



Title: Pūrākaunui Chandeliers

Short Description: Condensation on grass seed heads, Pūrākaunui.

Photographer: Tim Heath

Where and when: Pūrākaunui, February 2022

Sustainability: The chandeliers are lit for the Purakaunui Invertebrates Ball. The first dance is an 'Arachnid Eight-step. Supper follows....

Condensed mist glistened on the grass stalks and seed heads during our usual walk. Sometimes light rain lights them up too. The moisture is critical for the grasses and a host of insects and spiders that live in that ecosystem. Farmers maximise production for stock by rotational grazing of pasture. They aim for keeping the grass low, but not so low that the regrowth of the grass is disrupted, and not so high that seed heads and stalks are formed. Seeding

represents a diversion of the plant's energy and nutrients from growth to reproduction and reduces forage quality from a cow or sheep's perspective.

Some regenerative farmers advocate allowing the grass to grow longer and to build up a better root mass, as well as to encourage a greater mix of species. That's all part of a push towards "multifunctional agriculture" where biodiversity is encouraged and multiple goals of land use are combined, and general approach that is sometimes referred to as "land sharing". The same principles are important in urban landscapes too. Some weeds even have a place by adding biodiversity and the mix of species in the sward offer different trace elements and minerals as well as roughage.

A whole new micro-habitat forms in lightly grazed or ungrazed grassland. By creating some vertical structure and more permanent vegetation, moisture is trapped and wind cannot dry out the soil so much. This builds the soil and nurtures a whole other ecosystem underneath. Invertebrates can find shelter in the denser tangle of vegetation. Spiders are a very important part of that invertebrate community and food web. The spiders are important food for birds and the grass seeds are eaten by introduced birds, as well as for mice ... and when the mice come, so too do stoats.

So it's a progressive ecological dance – remove grazing pressure, the plants respond and change, and a cascade of other ecological changes unfold.

Photographer's notes: iPhone 6+

Exposure: 1/800s, f/2.2, 4.15 mm, ISO 32

Digital specs: 2,448 x 2,448 (6MP)

Key words: Grass, moisture, biodiversity, Regenerative Agriculture, Tim Heath, Aotearoa, New Zealand, Ecosystems Photography, Sustainability.

Price: \$100 donation. Visit www.ecosystemsphotography/sales for details & to order, or to get a quote if you want a high-quality print.

Donation: The price consists entirely of a \$100 donation to a sustainability organisation or project of your choice, or otherwise for the *Orokonui Ecosanctuary* <https://orokonui.nz/>

We recommend that the donation goes to the *Orokonui Ecosanctuary* because they are working hard to restore the bird, reptile and insect life at the reserve near to Purakaunui where this photograph was taken. Scores of volunteers contribute and the sanctuary is a hub for education as well as eco-tourism.

Image Ref: TH#018 (please use this reference in all orders and correspondence).

Tim Heath

9 February 2022