

## **Hawksbury Lagoon update March 2019**

Over the past few years we have planted quite a number of Kowhai trees (*Sophora microphylla*) throughout the lagoon environs, where in early spring they provide a very colourful display. Did you know that kowhai is the Maori word for 'yellow'? NZ has eight different species of Kowhai and recent research has revealed that Kowhai found on islands throughout the southern Pacific originated from NZ, with seed pods dispersed by floating across the ocean. Kowhai species are found on the Lord Howe, Easter, Kermadec and Chatham Islands.

Maori used many parts of the Kowhai as medicine (Rongoa). The bark, inner bark, flower, leaves and juice can all be used for medicinal purposes, but if not correctly prepared can also be toxic. Bark-infused liquid was used to treat colds, sore throats, and diarrhoea. Boiled and crushed bark was used to treat sprains, bruises, wounds and skin infections. Kowhai ashes were used to treat ringworm.

Kowhai is the hardest of the native timbers and burns hotter than coal. Roots were used by Maori as shafts for fish hooks. Kowhai was ideal for fence posts which would last up to 100 years. If blossoms appear from the lower branches upwards, a warm fruitful season will follow but if the blossoms appear from the crown downwards, a cold wet season will follow. Worth keeping in mind for next spring!

Kowhai are easy to grow, although the seed pod is very hard and needs to be scarified (cut or scraped) before planting. Kowhai species grow throughout NZ in a range of habitats; flood plains, riparian forests, lake margins, hill slopes and rocky ground. Their brilliant yellow flowers appear in profusion in early spring and really stand out amidst the green forests. The trees can grow to 25 m high and native birds such as tui, bellbird and Kereru (wood pigeon) feast on the leaves and flowers, an important nectar source for them. DOC ran 'Project Gold' a few years ago encouraging people/organisations to plant more Kowhais. The group of Kowhais planted on the Inverary Street grassed area were donated by the local Lions Club as part of this project.

**The Hawksbury Lagoon AGM will be held on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> March at 7.30pm in the St John's Church Hall, Beach Street. Our guest speaker will be Greg Kerr (Maori Reserve Trustee representative) who will speak on the history of the HL from a Maori perspective. We would like to warmly invite any interested person to attend.**

Shirley McKewen  
Chairperson