

Bason botanic gardens trust

spring 2017 newsletter

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A STORM IS BREWING

Shakespeare in the park returns to Bason Botanic Gardens next February with evening and matinee performances of *The Tempest*.

Two years ago Karen Craig, the play's director, approached the Bason Botanic Gardens Trust Board with the idea to perform *Macbeth* at the Bason.

The Board agreed as the performance met several objectives to engage with the community on a different level and promote the gardens in a new way.

The performance was a great success and it is now time to host another Shakespeare play, with many people in the Whanganui community embracing the idea and volunteering to participate behind the scenes or on stage.

The natural amphitheatre setting at the Bason is ideal for live theatre. *The Tempest*, which many consider to be Shakespeare's last play, will bring together a diverse group of seasoned actors and first-time performers of all ages from all sectors of our community. From teenage dancers to retired set builders, these volunteers will share their passion for performance and showcase Bason Botanic Gardens as one of the finest examples of a treasured natural asset. Bason Botanic Gardens normally closes at dusk



so the evening performances are a rare opportunity to enjoy the site at night.

The performances will be on 22-24 February 2018. Tickets are priced at \$10 for the Thursday night and Saturday afternoon performances and \$20 for the Friday and Saturday night shows.

We encourage schoolchildren to

attend and offer teachers and guardians free entry. Community groups are encouraged to host thank you functions for their donors, staff and volunteers.

Following on from knowledge gained in the first production, new ways of managing the event are in place including hiring an executive producer who is responsible for all non-theatrical logistics, marketing and fundraising.

The Whanganui community embraces the arts and this Shakespeare production will enable people to learn about and experience live theatre in a unique natural setting.

Tickets are on sale at the Royal Wanganui Opera House. Picnic hampers will be available to purchase.

Invite family, friends, colleagues, neighbours and relatives to enjoy this very special event.

For further information, please visit www.shakespeareintheparkwhanganui.com, www.royaloperahouse.co.nz and www.basonbotanicgardens.org.nz



VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

I refuse to talk about the weather. So many people have commented about things meteorological over winter and spring that the combined weight of publicly broadcast waves of discontent has given the hydrological cycle a flat tyre. So please, no more talk, just find a pump someone!

Fortunately, as a result of good management, weather, excellent planning and good fortune, the proportions of which will remain confidential, the construction of the walkway to the Japanese Tea House is almost complete. Not only that, it is decidedly attractive and complementary to its surroundings, increasing safe accessibility and enhancing the Tea House and gardens themselves. Well done designers and contractors both. I'm looking forward to seeing this facility well used and the viewing platforms over the lake and towards the Tea House taken full advantage of. No doubt there will be some great wedding photos taken over the summer.

This summer also sees the return of Shakespeare to the Bason. Karen Craig and her talented troupe who gave us a hugely successful "Macbeth" two years ago are presenting "The Tempest" at the Bason over 22-24 February 2018. Tickets are available from the Royal Wanganui Opera House from November 1 and



I urge you to snap them up early as this will be a popular event.

Just as with Macbeth, there has been some concern expressed

about the title of the play having portentous, well, portents. I can categorically deny this to be so. No-one involved in the production of Macbeth and no members of the audience suffered any mishap whatsoever or has since died an horrendous and painful death by sword or poison. Well, not to my knowledge anyway. Likewise, the unusually severe hurricane season in the west Atlantic this year is in no way connected to Karen's choice of "The Tempest" and we will have gloriously fine, calm weather for our next play. Besides, we will have a great line in souvenir brollies available on site for the superstitious and wealthy.

The Bason Botanic Gardens are a great attraction to the people of Whanganui in all seasons, be it for the quiet places, the plants, the barbecues, the spaces for families and friends to enjoy or a combination of all these things. The trust board, contractors, volunteers and council staff take great pleasure in seeing so many of you enjoying these facilities. Keep coming please, often.

Terry Dowdeswell
Chair

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BOOKINGS: Direct all Botanic Gardens venue/BBQ bookings to the Customer Service Desk Whanganui District Council, phone 349 0001.

MEMBERSHIP:

Become a **Friend of the Bason**, or **gift a subscription**, and support Stanley Bason's dream.

Send your name, postal and email address to BBGT Treasurer.
Membership: Individual \$20; Family \$30; Corporate \$100; Life \$500

Internet banking is also available. The bank details are:

Account Name: Bason Botanic Gardens Trust Account
Account Number: 03-0791-0463019-00

Use your name as a reference and also please state whether this is a donation or membership subscription.

Notification of payment can also be emailed to the Treasurer if you wish, at alan.donald@clear.net.nz

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CHILEAN MAYTEN "A TICKING TIME BOMB?"

By Phil Thomsen

In April of this year the Board received an article, kindly forwarded by botanist Colin Ogle, ominously titled "Chilean Mayten (Maytenus boaria) – a ticking time bomb?", authored by Murray Dawson. The article pointed out that the tree has demonstrated the ability to spread catastrophically through parkland and native forest.

So what is this tree, so innocuously named and yet apparently with triffid-like aspirations for global domination? Mayten is an attractive small tree, planted as a specimen tree in parks and arboretums. The attached photo shows a beautiful one beside a W&W Construction shipping container that was at the Gardens this winter. The container shows the scale of the tree – maybe eight metres high, with a graceful rounded habit, attractive pale-green foliage and finely furrowed bark. This tree, and others in parks in Whanganui, was planted and grew for about 40 years without any concern. This begs a further question – why the sudden concern?

For some time after the introduction and planting of the trees into New Zealand, it was believed that the plants were male only (probably mainly grown from suckers) and therefore incapable of reproduction without human assistance. However, recently seedlings have been discovered at several places, one of them in Whanganui – Bason Botanic Gardens. This showed there are female fruit-bearing plants at these locations. These trees need to be located and removed before they do further damage. Unfortunately, I believe that one of them is the tree in the picture. However, the tree will be monitored over the growing season before a decision is made about its removal.

Furthermore, there are numerous seedlings (and maybe suckers) at the Gardens, in a band that starts from behind the lake by the weir, through the Rhododendron Dell and right through the native plantings to the western boundary. The seedlings are perfectly happy growing in a shady environment and are hard to distinguish among native forest. The seedlings are being slashed off and then treated with an herbicide by Fulton Hogan contractors. It is apparently exceptionally hard to kill off all regrowths and it will

take vigilance over several decades before we can be sure that we are safe from this invasive, if beautiful, pest.



DENDROSERIS LITORALIS: A JOURNEY FROM JUAN FERNANDEZ ISLANDS TO WHANGANUI

By Clive Higgie

Out in the Pacific Ocean, 660km off Chile, roughly level with Santiago, lie a group of islands called the Juan Fernandez Islands. These islands have a subtropical Mediterranean climate.

They are home to roughly 500 Chileans. One of the islands, in centuries past, offered refuge to the shipwrecked Alexander Selkirk, on whom Daniel Defoe based his novel, "Robinson Crusoe".

But our interest lies in some of the flora from this group of islands. It is home to what has been described as the largest daisy in the world.

This orange-flowered daisy, *Dendroseris litoralis*, and the other eleven species in the *Dendroseris* genus have been some of the most endangered species in the world. Some have even been reduced to one plant, due to goats and loss of habitat.

Dendroseris litoralis has been in New Zealand a long time but no one seems to know when it arrived. Brian Caseley, a Whanganui resident, saw a plant growing in Whanganui East in the 1980s, collected seed and grew plants, wondering what on earth it was. It looked almost like our native puka. Unfortunately, this already-old plant had been cut down by the time he went the next time. He sent plants to the then DSIR in Christchurch, who identified it. Brian continued to grow his plants in Whanganui.

It next surfaced in Sumner, Christchurch, from which the Prebble brothers (Texture Plants in Christchurch, one of New Zealand's best plant nurseries) collected seed and have been selling plants for almost 20 years. I often wonder if there is a connection between the plants sent to the DSIR and the plant found in Sumner, a decade or so later.

When young, these plants have massive leaves, two or three times bigger than our native puka. As the plant ages and grows taller, the leaves get smaller. It branches and bears intensely bright orange, daisy flowers. It's quick-growing. When we saw the Sumner plant 15 years ago, it was 2.5 metres high.

At the time of planting earlier this year, the *Dendroseris* plants in Rangiora Street were only 50 to 70mm high. Go and check them out now – you'll be amazed! They seem to need a coastal climate. Indeed, the more wind and salt the better. We can't grow them here at Fordell.

Earlier this year, Kevin Luff grew plants which he supplied to Springvale Garden Centre. So you may indeed have one yourself, or see other plants in Whanganui. We have recently planted two at the Bason Botanic Garden, on the Millennium Hill.

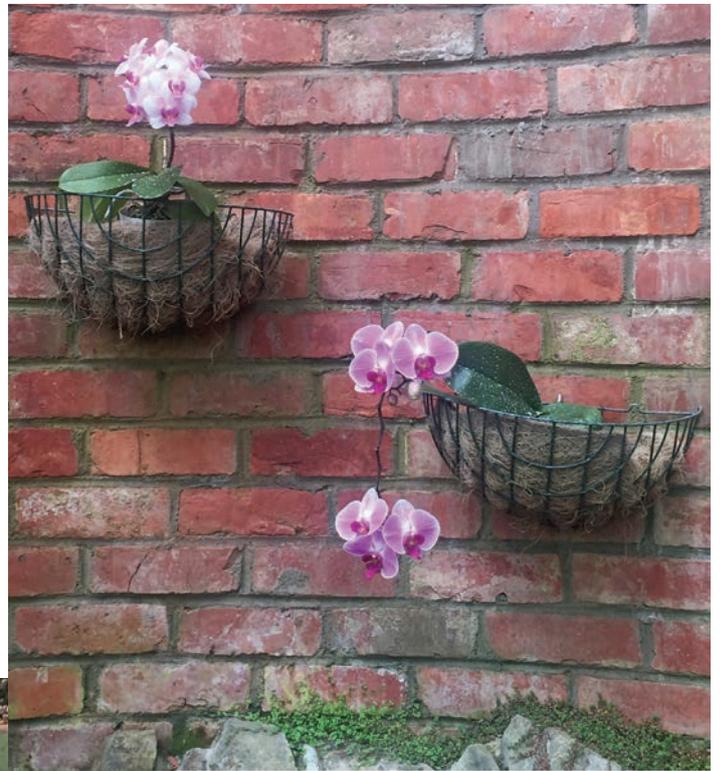
This is a great example of conservation through cultivation.

TIME TO VIEW THE BASON ORCHIDS

By Kevin Luff

Yippee, we are out of the winter months and have another spring/autumn season to enjoy at Bason Botanic Gardens. My topic is the orchids and we will be having a great display of different types, especially between now and Christmas.

The Japanese Calanthes have just finished in the Begonia House and the Cymbidiums will be continuing on from winter. Starting, or should I say already started, are the Pleiones and Masdevallias in the Begonia House and the Australian Dendrobiums in the Scoular House – so to see what is happening in the orchid houses you all should visit at least once a month until Christmas to see new additions to the displays. After Christmas is often a bit of a quiet time for orchids but it would be a good time to see some of Bason's Odontoglossums which may be out at this time.



I would like to acknowledge the excellent job Nikki and Jennifer have done looking after the orchids for so many years and their attention to detail and green fingers when it comes to growing orchids. From what I have seen, the display this year has at least twice as many flowers on the plants than last year – a testament to their abilities.

Unfortunately, Fulton Hogan, much to my disappointment, have cancelled their contract in favour of using inhouse staff to continue the growing. I'm sure they are still in very capable hands so please go and enjoy the exotic plants.



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