

CENTRES OF WELLBEING

AUCKLAND NATURE RESERVES THROUGH CHILDREN'S EYES

It was Fred R. Barnard who, just on a hundred years ago, offered “A picture is worth a thousand words, but a memory is priceless”. This is a wonderful book of pictures created and curated by a gifted and giving tutor and mentor. We are fortunate indeed to live where we do; surrounded by abundant natural beauty in a healthy environment where community, culture and artistic talent can be brought together in a simple but delightful publication.

This is a book about seeing the beauty and value of nature reserves from the eyes of our children.

From May '22 to April '23, many creative and enthusiastic students and adults participated in photography workshops on nature reserves in the eastern suburbs, and captured these beautiful glimpses of nature to share with us all. They serve to remind us that we do not have to go far to find the peace and beauty of nature.



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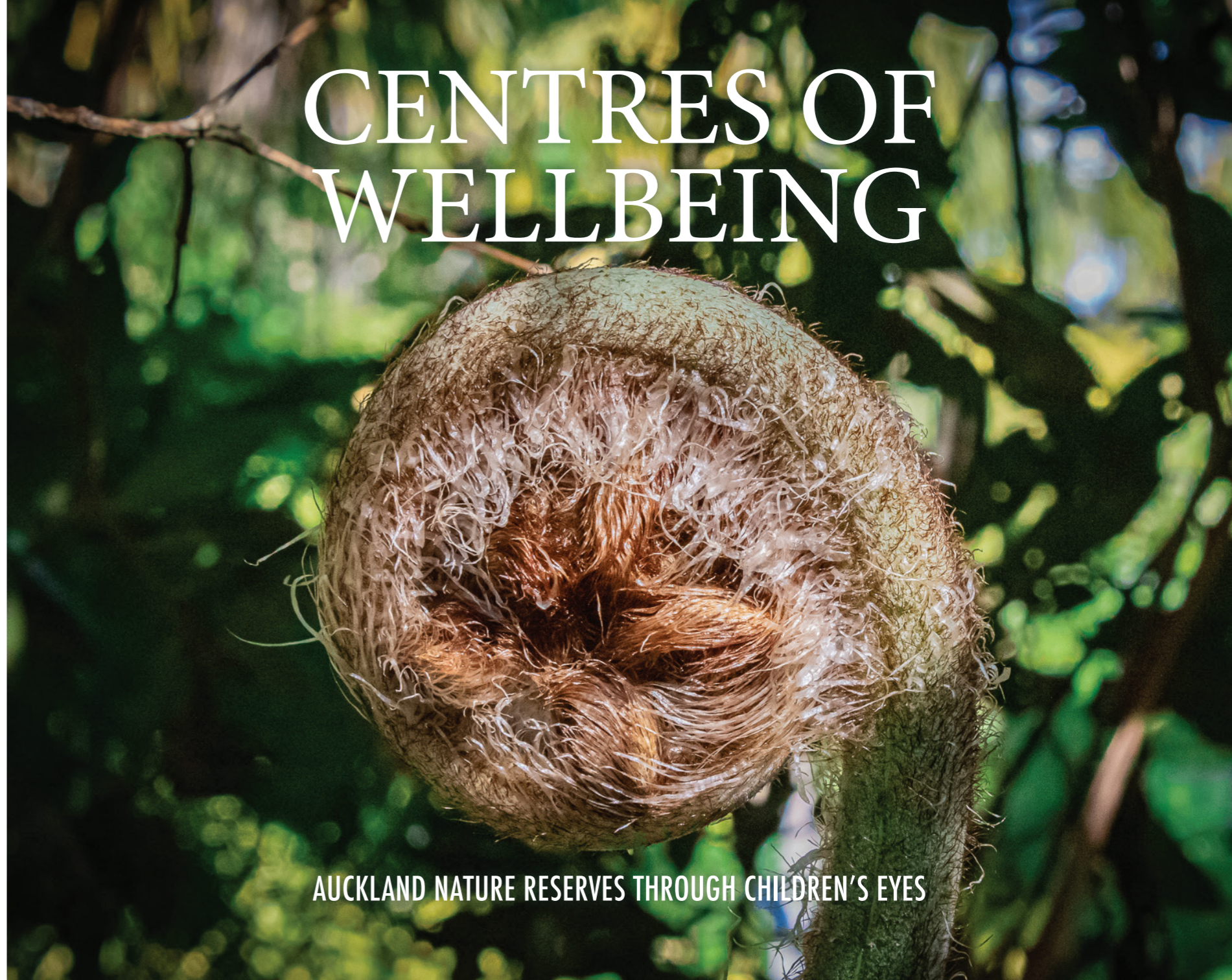
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Auckland nature reserves through children's eyes

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FOREWORD

It was Fred R. Barnard who, just on a hundred years ago, offered “A picture is worth a thousand words, but a memory is priceless”.

This is a wonderful book of pictures created and curated by a gifted and giving tutor and mentor. We are fortunate indeed to live where we do; surrounded by abundant natural beauty in a healthy environment where community, culture and artistic talent can be bought together in a simple but delightful publication.

Tushar has devoted hundreds of unpaid hours to give our young people a sense of purpose, a taste of a talent that will serve them a lifetime and the thrill of being published!! Yes, he has had support but he has maximised it well beyond everybody’s expectations – and he has created a physical tohunga for all to treasure.

We are grateful for the effort and the memory – not just for the young photographers but for the whole city.

Scott Milne
Chairman
Orakei Local Board

Children see magic because they look for it.
-Christopher Moore

INTRODUCTION

CENTRES OF WELLBEING

Forests are immensely beneficial for our wellbeing. There is something highly therapeutic about being in the middle of a bush where all you see are trees, and all you hear is flowing water and birds. New Zealand's national and regional parks are a treasure, but we can't get to them every day. Nature reserves in our cities, like the ones in the eastern suburbs of Auckland, are a treasure for the city. If you live in the neighbourhood, you can walk in the bush if you only have an hour to spare. Wellbeing from that hour in the forest brings us and everyone we touch great benefit. These nature reserves are 'Centres of Wellbeing' in our beautiful peaceful city.

This is a book about seeing the beauty and value of nature reserves from the eyes of our children. From May '22 to April '23, many creative and enthusiastic students and adults participated in photography workshops on nature reserves in the eastern suburbs, and captured these beautiful glimpses of nature to share with us all. They serve to remind us that we do not have to go far to find the peace and beauty of nature.

These photographs were taken with digital Canon and Nikon single lens reflex cameras, made possible by IMAgEN8, a charity aimed at fostering sustainable connections with New Zealand's natural environment in our diverse communities through education, photography and technology. The purpose of the nature photography workshops is to deepen student's connection with nature, allow them to express themselves creatively, increase awareness and support for important conservation and climate action goals, and improve mental wellbeing through time in nature and artistic expression.

It is really wonderful to see these nature reserves from the eyes of the children. These young minds often find things that adults may overlook or ignore as not being interesting. Nature photography is also an excellent learning tool for strengthening our creative neuron pathways as we use both divergent and convergent skills when we walk in the bush with a camera in hand.

There is so much biodiversity in the bush, and that is what makes it resilient. I hope these glimpses of nature from the students' eyes bring you peace, and inspire you to explore and protect your local wild places. We trust that this extension of their deepened appreciation for nature through their photography and writings will benefit themselves and our communities, indeed, New Zealand.

In Nature, there is deep wellness.
-Tushar Sharma

This we know - the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.
- Chief Seattle



TAHUNA TOREA RESERVE

The Tahuna Torea biodiversity focus area is situated on the coast at Glendowie. It includes a long sand bank which extends out into the Tāmaki Estuary. It also has a tidal lagoon with mangrove scrub, freshwater wetlands and regenerating native forest and scrub. The area provides a mosaic of marine, intertidal, freshwater and terrestrial habitats.

Tahuna Torea is a key shorebird roost in the Tāmaki Ecological District. The habitat diversity attracts a wide range of coastal and shorebirds including tōrea (oystercatcher), poaka (pied stilt), kuaka (bar-tailed godwit), tarāpunga (red-billed gulls), kāruhiruhi (pied shags) and matuku (white-faced heron). A variety of tracks and viewing points in the reserves provide visitors with opportunities to appreciate the beauty of this natural area and its diverse birdlife.

Fifty years ago, the triangle-shaped spit of land close to the mouth of the Tamaki River was an inaccessible, boggy, weed-infested area, overgrown with brambles, wild fennel and gorse. It looked set to be dug up and turned into a marina or become a council tip and gradually filled in with rubbish. Today, thanks to the efforts of a dedicated local community organisation – the Tamaki Estuary Protection Society, supported by Auckland Council – the area known as Tahuna Torea is home to a wide variety of native bird species, and is visited by more than 50,000 people a year.

Opposite: **This is my home**
(Kavisha Kanagasooriyam)

Pied shags mainly inhabit coastal habitats about much of New Zealand. Unlike most other shag species, the pied shag is reasonably confiding, allowing close approach when roosting or nesting in trees. It can often be seen spreading its wings after diving to help dry the feathers, as it has inadequate waterproofing. This lack of feather waterproofing may help it spend longer underwater due to decreased buoyancy effects.



Freshwater pond (Petar Lithgow)

Tahuna Torea is a haven for birds. On our workshops, we spotted pied shags, black swans, mallards, common pheasants, dabchicks, pukekos, and seagulls.



Young swan (Isabel Posada-Hinestroza)

Black swans were deliberately reintroduced, initially from Melbourne, in the 1860s. Their distribution and abundance within a few years of those reintroductions suggests that, coincidentally, natural re-colonisation may have occurred. Black swans breed only on freshwaters. Most breeding occurs as monogamous territorial pairs defending all or part of a pond, small lake or lake edge.



Black swan family (Moana Funk)

Nesting may commence in July with a large mound of vegetation being accumulated at a secluded site on the water's edge. On average 5-6 pale green eggs are laid and incubated for about 36 days mostly, but not exclusively, by the female.



Mealtime (Moana Funk)

Young fledge after about 120 days, but families may remain together for several months. Occasionally, and where lake food is plentiful, a pair may nest again in late summer and raise a second brood.



The Birds (Marc Lithgow)

The southern black-backed gull (or 'black-back') is one of the most abundant and familiar large birds in New Zealand. The mottled brown juveniles (mistakenly called "mollyhawks") are the same species as the immaculate adults.



Decorating the tree (Jan Power)

The rock pigeon is a familiar species to most New Zealanders, given its distribution from Northland to Southland, and being present in both urban and rural areas. It is a gregarious species, often roosting, commuting and foraging in flocks.



Red-billed gull (Margaret Voyce)

The red-billed gull is the commonest gull on the New Zealand coast. A major threat to breeding birds is predation from introduced predators such as cats, ferrets, rats and stoats. Climate-induced fluctuation in the availability of krill, the principal food of the birds during the breeding season, has a major impact on breeding success.



Female mallard duck (Isabel Posada-Hinestroza)

The New Zealand mallard population is derived from 17 small importations of gamefarm mallards from England between 1870 and 1930, and two later imports of birds and eggs from a gamefarm in Connecticut, USA. Acclimatisation Societies subsequently bred and released over 30,000 mallards throughout New Zealand until 1974, by which time the mallard had become the most common waterfowl in the country.



I love the tall trees (Karla Tremain)

A growing body of research shows that regularly spending time around trees provides a wide range of human health benefits, from lowering stress to improving cognition to boosting longevity. Tree aerosols have anti-cancer properties, improve circulation and decrease high blood pressure.



Forest bathing (Olivia Strang)

What exactly is forest bathing? The term emerged in Japan in the 1980s as a physiological and psychological exercise called shinrin-yoku (“forest bathing” or “taking in the forest atmosphere”). The purpose was twofold: to offer an eco-antidote to tech-boom burnout and to inspire residents to reconnect with and protect the country’s forests.



Home for someone (Karla Tremain)

Trees in the reserve are home for many little and big creatures. This spider den looks like the entrance of a hobbit hole.



Good find (Jan Power)

Trees provide habitats for native insects that are an important part of the ecosystem, and we get to enjoy finding them when we go out for a walk.



Male tree weta (Isabel Posada-Hinestroza)
Tree wētā (Hemideina) are commonly encountered in suburban settings in New Zealand's North Island. They are up to 40 mm long and most commonly live in holes in trees formed by beetle and moth larvae or where rot has set in after a twig has broken off.



Plague Skink (Abigail Cullinan)
Skinks belong to one of the most diverse lizard families, the Scincidae. They typically have relatively small legs and no pronounced neck, long tails which they are able to self amputate, and 'tight fitting' smooth skin with flat, shiny, overlapping scales. Their cousins, geckos, have 'saggy' skin and small granular scales. Skinks can blink, unlike geckos which have a transparent scale in place of eyelids.

Book Preview - This is not the entire book

ARTISTS

Karla Tremain, Glendowie School
Kavisha Kanagasooriyam, Epsom Normal Primary School
Isabel Posada-Hinestroza, Glendowie School
Moana Funk, Glendowie School
Vithursha Kanagasooriyam, Epsom Normal Primary School
Jessica Winstone, Glendowie School
George Grove, Churchill Park School
Sienna Swain, Glendowie School
Elise Smithson, St Kents School
Jessica Stone, Selwyn College
Petar Lithgow, Glendowie School
Jakob Webber, Victoria Avenue Primary School
Max Candy, Churchill Park School
Victoria Webber, Churchill Park School
Genevieve Piton-Boldero, Te Kura School
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Jessica Olsen, St Cuthberts School
Loren Webber, Victoria Avenue Primary School

Margaret Voyce (Orakei Local Board)
Jan Power (Eastern Bays Songbird Project)
Wendy Stone (parent)
Kathleen Bell (parent)
Marc Lithgow (parent)

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Thanks to John La Roche for allowing me to use some of the content from his book 'The Pourewa Valley Story' and providing some of the image captions. Thanks to Turfa Chowdhury from Eastern Bays Songbird Project for being a very knowledgeable guide on two of our workshops. Thanks to the many contributors who helped identify observations on iNaturalist NZ.

Thanks to Michelle Brinsden from Eastern Bays Songbird Project and Joanne Rutherford from St Heliers Library for getting the word out on the workshops. Thank you Dillon Rungan, Deputy Principal of Epsom Normal Primary School, for encouraging students to sign up for the workshops. Thanks to Jill Kayser at the St Heliers Community Centre for allowing us to exhibit the students' photographs in the community centre.

And a big thank you to all the parents who brought their children to the workshops and encouraged them to explore these beautiful nature reserves!

REFERENCES

John La Roche (Native bird and tree information for Kepa Bush and St Johns Bush taken from the the book - The Pourewa Valley Story)

Michelle Brinsden, Eastern Bays Songbird Project (Kohimarama Forest introduction)

Ross Dunlop (Information for Churchill Park taken from speech written for Orakei local board)

Look deep into nature and you will understand everything better.
- Albert Einstein

TEACHERS

Tushar Sharma (Founder, Director and Teacher at IMAgEN8)

Tushar is a nature photographer, author, educator and conservationist. He has been conducting workshops and publishing books for IMAgEN8 since 2019. IMAgEN8 was born out of his love of nature and his desire to deepen people's love and connection with our natural environment, improve mental wellbeing, foster sustainable living, encourage kaitiakitanga, and bring joy.

Tushar tutored students on the nature reserve workshops, and curated the images, designed and authored this book.

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Hina Patel (Nature Photography Educator)

Hina led many of the nature photography workshops in the nature reserves, tutored and encouraged the students. She is also responsible for editing most the images that you see in this book. Her work brings to light what the students saw and experienced in the bush.





Mental wellbeing, skill development and kaitiakitanga through nature photography.

IMAgEN8 is a registered charity whose purpose is to foster sustainable connections with New Zealand's natural environment in our diverse communities through education, photography and technology.

There is no doubt that our planet is under pressure as never before. Thousands of species have gone extinct and many are on the brink. Habitat loss due to human activity is destroying biodiversity. Climate change is a significant threat to human security and world peace. Concurrently, mental wellbeing has been on a downward trend due to the effects of the Covid pandemic, economic pressures, global conflicts, increasing pace of life, social media and technology overuse. We are inextricably linked to the environmental landscape within which our daily lives unfold.

Nurturing a love for nature is critical for inspiring action to be guardians of our environment. After all, we protect what we love! Additionally, time in nature is essential for our mental wellbeing. This wisdom has been part of world cultures for thousands of years and both eastern and western academics now have significant scientific evidence to support this. Love for nature protects our wellbeing!

We know that by forming deep connections to our natural environment, we are happier, more compassionate, conserve what we love, and live sustainably.

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