

DWINDLE RIVER GARDEN

MAY IN THE DWINDLE RIVER GARDEN *WITH ZENOBIA SOUTHCOMBE*

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A rainbow appears at the butterfly garden at Blockhouse Bay Recreational Reserve.

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The First Edition

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the first edition of the *Dwindle River Garden* newsletter. I'm Zenobia, and this is my monthly offering for premium members of [my wildlife newsletter](#). It's a way to share my garden (and its plethora of inhabitants) at a deeper, more personal level.

Best read while accompanied by birdsong and a cuppa. Enjoy!

Winter is the Season for Feeding Ngā Manu

SEASONAL FEEDING WITH SUGAR WATER FOR NATIVE BIRDS

Like any respectable New Zealander, I love our native manu (birds).

I bought a couple of bird feeders quite soon after getting our own garden. Given the rural outlook here we get a lot of the introduced seed-eaters like sparrows and finches, as well as the larger birds like starlings and blackbirds who dig up worms & grubs from the lawn.

But it seemed that I saw more kererū, tūī, korimako, and pīwakawaka in the cities I had lived in than here in the countryside.

I bought a bird-feeder... and then learned that most of our native manu don't eat seeds! So I did my research (properly, this time) and got a sugar water feeder as well.



On reflection, it makes a lot of sense. There's higher predator action (there was an outbreak of stoat/ferret attacks on domestic chickens recently) and only small patches of native bush in the area.

It was a bit of a disappointment to learn about the sparse native bird populations here, but I'm trying to see it as a greater opportunity to make a difference!

On the positive side, there are also some wildlife sanctuaries in the broader area: [Orokonui](#) in Ōtepoti/Dunedin, [Hawksbury Lagoon](#) in Waikouaiti, and [Point Bush Ecosanctuary](#) in Waimate. The more of these that pop up, the easier it will be for individuals to create pathways and way-stations in between them and boost our overall populations of ngā manu.

The NZ Garden Bird Survey is coming up soon! [Join here.](#)

24 June – 2 July 2023

A tūī eyes me at the bird feeder (left); a korimako waits its turn (top).

Dandelions for the Butterflies

WHY I LOVE THIS LITTLE LAWN WEED

I'd been sick for a week, my body still feeling drained. Grey skies filled my window but the weather forecast had promised sunshine so I kept glancing outside hoping the clouds would magically disappear.

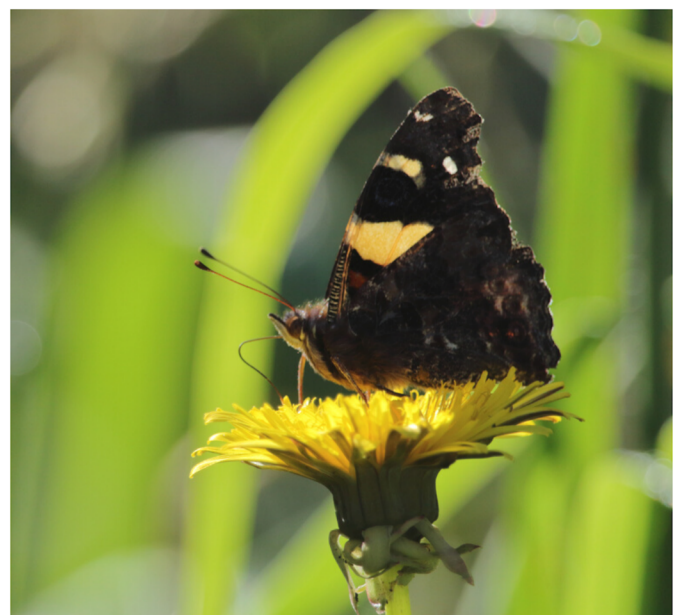
They did, so I took my laptop, sketchbook, and a cup of tea outside. It was only the end of May but feeling wintery already so I knew there wouldn't be any butterflies around. Winter is the season for birds, as they travel further afield to find food, and I was hoping to catch a korimako or riroriro.

But, lo and behold, a kahukōwhai fluttered away from me on my way through the meadow. I must've disturbed it as I walked past.

It flew from flower to flower, stopping for breaks to bask in the sun. The light was beautiful so I took some photographs. I recently bought a new-to-me phone so I also tried to get some footage, though I am still learning how to use video effectively.

Most special to me was that it visited my butterfly garden. I put a huge amount of observation and research into getting the butterfly garden right after my first failed attempt (which I [wrote about here](#)) so it is always a relief to see they are actually using this one!

The dandelions were easily the favourite flower, also enjoyed by bumblebees, honey bees and hoverflies. It's a good thing we've got so many!



A bumblebee on a small dandelion (**left**); a kahukōwhai with proboscis unfurled (**right**).

Joining the Moths & Butterflies of NZ Trust

FINDING MY WAY IN ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERING - AS A TRUSTEE

In March I "attended" the online Moths & Butterflies of NZ Trust (MBNZT) annual general meeting for 2023. I've been a financial member for a few years, which means I get their quarterly magazine, and they needed members to attend. To sweeten the request, they followed up the AGM with a talk on biodiversity in New Zealand gardens (it is now [available to view online](#)).

Finding Aotearoa-specific, reliable information about garden biodiversity has been an ongoing source of frustration for me so I jumped on the chance to attend. During the AGM, the chairperson (Maurice Mehlhopt) put a call out for more trustees, particularly younger members and those living outside of Auckland.

So I reached out to MBNZT to ask what sort of commitments it would involve, and put my hand up to apply for a position on the board. They asked for a CV and references and accepted my application.

It was good timing, as the annual planning meeting was coming up which gave me a chance to meet the other trustees in person. It was a wonderful feeling working with people who were passionate and invested in growing our lepidoptera (moth and butterfly) populations, as well as planting the seeds of this passion in other New Zealanders. I am really looking forward to doing more for MBNZT and hopefully playing my part in its growth.



Garden Inspiration

THE BLOCKHOUSE BAY

BUTTERFLY GARDEN BY MBNZT

While in Tāmaki Makaurau the MBNZT secretary, Jacqui Knight, took me to see a couple of the trust's garden projects.

One was in Blockhouse Bay, the suburb I grew up in. It was a magical experience; like *The Secret Garden* but with butterflies!

When I was there it was only the monarchs that were out, but there were several flying around our heads, stopping to feed or bask. I fell in love with the showy tree dahlias (pictured left) and left inspired to add more plants to my own butterfly garden.

Tree dahlia flowers nod their heads in the evening's golden light.

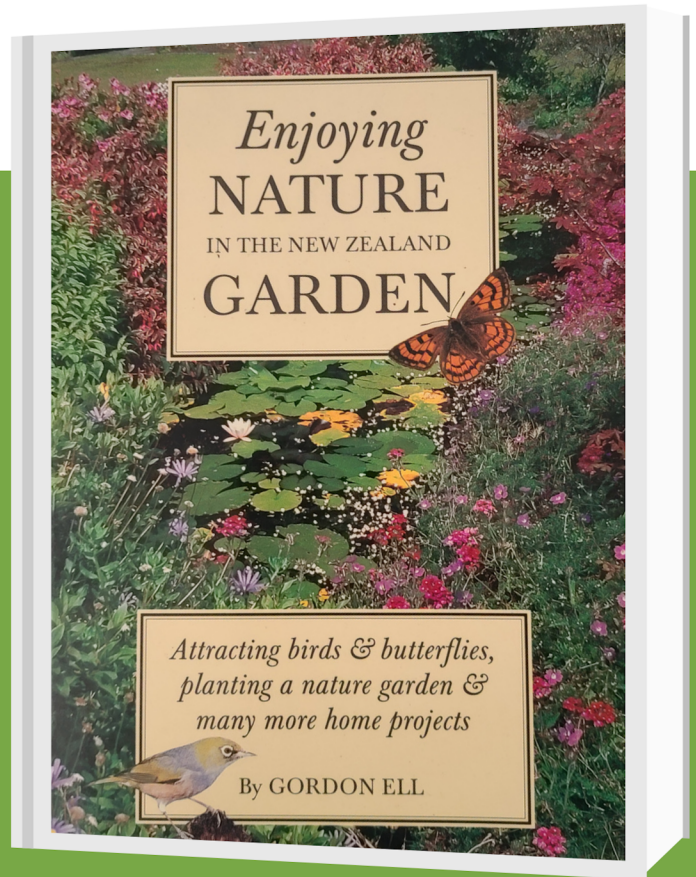
WHAT I'M READING

Enjoying Nature in the New Zealand Garden

BY **GORDON ELL**

I was excited to see this book pop up on TradeMe as there are limited resources on NZ garden wildlife.

Despite being dated (first published 1995) the author covers a good range of wildlife: birds, butterflies & other insects, lizards, spiders, and frogs. Ell has included some good garden projects for attracting wildlife - though emphasises the preference for natural solutions over constructed objects.



WHAT I'M LISTENING TO

THE LAST BUTTERFLIES

A SCIENTIST'S QUEST TO SAVE A RARE AND VANISHING CREATURE

NICK HADDAD



The Last Butterflies

BY **NICK HADDAD**

I'm listening to the audiobook version of this title in which the author explores some of the rarest - and little-known - butterfly species. I really like the storytelling style, which allows Haddad to tuck some science and statistics in without the text becoming too heavy.

With some unconventional methods (like teaming up with the military) Haddad explores how we can be a bit more hopeful about bringing back our biodiversity.