wine Oliver supplied. Turns out it was finalist wine from the Air New Zealand wine awards, but do not expect this at the next one!

It was rewarding to learn later that people had been speaking to neighbours they had never met, which was one of the objectives of the exercise. I would like to extend a huge thanks to Oliver for his help in putting this together and his involvement on the day. We will be repeating this and hope to make it a regular event on the calendar; say four times a year.

On the Wednesday evening following Meet Thy Neighbour there was a Neighbourhood Support/Civil Defence meeting with another good turnout of over 60 this time and to all accounts it was an informative night. Guest speaker was Karl Nuttall – Emergency Management Officer, Waitakere City Civil Defence, with the meeting having been convened by Les Duffield, our Neighbourhood Support co-ordinator. If you have not joined Neighbourhood Support and wish to, just contact Les on 814 1130 or email [lesjudyj@xtra.co.nz](mailto:lesjudyj@xtra.co.nz), I am sure he would love to hear from you.

Finally if you have a story to share with us be it, a trip you have done, an organisation you belong to, or an interesting experience, feel free to send it to me for inclusion in our newsletter.

**So until next month**

**Keep smiling, Dave**

## The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society Inc.

The Waitakere Ranges Protection Society was formed in 1973, and currently has over 600 active members. The Society was formed by the local community at Te Henga (Bethells Beach) to fight a proposed refuse tip in the upper reaches of the Te Henga wetland, the largest wetland remaining in the Auckland region. The Society was successful in stopping that project by pointing out the inadequacies of the leachate collection and treatment proposed and the threat it proposed to the wetland biota.

Since then the Society has taken an active part in advocating conservation of the Waitakere Ranges, one of the last four large remnant coastal forests in the North Island and the one subject to most development pressure. It has operated by utilising professional advocates and advisers and has established a formidable reputation as an effective environmental group. The Society has made submissions to the Waitakere City district plan as well as the regional policy statement and many management plans. It is an excellent example of a voluntary, not-for-profit organisation using the procedures under the Resource Management Act 1991 in a responsible way.

The group has organised land acquisition with more than ten major additions to the Regional Parkland; totalling over 1000 hectares of land. To achieve this the Society has worked with other contributors (including the Forest Heritage Fund, the Auckland Regional Council, Waitakere City Council, Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society and the ASB Community Trust), as well as making considerable financial contributions itself.

Over the past 35 years the Society has prevented many inappropriate developments including a power station at Whatipu, a gas pipeline through the Ranges, a sewage outlet along the West Coast and four rubbish dumps, and has defended large areas of bush and rural land from subdivision. With today's environmental pressures and rising land values, the Society's work to save the Ranges is more urgent than ever. We are collaborating with local and regional Councils to develop strategies for the sustainable management of the Ranges, and are involved in community programmes to conserve, study and restore the Ranges' unique flora and fauna.

Together with the Environmental Defence Society, we have advocated strongly for permanent protection for the whole of the Waitakere Ranges, which finally resulted in the Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area Act 2008.

The Society has also been active in educating young people about the values of the Waitakere Ranges. It has sponsored important art events and has strong support from local artists. It holds seminars and planting days, and has an active programme of organised walks for members and supporters. It produces publications and works co-operatively with other conservation groups in the region. In 2004 the Society published a 400 page full-colour book on the history, nature and culture of the Waitakere Ranges with essays by over 50 expert contributors.

The Society's Patrons are the Rt. Hon. Jonathan Hunt, Dr John Morton and Professor Richard Bellamy.

For more information visit our website [www.waitakereranges.org.nz](http://www.waitakereranges.org.nz)

**John Edgar – President**

## BANGLADESH – PART 4

Where we had run aground was right by a small native village – their houses being atop the bank we were now firmly wedged into – which provided unexpected entertainment for them. One girl of about 10 years spent hours huddled in a blanket just watching this strange sight of a weird boat with funny looking people in it.

As the tide receded the boat inclined even further until we were on a 45 degree angle, which made walking around rather entertaining and of course put paid to cooking, so it was tea, coffee and biscuits for breakfast. Our honourable captain decided we should go and visit a local village whilst waiting for the tide to float us off.

Just before leaving the peace was shattered by yelling, screaming and something banging on the hull, which turned out to be an irate fisherman holding up the remains of his fishing net which we had apparently run over during the night. What you have to realise that the net, probably his only one, is a much valued possession, providing food and income for his family.

Eventually we hopped into the crew's sleeping boat and headed off to a village, being entertained by dolphins on the way. At the landing point there were large stacks of timber logs which turned out to be wood reclaimed by the Forestry Department from poachers caught illegally felling trees. We spent an interesting hour wandering around the village before finally heading back to our boat which was now afloat.

Shortly after boarding we set sail, followed by a very welcome brunch, heading for where we started at Khulna, to end our cruise. All during the trip there had been talk of the last night BBQ, which is a specialty of Captain Monju's; little did we know!

We arrived at Khulna and anchored midstream, being taken ashore by the tender boat with the weather looking very threatening, to have some shore time before being returned to the boat for farewell dinner. Didar (our tour provider) had organised transport in the form of trishaws, in this instance being tricycles with flat wooden trays on the back seating four people with comfort not being uppermost. I and another guy of the group, also of generous proportions, both ended on the same tray with two others which provided our pedaller with a challenge. By this time the rain had started and we all had on our coats or ponchos, in my case a bright yellow poncho, in which Shirley says I look like a giant banana. We travelled the length of the town on a dirt road lined on both sides by shops, with the road being about two trishaws wide, which of course provided great amusement to all the locals. The rain got worse and worse so finally we sheltered in a local eating house only to find out ¾ hour later that the boat had broken down and was stranded downstream with all our luggage on board. We were transported by minibus to our hotel for the night whilst Rick, our Kiwi tour guide, and Didar traipsed through the mud to the boat and rescued our luggage. Unfortunately this meant we missed out on the BBQ and more importantly the chance to say thanks and goodbye to Monju and his crew.

After pleasant night in a nice hotel with a hot shower, we were to go to Dhaka for the last day of the main tour, which had been planned to coincide with a special day in Bangladesh. February 21st commemorates the lives sacrificed to make the Bangladeshi language one of the national languages when Bangladesh was part of Pakistan. Mourning procedure begins with locals placing floral wreaths at the Shahid Minar (martyrs' monument), which we witnessed – as apparently only a handful of white people have. Following a proposal by Bangladesh, UNESCO declared February 21st as the International National Language Day in 1999. As you can imagine the place was absolutely jam packed with people and yet we could move around without being jostled or anyone getting impatient. At the monument we were able to move up to the front of the crowd without any hassling and in fact they encouraged us, as they were proud to show these tourists their culture.

That night we had dinner in a restaurant that covered three floors and had the biggest buffet I have ever seen, with dishes from around the world, so one did the only decent thing and over-ate.

Upon returning to the hotel we said goodbye to most of the rest of the group as they were flying home next morning and four of us (three women and me) were heading into the remote part of Bangladesh for a real cultural experience. **Dave**

**Waiatarua Rainfall (May 2008)**

	Rain Days	Wettest Day	Mth Total	Year to Date
<b>Mountain Road</b>	16	4th – 40 mm	165 mm	562 mm
<b>Brabant Road</b>	18	4th – 46 mm	136 mm	507 mm
<b>Quinns Road</b>	22	5th – 45 mm	150 mm	471 mm
<b>Forest Hill Road</b>	13	4th – 48 mm	130 mm	481 mm
<b>Auckland City</b>	–	–	125 mm	307 mm

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 To: Treasurer, WRRRA, 911 West Coast Road, Waiatarua, Waitakere City or leave at the library

2008

## ARK IN THE PARK Family Picnic Spot

A great place for a family picnic is at the Cascades Reserve. If you go to the Ark in the Park (in the Cascades at the end of Falls Road), you might not only see a robin around the 'Auckland City Walk', but could, if you are very lucky, hear or see one of the hihi (stitchbirds) that we released there just over a year ago, the first time they have been back on the mainland in a natural site for 120 years. The males, with their black and yellow head and shoulders and their explosive call, are amazing little birds. Our team has confirmed that they have bred at least three times, two nests amazingly found very high up in large kauri trees.

If you love birds you could come monthly (or more often) to join our hihi feeder team which involves a pleasant walk and the chance to see a very rare NZ bird. Don't despair, you will be trained.

If you want to be involved as a volunteer baiter or join the hihi feeder team or otherwise as a helper in either Matuku Reserve or the Ark in the Park, **please contact Sandra Jack, Project Manager, 09 302 3902, arkinthepark@paradise.net.nz.**

Ark in the Park is in partnership with the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of NZ Inc and the Auckland Regional Council.

### WEST AUCKLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## The Piha State Saw Mill and Piha's WWI Soldiers

15 July – 7.30pm

Opanuku Room, Corban Estate  
(entry off Mt Lebanon Lane)

Sandra Coney talks about the mill at Piha and the men who enlisted from there – the subject of some five years of research.

Contact: Grant on 834 7133.

### Waiatarua Ratepayers & Residents Association Inc Committee as from February 2008

#### President / Community Board

Dave Pocock Ph 814 9697 davepocock@xtra.co.nz

#### Vice President

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#### Treasurer

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Robin Essex Ph 814 1850 robsx@free.net.nz

Susanne Timms Ph 814 9346 shtimms@xtra.co.nz

#### Representative:

Ian Ford Ph 814 8871 ian.ford@xtra.co.nz

(Fire Brigade)

# Advertising & Community Notices

Commercial advertisements are welcome and can be arranged by contacting Dave Pocock via email [davepocock@xtra.co.nz](mailto:davepocock@xtra.co.nz) or phone 814 9697. Community Notices are free to financial members 2008, January to December.

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**te mutunga me te timatanga** - the end and the beginning. 21st June - 3 August

West Coast Gallery, The Old Fire Station, PIHA 812-8029 Thursdays-Sundays, 10-4pm

**LAWN MOWING:** - Local, reliable. Phone Eric 837 2333.

**OTIMAI:** - Events and training centre is available for hire (Guides Auckland) and is open to view by appointment. Please phone Lynne & Walter on 814 9992 for bookings.

**PLANTS:** - taros, bulbs, cannas and various perennials for sale. \$1 - \$3. Also some shrubs. All sales for charity. Phone Margaret 814-9859.

**SITUATIONS VACANT - TREASURER:** After three years of dedicated service Jan Haine will not be seeking this position at our next AGM. To ease the transition we invite interested parties to contact Jan now and work towards the handover. For further details Jan Haine ph 837 2318 or [jan\\_haine@xtra.co.nz](mailto:jan_haine@xtra.co.nz).

**THE ORATIA COMMUNITY CHURCH:** On the corner of Parker & West Coast Roads. Fellowship (trips, meetings etc.): 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursdays of each month.

## Advantages of being a WRRRA member?

Show your membership card at the following businesses for a 10% discount (does not apply to already discounted or sale items).

### Glen Eden Landscape Supplies

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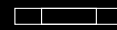
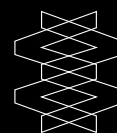
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**HALL HIRE** 911 West Coast Road.

1-2 hour sessions \$20. Half day hire \$60  
Half day & evening function (deposit required) \$150  
**Contact John Goudge on 814 9744**

## AUGUST NEWSLETTER

Copy needs to be in the hands of The Editor, by **THURSDAY 11TH JULY, 2008 - 5PM**

Dave Pocock Ph 814 9697

[davepocock@xtra.co.nz](mailto:davepocock@xtra.co.nz)