



Golden pathways of Māori onion thread through waving tussock, marking damper seepage lines across the tableland of Kahurangi National Park. The Arthur Range dominates the skyline.

PHOTO: RUEDI MOSIMAN

# Volunteers' care inspires

CARING FOR KAHURANGI

Sandy & Robin Toy  
Potton & Burton

By DAVID BARNES

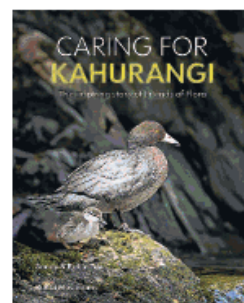
The Flora Stream is a tributary of the Takaka River, which drains the slopes of Tu Ao Wharepapa / Mt Arthur in Kahurangi National Park.

This excellent book tells the tale of Friends of Flora, arguably one of the most successful local volunteer trapping and biodiversity groups in the country, and in doing so introduces the reader to the natural wonders of its patch.

Sandy and Robin Toy are British ecologists who have lived in Motueka for 15 years and have been actively involved in the group for all of that time.

The group was founded by Maryann Ewers and Bill Rooke, who had noticed a serious decline in bird numbers, particularly whio/blue ducks, in the years leading up to 2000.

The Department of Conservation was supportive of their proposal to start trapping stoats, but expressed reservations about the ability to sustain the work. The initial success of this work enabled whio bred elsewhere to bolster the dwindling local population and, most importantly, for their chicks to survive to adulthood.



The result was a population increase from one to 60 in the protected area.

The next project was the reintroduction of roroa/great spotted kiwi.

The first part, and probably the most challenging, was capturing birds from other parts of the park.

Once in the Flora area, these birds were closely monitored, with tracking devices needing to be checked and changed regularly.

Naturally, kiwi do not particularly care whether they are somewhere easily found by humans, and so this work involves some difficult terrain.

I was astonished by a sequence of photos of Robin Toy disappearing into a burrow, with one shot showing only his boots visible from a hole maybe 50cm wide.

That's dedication.

After five years, they were

satisfied the population was thriving and could leave them be.

It is clear the group's philosophy extends well beyond "put out a heap of traps and hope that every dead pest helps", and their work is guided by an enormous amount of high quality citizen science and data.

This has enabled them to identify other species in need of protection and support.

As well as other bird species, these have included mistletoe, wētā, geckos and Powelliphanta carnivorous snails.

An absolute highlight of the book is the photography, mostly by Friends member Ruedi Mosiman.

I hadn't encountered Mosiman's work before, but it is outstanding.

His active involvement with the group has enabled him to capture the work in many different environments and conditions, as well as take some fantastic images of the fauna and flora that are what underlies the group's mahi.

As the subtitle says, the story is inspiring. My local trapline check this week will be done with a greater spring in my step, and my itch to return to Kahurangi will need to be scratched soon.

David Barnes lives in Lower Hutt and is a former member of the New Zealand Conservation Authority

# It was murder living in conservative New Zealand

THE BIRDS BEGAN TO SING

Jeffrey Buchanan  
Text Publishing

By JESSIE NEILSON

Godfrey Barnham, the school's top bookworm and an all-round intellectual, fancies himself the solver of crimes in the manner of his literary heroes Ngaio Marsh and Agatha Christie.

He might just need to draw upon their words of expertise to appease the scandal sweeping the small-town of New Plymouth.

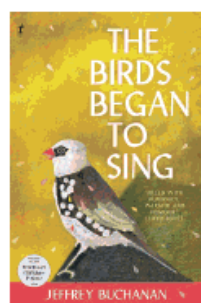
It is 1968 and young man Reginald Kingsley is missing, presumed murdered.

There is no body but plenty of material, for Reggie lived on the fringes, as a gay man, as "that type".

Godfrey is Reggie's impressionable 14-year-old friend who above all else is a boy who longs for a man. He repeats this aching want at various intervals of his narrative. He sees the "equation" of different men and has many objects of desire. However, the prison on the hill is where all homosexuals go and so, such desire must be camouflaged.

Godfrey manages to play at being quite the innocent to his schoolteachers, his priest and even to his young and fashionable hotel proprietor parents.

Meanwhile, he regales us with his many lurid sexual encounters,



not only as a matter of course, but also in his self-appointed role of blackmailing detective.

With his fifth novel, winner of last year's Michael Giffkins Prize, Canterbury-based Jeffrey Buchanan has produced an absolutely terrific work.

Bursting with fantastical characters as seen through Godfrey's eyes, the novel parades life in a conservative and condemning New Zealand town.

Godfrey sees individuals as either friends or suspects, and the latter form a growing chorus.

There is the dowdy, gossiping middle-aged cook in her old slippers and diamante-framed glasses who holds a lipstick-smeared ashtray like a murder weapon, and the effete Kenny Benny, like a lizard swivelling its protruding eyeballs. Godfrey's glamorous and beehived Lebanese mother fares better in his judgement, for she channels Maria Callas both in appearance and performance. Like mother

like son, they both long to be divas upon the stage.

Buchanan fills in all the details of this New Plymouth community: the sad sacks and no-hopers, the heroin addicts and the bodgies, the nosey parkers and the kind little old ladies.

The author has dedicated this story to the memory of homosexual men who have been imprisoned through the ages, and has detailed a social scape where these men are far more frequent than mere appearance suggests.

The double or hidden lives of gay men in 1960s New Zealand is portrayed, not only as fraught, but as demoralising.

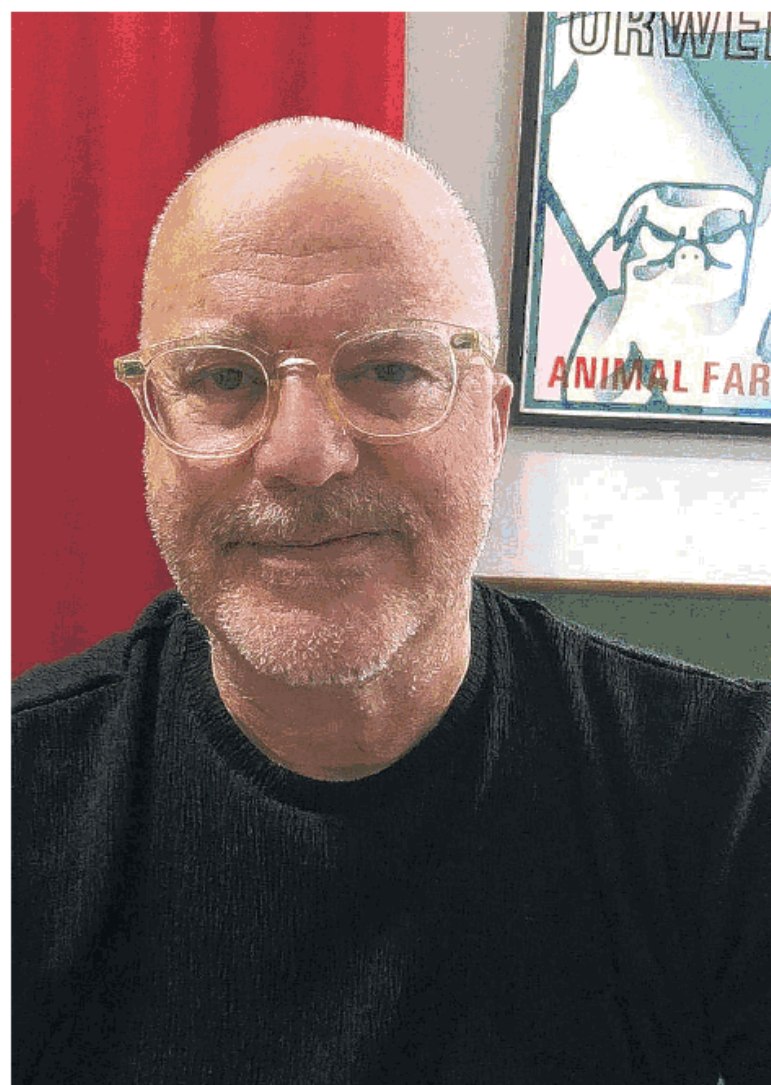
Our protagonist frequently suffers from severe despondency about his existence.

He pictures jumping off the balcony into the mouth of a great white shark. He would like to disappear into the fluffy white clouds. He is entirely likeable, a mixture of charming and scandalous teenage boy.

While homosexuality and its suppression is the dominant theme, *The Birds Began to Sing* should attract wide readership for its sheer humour, fine craftsmanship and the bubbling and hypocritical community in which to spend some time.

Buchanan's work is an absolute joy.

Jessie Neilson is a University of Otago library assistant



Jeffrey Buchanan

PHOTO: STUART WATSON