



## Nga Taonga o te Wao Nui a Tāne ~ a cultural perspective

The connection to the forest, te Wao nui a Tāne, is one of the foundations of the Maori world. Maori see themselves as directly descended from Tāne Nui a Rangi, as were all other creatures living in the forest, the trees and plants, the birds and insects. The interconnectedness of that world was the key to health and survival of all that were part of it. For Maori themselves to be well, they needed the forest to be well.



## TIKANGA

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The tikanga (traditional practices) that governed all activities involving the forest were put in place to ensure the wellbeing of the whole forest community, and the various species that are part of it.

This is not only a traditional viewpoint; it very much reflects the understandings and expectations of many Maori today. Again and again submissions made in support of Wai 262 and other claims to the Waitangi Tribunal in recent times highlight the concern of Maoridom at the way the integrity of the forest world has been destroyed by the land management practices of the last 150 years. Maori see that as a major factor in their loss of mana; in the deterioration of their social structures; in their poor health statistics; and in the uncertainty that many feel as they look towards the future.

A number of issues including deterioration of waterways and ground waters, changes in coastal sedimentation and loss of biodiversity are seen by many claimants to be a direct result of the lost integrity of the forest world. The world of Tāne has lost its mana, and he is no longer able to provide for his children.

The goals and objectives of Tāne's Tree Trust reflect a response that many claimants would endorse. However the traditional Maori understanding of the forest suggests a different order of priority to that of the Trust, which, amongst other values, strongly promotes the potential of the major timber producing species of the forest. Maori see that as very important, but the first priority for many would be to focus firstly on reinstating the integrity of the forest itself, before focusing on those species within the forest of particular commercial interest.

Most members of Tāne's Tree Trust would agree with that, even if the primary thrust of the Trust is the timber species. A healthy functioning forest is the environment needed to ensure the optimum growth of the major trees that make up the forest canopy, those that have potential both for timber production and carbon credits.





## WEAVING MATERIALS

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There were a wide range of species in the forest used by Maori for weaving. Many of the vines had particular uses, for example, in the construction of hinaki (traps) for catching eels. Fibre was needed that was durable in water for long periods of time which meant that materials other than flax were often used. Various trees provided dyes and preservatives.

There is no longer the same need today for many of the traditional uses, as modern materials are readily available. However there are exceptions. Kiekie is still very much in demand for weaving. This is an epiphytic vine found in mature healthy forest, particularly in the North Island. It belongs in a natural forest community, but could be considered unwelcome in forest managed for sustainable production. The importance of such species as kiekie needs to be recognised and respected.







## NGA MAHI WHAKAIRO - TIMBER FOR CARVING

There is growing demand for timber for carving. This reflects the revival of traditional Maori art forms. The demand far exceeds the supply. Various alternatives have been used with varying success, however a very strong preference remains for those timbers traditionally used by tupuna (ancestors), particularly totara, kauri, matai.

There is a realisation that if those timbers are to be available in the future it is necessary to ensure that trees are planted and cared for. It is a long term project, but most are unperturbed by that, since Maori have been part of Aotearoa for many hundreds of years. To leave a growing forest that contains trees that one day will provide timber for waka, for whareniui, etc., is seen as the fulfilment of a very serious obligation to the coming generations.



The challenge is to actually begin the planting of trees. Maori land tenure is complex and there are many demands on the resources that are available. The major issue for Maoridom at the present time is the settlement of the Treaty Claims.





## **TRADITIONAL MAORI MEDICINE - RONGOA MAORI**

Use of various plants for medicine is a key part of traditional Maori medicine. Again interest and use of traditional rongoa is increasing at the present time. This reflects a growing confidence in the therapeutic value of some medicinal plants long used by Maori; benefits which are increasingly being verified by researchers.

A major obstacle to the use of traditional medicines is a lack of ready access to the trees and plants. Most of the plants used for medicine are secondary species, best found in the regenerating fringe of the forest, te totara hoe. These species also serve as the nurse trees for the major species, such as totara and kauri.

In many areas, the regenerating fringe of the forest has been so heavily infested with noxious pest plants that native species struggle to survive. In some places they have disappeared completely. The other issue is that many of these species are palatable to grazing animals, be they domestic or feral. Both the regenerating fringe and the understorey of many apparently healthy forests is depleted of the species most used for rongoa.

Maori experience suggests it is important not to overlook the importance of these secondary species in the health of the forest, and in particular the range of different species found in a natural forest. The tendency in revegetation projects is to confine plantings to those species that are easy and fast to propagate and easy to establish. The economics make sense, in the short term at least. However the long term effect of the lack of diversity is yet to be fully understood.

Traditional Maori healers would hope, that in re-establishing forest areas a consistent effort be made to include, as far as possible, a full range of species that were historically present on the site. That should ensure that the plants used for medicines will be present. It should also help ensure that the health and vigour of the forest is optimised.



## Trees used for Rongoa

The range of species used by traditional healers varies from area to area, reflecting local traditions and local flora. Some of the most important forest species are given in Table 1.



*Table 1: Plant species found in native forests that are used in Rongoa Maori, traditional healing. Names vary from region to region, so in some cases several Maori names are given.*

Maori name	Botanical name
Karamu	<i>Coprosma robusta</i>
Kanono/raurekau	<i>Coprosma grandifolia</i>
Kawakawa	<i>Macropiper excelsum</i>
Tutu/tupakihi	<i>Coriaria arborea</i>
Makomako	<i>Aristotelia serrata</i>
Mamaku	<i>Cyathea medullaris</i>
Tataramoa	<i>Rubus australis</i> , <i>R. cissicoides</i>
Koromiko/kokomuka	<i>Hebe stricta</i>
Manuka	<i>Leptospermum scoparium</i>
Mingimingi/tumingi	<i>Leucopogon fasciculatus</i>
Kumarahou	<i>Pomaderris kumerahou</i>
Pukatea	<i>Laurelia novae-zelandiae</i>
Houhere/houhi	<i>Hoheria populnea</i> and other <i>Hoheria</i> species
Whauwhaupaku/ parapara/puahou	<i>Pseudopanax arboreus</i>
Horopito	<i>Pseudowintera colorata</i>
Poroporo	<i>Solanum aviculare</i> and <i>Solanum laciniatum</i>
Kohekohe	<i>Dysoxylum spectabile</i>
Tanekaha	<i>Phyllocladus trichomanoides</i>
Kowhai	<i>Sophora tetraptera</i> and other <i>Sophora</i> species
Mahoe	<i>Melicetyus ramiflorus</i>
Ti kouka	<i>Cordyline australis</i>
Mangeao	<i>Litsea calicaris</i>
Kamahi/tawhero.	<i>Weinmannia racemosa</i>
Rangiora/wharangi	<i>Brachyglottis repanda</i>
Mapou/matipo	<i>Myrsine australis</i>



Not all of these species would be suitable as nurse trees for large scale plantings of podocarps. However many will, and the need to ensure that local biodiversity is reinstated would be better served by widening the range of species used.





## **LEAVING THE TAONGA OF THE FOREST FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS**

The reason for focusing on reinstating the forest is to ensure that coming generations will have access to the taonga (treasures) of the forest. These include the physical resources that it has traditionally provided: timber for carving; rongoa (medicinal plants) for health and healing; materials for weaving; and various foods; along with the many other taonga that are at the basis of Maori culture.

If Maori lose their connection to the forest, many believe they will lose a key part of their identity. It is the source of their mana, and the foundation of matauranga Maori, traditional knowledge. They see the mauri of the forest, its life force and life-giving force as being compromised and therefore much less able to protect all that belongs to it.



## **CURRENT CUSTOMARY USES OF THE FOREST**

Current Maori uses of forest resources reflect traditional values and uses. This use is increasing rather than diminishing, a reflection both of the current cultural revival, and the realities of modern life.







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Tāne's Tree Trust promotes the successful planting and sustainable management of New Zealand native trees and shrubs for multiple uses.